

# 3 CULTURE AND IDENTITY

## Example answers

### AS LEVEL

1 Define the term 'subculture'.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

A subculture refers to a social group with distinctive characteristics which are outside the norm. For example a subculture may be criminal, therefore not respecting the law.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

How would you respond to this question? Do you think this answer accurately defines subcultures and provides a relevant example to illustrate?

2 Using **one** example, briefly explain how peer pressure may socially control the behaviour of children.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

They may start smoking because a group of their friends do the same.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

The example here is relevant but do you think you could improve this answer? Is there anything missing?

3 Outline **three** characteristics of high culture.

[6 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

- High culture refers to art, music, literature, and other forms of culture which are considered to be superior. This singles high culture out from lower forms.
- High culture is also practised by an elite group of people, and is usually linked to their class and social status.
- It is also long established through traditions, for example the Proms are held every year.

### TEACHER COMMENTS

Do you think this is a good answer? Write a paragraph explaining the good points and bad points and what you would do differently. Share with a classmate. Do they agree?

4 Outline and explain **two** ways in which the mass media might influence a person's sense of national identity.

[10 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

- The media may portray events which mark a moment of national pride, aiming to forge a collective identity.
- The mass media may also expose and label those who do not adhere to the national identity.

### TEACHER COMMENTS

It is important to explain the ways provided rather than just outlining, the wording of the question explains this. To do this well, use examples of how your point works in practice and use relevant sociological studies to support your claims.

5 Read **Item A** and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM A

Functionalist sociologists see the family as a personality factory which churns out good citizens and workers. They particularly focus on how parents socialise children into basic social and communication skills, knowledge of right and wrong, and so on. However, some sociologists argue that the family today may find it more difficult to carry out this function effectively compared with the past.

Applying material from **Item A** and from your knowledge, evaluate functionalist views of the primary socialisation of children.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

Functionalist sociologists, including Talcott Parsons, argue that the family is the best way to provide children with primary socialisation. To functionalists, this provides a moral compass for children, ensuring they treat other members of society with dignity and respect. Functionalists suggest this is beneficial to all members of society, as all children should share the same norms and values, making conflict less likely.

Contrastingly to functionalists, Marxists suggest that the family socialises children in a way which does not benefit the whole of society, but the ruling class. This is because the family teaches children to consume, and to aspire to create wealth. It also leads children to follow the law, which according to Marxists helps maintain the ruling class's dominant economic position within the social hierarchy.

Some sociologists from the new right would agree that "the family today may find it more difficult to carry out this function effectively compared with the past." Charles Murray studied families in the UK and argued that lone parent families did not teach children the norms and values of society effectively. The lack of male role model led young males to commit crime. Murray suggests that the rise of lone parent families explains higher crime rates, and therefore only a nuclear family can effectively socialise children.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

Read through the response do you think there could be any extra detail given to the functionalism section? If so, how could this be added? The answer could also benefit from another source of evaluation to accompany the inclusion of the Marxist and New Right perspectives. Can you think of another theory that would be relevant to the question?

## A-LEVEL

6 Outline and explain **two** ways in which an individual's identity may be shaped by age.

[10 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

One way in which age can shape identity is through the social construction of age as directly affecting a person's identity. For example, Hockey and James argue that age is socially constructed, as is the view that elderly people are passive and powerless. This may explain why many old people feel depressed as old age sets in – they feel powerless.

Age may also be linked to gender in shaping identity. For example, some feminists argue that elderly women are doubly disadvantaged by their stratification of age and sex. They are also paid less in old age which leads to material deprivation.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

The student displays reasonable knowledge of two ways in which identity is shaped by age. There are however, some vague statements and although there is mention of a research study, this could be developed further. Can you take these two relevant answers and enhance them using more detail?

7 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM B

The concept of gender refers to the cultural expectations that society associates with 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Men and women are expected to conform to expectations about 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour. Such expectations are not fixed – they change over time and are often different in other cultures.

Applying material from **Item B**, analyse **two** ways in which gender identity may have changed over time.

[10 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

As Item B puts it, "cultural expectations that society associates with masculinity and femininity" may have changed over time in the workplace. For example, today there are a lot more women in full-time employment. This may largely be explained by societal expectations, as the feminist movement has highlighted the gender inequality of men being the primary earners, both in families and society as a whole.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

The aim is to provide two well developed ways that may explain how gender identity has changed over time. Although employment has been correctly selected within the above response, it is not well developed. Can you think of a research study that would support this claim? Another answer is needed to meet the demands of the question, could you add a detailed paragraph?

8 Read **Item C** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM C

According to Marxist sociologists, culture can only be understood and explained in terms of its ideological role in capitalist society. Marxists argue that culture reflects ruling class values. In this sense, culture functions as a capitalist ideology to persuade the working class to passively accept inequality. However, in contrast, functionalist sociologists see culture as reflecting values and norms upon which the majority of society agrees.

Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge, evaluate the Marxist view that culture is a ruling class ideology.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

Marx argued that the bourgeoisie have political and cultural power because they control wealth. This means that that culture is dominated by ruling-class ideas and values. Marx called this ruling-class culture 'ideology'. He argued that social institutions such as religion, education, the mass media and even the family, functioned to socialise society's members into a value consensus that benefits everyone.

In particular, Marxists highlight the role of popular or mass culture. These are pursuits focused on entertainment which are enjoyed by a majority of the population, that teach everyone the values within the ideology. Marxists believe that this is vital for social order.

The Marxist interpretation of culture can be criticised by Engels, a functionalist, who argued that a shared culture is necessary to benefit the whole of society, not just the elite. For example, religion helps form a collective culture by identifying certain objects as sacred and profane. This is common in simple societies and helps form a culture in which everyone can benefit from upholding shared norms and values. According to functionalists, the family, education system and the mass media socialise society's members into a common culture of norms and values which creates a false class consciousness. As Item C suggests, functionalists see culture as reflecting values and norms which the majority of members of society agree upon.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

Read through the answer above and discuss with a class mate. What is your general impression? Have you identified any particular errors that appear? A common issue that students have is getting confused between the theories, this can have a negative impact when applying your knowledge. Once you have discussed these points, can you attempt to write this essay using your own knowledge, ensuring that all the content is correct? Also, can you think of other theories that you could use to evaluate the Marxist view?