

Candidate 2 evidence

5(a) Describe two findings of Goldthorpe's (1972) Oxford Mobility Studies. (4)

5(b) Evaluate this research study. (6)

6 Analyse the issue of social mobility using Marxism and any other contrasting theory. (15)

Candidate response

5(a)

Goldthorpe invented seven social classes - from higher managers and professionals at the top to "routine occupations" at the bottom - now used in official statistics.

The study shows that a significant number of sons achieved a higher social class from their parents. This means in the period after the second world war there had been considerable upward social mobility. In fact, over two thirds of the service class had started off in either the working class or the service class. One possible explanation for this was the introduction of free secondary and the expansion of opportunities in higher education.

A further finding was that downward mobility was on the decline - but more men in the working classes were unemployed. Goldthorpe suggested the changes in the occupational structure were more significant- the reduction in the size of the working class was because there were fewer heavy industry blue collar manual jobs and an increase in the size of the intermediate and service classes due to the growth of the service sector, for example, professionals and administrators in fields such as education, welfare, health and financial services. The double result of this was a) increased unemployment of working class men due to fewer working class manual jobs and b) increased numbers of people finding occupations in the in-demand increasing service

sector. This means that even if every son of service class parents had obtained a job in the service class, some sons of intermediate and working class parents would have still needed to be recruited to fill the growing number of service-class occupations.

Goldthorpe shows that the extent of movement between different social classes or occupational groups over time was still limited. Short range social mobility refers to mobility between similar occupational groupings, such as from a teacher to a nurse, or from a plumber to an electrician. The finding shows many service sector workers had come from working class families, highlighting short range social mobility.

5(b)

A strength of the study is that it provided robust sociological evidence of the extent of limited social mobility within Britain at that time. The study highlighted that the UK was an 'open' system of stratification, at least to some extent, as young people were able to move from a lower class job to a better class higher paid job than their parents.

However, a Feminist critique weakness of this study is that to study the extent of social mobility in the UK, the sample was based on the occupations of 10,000 men and sons, regardless of the occupation of any women/ mothers/ daughters, in UK households, which may well have been the higher earner. There was no evidence gathered about the extent to which daughters achieved social mobility - so the study did not arguably study 'social mobility' but rather 'male social mobility'.

A further strength is that the findings based on a large sample of 10,000 men, could be generalised to the wider population. This means the conclusions about social mobility patterns drawn from the sample, were likely to reflect those in the wider UK population. So the study contributed to the debate on social mobility, leading to further studies (such as Blanden/ Machin) helping to further understand the issue. According to the Social Mobility Commission, the UK's total occupational mobility rate has remained stable for many decades, meaning that about half of the population end up in a different class from their parents. However, this does not mean that everyone has an equal chance of achieving a high social class position.

A further strength is that social mobility was shown to be absolute, whereby people ended up in a different social class from their parents, and suggested a number of reasons for this. This is a strength as research is carried out to better understand social issues, and as a result of this study, we learned that increased demand for jobs in service sector, declining demand for heavy industry sector work and increased educational opportunities, had an impact on the extent of social mobility in the UK at that time.

Q6

I will use Marxism and Functionalism to analyse social mobility.

Theory 1: Marxism

Marxism argues that Capitalist economies are systems of social stratification, which create and reproduce class inequality. People in lower classes have very little opportunity to achieve upward social mobility and economic success and is likely to only be short-range when mobility is achieved, on occasion. Marx argues Capitalism encourages social reproduction, whereby children of the Bourgeoisie become the next generation of wealthy privileged Bourgeoisie adults, and children of the working class Proletariat most likely become Proletariat adults. This happens due to the Bourgeoisie having power and privilege over the Proletariat, in institutions such as access to Private education, or in the economy such as limiting wages to maximize profits. This creates conflict between the profits of the Bourgeoisie (profit) over the Proletariat (pay and conditions)

Marx argues that Institutions of society serve to reinforce class inequality. Education for example, benefits the wealthy classes most, as they access Private schools or highest performing schools in affluent areas, ensuring the ruling class children benefit from education, to get the highest paid jobs, whilst lower income kids learn obedience punctuality and following rules, to make them obedient workers in the economy. Working class children will be more likely to attend poorer attaining schools in more deprived areas. They will be more likely to achieve lower grades and will have more limited employment opportunities, becoming the next generation of working class adults. Thus, education reinforces class inequality.

A strength of Marxist explanations of social mobility is the claim that one class has power to exploit the other, through control of social institutions. This means social mobility is limited in

Capitalist economies because powerful Bourgeoisie deliberately keep wages as low as possible, to maximize profits, but which prevents those on lowest incomes from achieving increasing wealth, and from becoming a home owner or renting better housing, affording private healthcare or access to the best education, which limits their opportunities for upward social mobility, and ensures these are the privileges only of the wealthy Bourgeoisie classes.

Marxism argues the Bourgeoisie's control over institutions from the Economy and Media to education and religion, create a meritocracy myth of 'working hard for one's own benefit' This means working classes will work hard to achieve increased pay and bonuses, believing this will bring social mobility, but the owning class benefit most from this labour, gaining huge profits. So in fact, this hard work of the workers mainly benefits the owners, but they don't realise that. Therefore, despite all their extra hard work, these workers will never achieve the level of social mobility their effort deserves, nor achieve the income levels achieved by the owning class. This maintains social inequality and limits social mobility in Capitalist economies.

Marx argues that in Capitalist societies, religious institutions and schools discourage challenging authority - this reinforces the exploitation by the powerful class over the working class, as respect for authority - employers, teachers - including owners of the means of production - is encouraged. The lack of challenge to this exploitation prevents the working class from doing as Marx predicted - taking control of the means of production and redistributing the wealth to achieve equity, social justice and social mobility.

In modern UK economy, the bonus payments paid 'fool' workers into thinking they are being rewarded for their efforts, so are working hard for themselves, and to achieve increased wealth, whereas the reality is that the owners benefit more from the workers' additional work through increased profits. No employee of Amazon, regardless of bonus payments, will achieve upward social mobility to achieve the income level of owner Capitalist Jeff Bezos.

A criticism of Marxist explanations of social mobility is that social stratification is perhaps a more open system than Marx has argued. There are some people who, despite being born into poverty are able to achieve significant upward social mobility, and indeed become themselves, Bourgeoisie owners of the means of production. Oprah Winfrey, Eminem, Pink - all now own companies in Capitalist economies, having come from deprived Proletariat backgrounds showing class is not always 'ascribed' as Marx claims. This perhaps supports Functionalist claims of meritocracy to achieve social mobility through hard work.

Furthermore, many employees of companies such as Motorola can also own shares in the company they work for sharing in profits, to achieve upwards social mobility. Thus contrary to Marx' claims of being either one class or the other, and that one class exploits the other; these modern workers are both Proletariat selling their labour for a wage, and Bourgeoisie, owning company shares and enjoying the resulting profits.

Another strength of Marxist explanations of social mobility is that social reproduction does happen, and for many, stratification is a mostly closed system. The vast majority of people in the UK born into low income families, will find social mobility increasingly difficult in Capitalist Britain, and will therefore become the next generation of low income adults. Meanwhile, pupils currently in private school education, are likely to become wealthy and successful adults due to accessing this privilege, thus reproducing their wealthy class. A recent Government survey revealed that over 50% of UK population believe the Covid pandemic increased social inequality and reduced opportunities for social mobility.

Marxist claims of lack of social mobility is supported by the fact that in the UK, under 6% of the population attended private school, yet 2/3 of Boris Johnson's cabinet were Privately educated, highlighting the limited opportunities those born into lower income families have, of gaining access to powerful political institutions. This ensures the wealthy classes maintain control

over political institutions, passing laws to benefit the ruling class such as tax cuts and cutting inheritance tax, further limiting opportunity for social mobility for those in lower classes.

Theory 2 - Functionalism

Functionalism as a structural consensus theory, argues there is a value consensus - an agreement that social inequality is functional/ beneficial for society as a whole. Surgeons they argue, with higher level of skill/ qualification, should be rewarded more highly than checkout operators. An agreement that some social positions/ occupations in society are of more value than others, and therefore are deserving of higher pay and rewards.

Functionalism therefore argues that achieving social mobility is to be encouraged, and it is argued, is achievable for all, and inequality is a functional prerequisite for the smooth running of society and social order. Society needs people to do unskilled work, but the better rewards of higher classes serve to motivate these people to work harder to achieve upwards social mobility. Functionalism suggests that if some people are unable to achieve social mobility remaining in lower paid positions with less power, that is functional for society as a whole. Society needs people to fulfil such low-skilled, poorly-rewarded posts, so social class inequality serves a functional purpose.

Further support of Functionalist explanations comes from Saunders who highlighted that those who have achieved upwards social mobility, motivates others in lower classes to work harder to achieve the same level of luxury, wealth and reward. Functionalism argues that social mobility is achieved through differing levels of effort/ hard work. In a Meritocracy, those who work hardest achieve upward social mobility and thus deserve the best pay. A highly qualified surgeon therefore, correctly, earns more and has a better standard of living, than a low-skilled cleaner or bin worker.

A strength of Functionalist explanations is most people would accept that hard work does and can lead to higher rewards - surgeons and other professionals have clearly worked extremely hard to become skilled and qualified, and now correctly have high incomes. Therefore, people who do work hard and achieve upward mobility, in an open class stratification systems, and this would appear to support Functionalist claims of Meritocracy.

A weakness of Functionalist explanations of mobility is Feminists would argue the gender discrimination of the glass ceiling prevents social mobility for many women, whereas this does not affect male's social mobility. Functionalism fails to acknowledge barriers to women's social mobility. They would point to the lack of women in CEO positions in UK's top companies, or lack of women in the highest paid jobs even in female-dominated professions such as teaching (Head Teachers) or healthcare (surgeons) which can not be explained through lack of effort by women.

Furthermore, many high earners in the UK were born into wealthy families, (social reproduction) including many current MPs who as a result of the wealth they were born into, accessed private education. Thus the meritocracy claim of Functionalism falls, when we consider the majority of those accessing expensive University education in England, come from wealthy background families, whilst those who work equally hard but are from lower income families, can not afford the privilege of an education at a top University, further limiting their chances of achieving equivalent social mobility.

Rosenthal and Jacobson study supports the labeling theory as it shows that individuals can in fact internalise their labels and live up to what's expected of them. In this case it shows the pupils who got labelled something positive succeeded higher than those who got labelled more negatively¹

In conclusion, educational attainment inequality is an ongoing social issue. League tables highlight the highest attaining schools in the most affluent areas of Scotland, and many of the lowest attaining schools in some of the most deprived areas. Schools and Government re prioritizing equity and closing ¹ (Intro) the attainment gap, through support such as breakfast clubs, uniform banks and stationery packs and the empowered learning project giving all pupils an ipad tablet to access online learning.

The fact still remains though, that pupils from more affluent backgrounds have better access to quality educational experiences and are still more likely to achieve positive outcomes at school, further increasing their life chances such as better health, higher paid jobs, accessing Higher Education and a better standard of living as an adult.