



GSOC.ED3 Gender and Educational Achievement

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question refers to Item C, use both the Item and your own knowledge of sociological explanations in your answer.

Item C: Northgate Academy

A hypothetical scenario written for this exercise, for students to apply sociological explanations of the gender gap in achievement to.

At Northgate Academy, teachers report that girls currently occupy most of the places in the school's top sets across subjects, and that girls' coursework is usually submitted on time and to a high standard. Some boys, meanwhile, have gained a reputation among their friends for messing about in lessons and openly saying that revising for tests is 'not worth it'. A few of these boys are highly capable when they do engage with a subject, but rarely complete homework on time.

- 1** For several decades in England, which group has, on average, achieved higher grades at GCSE?

- ☐ A) Girls
☐ B) Boys
☐ C) Achievement has been identical between girls and boys
☐ D) There has been no consistent pattern at all

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Sociologists sometimes explain boys' underachievement in terms of a 'laddish subculture'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 The sociologist Sue Sharpe studied girls' attitudes towards their futures.

(a) Explain what Sharpe's 1976 research found about girls' priorities at that time. (2)

(b) Explain how Sharpe found girls' priorities had changed by the time of her later research. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The feminist movement has been linked to changes in girls' educational achievement.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 The sociologist Becky Francis has researched how some boys respond to school in ways that can affect their achievement.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 State one criticism that is often made of laddish subculture explanations of boys' underachievement.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Which of these is a genuine UK initiative aimed at encouraging girls into subjects they were traditionally underrepresented in?

- ☐ A) GIST (Girls into Science and Technology)
- ☐ B) SATs
- ☐ C) OFSTED
- ☐ D) The Pupil Premium

(Total for Question 7 is 1 mark)

8 Look again at Item C. A few boys at Northgate Academy are highly capable when they engage, but rarely complete homework on time, and have gained a reputation for messing about in lessons.

Using Item C and your knowledge of laddish subcultures, explain why some boys at Northgate Academy might be underachieving despite being capable.

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

9 Look again at Item C. Girls currently occupy most of the places in Northgate Academy's top sets, and their coursework is usually submitted on time and to a high standard.

Using Item C and your knowledge of feminist explanations and changing girls' aspirations, explain why girls at Northgate Academy might be achieving highly.

(Total for Question 9 is 6 marks)

10 Sociologists have also debated whether changes to exam assessment have affected the gender gap.

(a) Explain one argument about how the balance between coursework and final exams might affect the gender gap in achievement. (2)

(b) Explain one criticism of this argument. (2)

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Changes in the UK job market have also been linked to boys' motivation in education.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 State one criticism of explanations that focus mainly on the changing job market to explain boys' underachievement.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 Sociologists use the phrase 'gender gap in achievement' to describe patterns like those discussed in this pack.

(a) Define the 'gender gap in achievement'. (2)

(b) Explain one criticism of treating 'boys' and 'girls' as two uniform groups when discussing achievement. (2)

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

14 Wider changes in family life and the workplace have also been linked to girls' rising aspirations.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

15 State one criticism that is often made of feminist explanations of girls' rising achievement.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

16 Schools sometimes introduce specific measures aimed at addressing boys' underachievement.

(Total for Question 16 is 4 marks)

17 State one equal-opportunities measure, other than GIST, that has been used to promote gender equality in UK education.

(Total for Question 17 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ED3 Gender and Educational Achievement

Question 1

- **B1** A (girls)
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- **B1** a peer-group culture, often among boys, in which trying hard academically is seen as uncool or a threat to masculine status (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. boys within this subculture may act up, disrupt lessons or avoid appearing to try, to gain status among their peers instead
- **Answer: A peer-group culture, often among boys, in which trying hard academically is seen as uncool; boys within it may disrupt lessons or avoid appearing to try, to gain status among peers instead.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that Sharpe's 1976 study found many girls' priorities centred on love, marriage and family, rather than careers
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. this reflected wider expectations about women's roles in society at the time
- **(a) Answer: Sharpe's 1976 study found many girls' priorities centred on love, marriage and family rather than careers, reflecting wider expectations about women's roles at the time.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that Sharpe's later research found girls increasingly prioritised jobs, careers and financial independence
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. reflecting a wider cultural shift linked to feminism and changing expectations about women's roles at work
- **(b) Answer: Sharpe's later research found girls increasingly prioritised jobs, careers and financial independence, reflecting a wider cultural shift linked to feminism and changing expectations about women's roles.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies the impact of the feminist movement in raising awareness of gender inequality and encouraging girls to aim for careers, not just family roles
- **B1** development linked to legal change, e.g. the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 made it illegal to treat pupils differently in education on the basis of sex
- **B1** development linked to policy, e.g. initiatives such as GIST (Girls into Science and Technology) in the 1980s encouraged girls into subjects they were traditionally underrepresented in
- **B1** further development, e.g. these changes may have raised girls' confidence and ambition, contributing to their rising achievement
- **Answer: The feminist movement raised awareness of gender inequality; the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 banned unequal treatment of pupils by sex, and initiatives such as GIST encouraged girls into underrepresented subjects, raising girls' confidence and ambition over time.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that Francis's research (with Christine Skelton) examined how some boys build a masculine identity partly by rejecting visible academic effort
- **B1** development, e.g. openly working hard or being seen as a 'swot' can be seen by some boys as a threat to their status among peers
- **B1** further development, e.g. this can lead some boys to disrupt lessons or avoid extra study rather than risk being seen as too keen
- **B1** further development, e.g. Francis argued this laddish behaviour can become a self-reinforcing peer-group culture that lowers some boys' achievement
- **Answer: Becky Francis's research (with Christine Skelton) found some boys build masculine status by rejecting visible effort, since working hard can be seen as a threat to status among peers, leading some boys to disrupt lessons or avoid study in a self-reinforcing laddish peer culture.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. not all boys take part in laddish behaviour, so it cannot explain underachievement

Question 7

- **B1 A (GIST)**
- **Answer: A**

Question 8

- **B1** correctly applies laddish subculture ideas to Item C, e.g. the boys' reputation for messing about suggests peer status is being earned through disruption rather than academic effort
- **B1** links to the fear of being seen as a 'swot', e.g. openly revising for tests may be seen by these boys' friends as uncool
- **B1** links this to Item C's detail that revising is described as 'not worth it', suggesting a shared peer attitude devaluing visible effort
- **B1** explains that this can become self-reinforcing, e.g. once a boy has this reputation among friends, admitting to trying hard risks losing status
- **B1** further development, e.g. this explains the gap between capability (doing well when engaged) and achievement (rarely completing homework), which is not explained by lack of ability
- **B1** clear, accurate use of laddish-subculture terminology throughout (e.g. peer status, masculine identity, disruption)
- **Answer: The boys' reputation for messing about and saying revision is 'not worth it' reflects a laddish subculture: peer status is earned through disruption rather than visible effort, so admitting to working hard risks being seen as a 'swot', which explains the gap between their capability and their actual achievement.**

Question 9

- **B1** correctly applies feminist/changing-aspirations ideas to Item C, e.g. girls' consistent, on-time coursework suggests strong engagement with academic success
- **B1** links to Sharpe's research, e.g. girls today are more likely to prioritise careers and independence, giving them a clear motivation to achieve well
- **B1** links to the impact of feminism/equal opportunities, e.g. girls growing up after policies such as GIST and the Sex Discrimination Act may see fewer barriers to succeeding in any subject
- **B1** development, e.g. this contrasts with Item C's description of some boys, suggesting differing peer-group attitudes towards visible academic effort between girls and boys at the school
- **B1** further development, e.g. a sociologist might argue girls' organised, on-time coursework reflects a wider pattern of academic engagement linked to raised aspirations, not simply innate ability
- **B1** clear, accurate use of relevant terminology throughout (e.g. aspirations, equal opportunities, feminist explanations)
- **Answer: Girls' consistent, on-time coursework at Northgate Academy reflects the kind of raised aspirations Sharpe identified, girls today prioritising careers and independence, supported by changes such as GIST and the Sex Discrimination Act reducing barriers, contrasting with the peer attitudes described among some boys.**

Question 10

- (a) **B1** identifies the argument, e.g. some sociologists suggest coursework-based assessment may favour a sustained, organised way of working, while assessment weighted towards final exams favours a different type of performance
- (a) **B1** brief development linking this to the gender gap debate
- (a) **Answer: Some sociologists argue coursework-based assessment may favour sustained, organised working, so shifting the balance towards final exams could affect the size of the gender gap in achievement.**
- (b) **B1** identifies a criticism, e.g. the gender gap in achievement has existed both before and after changes to assessment format
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. suggesting assessment style alone cannot fully explain the gap, and other factors (such as laddish subcultures or changing aspirations) must also be considered
- (b) **Answer: The gender gap has persisted across different assessment formats over time, suggesting assessment style alone cannot fully explain it, and other factors must also be considered.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a decline in traditional manual, skilled and unskilled male-dominated jobs, e.g. in manufacturing and heavy industry
- **B1** development, e.g. some sociologists argue this removed a job route some boys previously felt they could follow without needing strong academic qualifications
- **B1** further development, e.g. this may have contributed to some boys feeling less motivated to work hard academically, sometimes discussed as a crisis around traditional masculine work identity
- **B1** evaluative note, e.g. this factor is usually seen as working alongside, not instead of, cultural factors such as laddish subcultures
- **Answer: The decline of traditional manual, male-dominated jobs may have removed a route into work some boys previously expected without needing strong qualifications, contributing (alongside laddish subcultures, not instead of them) to reduced academic motivation for some boys.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it cannot explain why the gender gap in achievement appears across areas and social classes, not just where traditional manual jobs have declined
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: This explanation cannot account for the gender gap appearing across many different areas and social classes, not only where traditional manual jobs have declined.**

Question 13

- (a) **B1** a measurable difference in average educational achievement between boys and girls as groups (oe)
- (a) **B1** development noting the current direction, e.g. girls have on average been ahead of boys for several decades
- (a) **Answer: A measurable difference in average educational achievement between boys and girls as groups; currently, girls have on average been ahead of boys for several decades.**
- (b) **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. treating boys and girls as uniform groups can hide large differences within each group, for instance by social class or ethnicity
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. some sociologists argue gender interacts with class and ethnicity rather than acting as a single, separate cause of achievement
- (b) **Answer: Treating boys and girls as uniform groups can hide large differences within each group, for instance by social class or ethnicity; gender is likely to interact with these factors rather than act alone.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a relevant change, e.g. seeing more women, including mothers, in paid work and a wider range of careers
- **B1** development linking this to raised aspirations or motivation in education, e.g. showing girls a wider range of possible futures
- **Answer: Seeing more women, including mothers, in paid work and varied careers may show girls a wider range of possible futures, raising their aspirations and motivation in education.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it cannot fully explain the continuing underachievement of some groups of girls, such as those facing poverty
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that focusing on achievement at school can overlook inequalities girls still face after leaving education, such as in the world of work
- **Answer: Feminist explanations cannot fully explain continuing underachievement among some groups of girls, such as those facing poverty, and may overlook inequalities girls still face after leaving education.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies a practical measure, e.g. mentoring schemes that check in on boys' progress and homework completion
- **B1** brief development of that measure's intended effect
- **B1** identifies a second, different practical measure, e.g. using male role models or reading material to engage boys with subjects such as English
- **B1** brief development of that second measure's intended effect
- **Answer: Schools may use mentoring schemes that monitor boys' homework and progress, and use male role models or**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies a genuine measure, e.g. monitoring and publishing exam results by gender to track the gap, or providing gender-neutral careers advice and subject-choice guidance
- **B1** brief accurate development
- **Answer: Providing gender-neutral careers advice and subject-choice guidance, so pupils are not steered towards subjects based on stereotypes about their sex.**