



GSOC.SA7 The Social Construction of Identity

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question refers to Item H, use both the Item and your own knowledge of the social construction of identity in your answer.

Item H: The Adeyemi-Clarke household

A hypothetical scenario written for this exercise, for students to apply ideas about the social construction of identity to.

The Adeyemi-Clarke family live in a large city. The two children, a boy and a girl, were given very similar toys and encouragement when they were small, but relatives often still described the boy as 'brave' and the girl as 'sweet' for doing the same things. The family celebrates festivals connected to both sides of their extended family's heritage, and the children describe themselves, depending on who is asking, as British, as connected to their grandparents' countries of birth, and as 'from this city' before anything else.

1 When sociologists say identity is 'socially constructed', what do they mean?

- ☐ A) Identity is shaped and given meaning by society, not simply fixed by biology alone
- ☐ B) Identity is decided entirely by government law
- ☐ C) Identity never changes once a person is born
- ☐ D) Identity has nothing to do with other people

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 The sociologist Ann Oakley (1972) identified four processes through which parents and others socialise children into gender roles.

(a) Explain what Oakley meant by 'manipulation'. (2)

(b) Explain what Oakley meant by 'canalisation'. (2)

(c) Explain what Oakley meant by 'verbal appellation'. (2)

(d) Explain what Oakley meant by 'activity exposure'. (2)

(Total for Question 2 is 8 marks)

3 Look again at Item H. The two children were given very similar toys and encouragement, but relatives often still described the boy as 'brave' and the girl as 'sweet' for doing the same things. Using Item H and Oakley's framework, explain which of Oakley's four processes best describes the relatives' behaviour, and why.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 State one criticism that has been made of Oakley's account of gender-role socialisation.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** Sociologists argue that ethnic and national identity, as well as gender identity, are shaped by society.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

- 6** The writer Benedict Anderson (1983) argued that a nation is an 'imagined community'.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Look again at Item H. The family celebrates festivals connected to both sides of their extended family's heritage, and the children describe themselves differently depending on who is asking. Using Item H, explain how the children's shifting self-descriptions illustrate the idea that identity is socially constructed.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979) argued that social class shapes identity through a concept he called 'habitus'.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** State one criticism that could be made of the claim that class identity is entirely a product of habitus.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

- 10** Gender, ethnic, national and class identity can all be described as socially constructed, but this does not mean they are unimportant or simply a matter of individual choice.
- Evaluate the view that identity is mainly shaped by society, rather than being fixed by biology or entirely a matter of individual choice. In your answer you should refer to more than one type of identity (for example gender, ethnicity, nationality or class).

(Total for Question 10 is 12 marks)

- 11** For each description below, state which named sociologist's concept it best matches.
- (a)** Giving different toys to children depending on their gender. (1)
 - (b)** Feeling connected to millions of fellow citizens one will never personally meet. (1)
 - (c)** Deeply learned tastes and habits from a person's class background that feel like a natural part of who they are. (1)

(Total for Question 11 is 3 marks)

12 Explain why sociologists say identity is socially constructed 'without saying it is not real'.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 Explain one way schools might unintentionally reinforce socially constructed gender expectations, even without meaning to.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

14 Explain why a person's sense of national identity might feel less important in some situations than in others.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.SA7 The Social Construction of Identity

Question 1

- **B1** A (shaped and given meaning by society)
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- (a) **B1** identifies manipulation as encouraging behaviour seen as appropriate to a child's gender, and discouraging behaviour seen as inappropriate (oe)
- (a) **B1** a correct example, e.g. praising a girl for being 'pretty' or 'gentle', or a boy for being 'brave' or 'tough'
- **(a) Answer: Manipulation is encouraging behaviour seen as appropriate to a child's gender and discouraging behaviour seen as inappropriate, e.g. praising a girl for being gentle or a boy for being brave.**
- (b) **B1** identifies canalisation as channelling children towards toys and objects seen as appropriate to their gender (oe)
- (b) **B1** a correct example, e.g. giving dolls to girls and construction toys or footballs to boys
- **(b) Answer: Canalisation is channelling children towards toys and objects seen as appropriate to their gender, e.g. giving dolls to girls and construction toys to boys.**
- (c) **B1** identifies verbal appellation as the use of different nicknames, labels or descriptive words for children depending on their gender (oe)
- (c) **B1** a correct example, e.g. calling a boy 'champ' or 'tiger' and a girl 'princess' or 'sweetheart'
- **(c) Answer: Verbal appellation is the use of different nicknames or descriptive words for children depending on their gender, e.g. calling a boy 'tiger' and a girl 'princess'.**
- (d) **B1** identifies activity exposure as encouraging children to take part in different activities and tasks depending on their gender (oe)
- (d) **B1** a correct example, e.g. involving girls in helping with cooking or caring tasks and involving boys in outdoor or mechanical tasks
- **(d) Answer: Activity exposure is encouraging children to take part in different activities depending on their gender, e.g. involving girls in cooking or caring tasks and boys in outdoor or mechanical tasks.**

Question 3

- **B1** correctly identifies 'verbal appellation' as the process best matching the relatives' behaviour
- **B1** applies this to Item H, e.g. the relatives use different descriptive words (brave/sweet) for the same behaviour depending on the child's gender
- **B1** development, e.g. explains why this is verbal appellation rather than canalisation, since it concerns the words used to describe behaviour, not the toys or objects given
- **B1** clear, accurate use of Oakley's terminology
- **Answer: The relatives' behaviour best matches 'verbal appellation': they use different descriptive words (brave for the boy, sweet for the girl) for the same behaviour, which is about the language used to describe the children rather than the toys or activities offered.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. critics argue gender socialisation practices have changed since the 1970s, so Oakley's original account may not fully describe how many families raise children today
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that it can understate how much individual children actively resist or reinterpret the messages they receive, rather than simply absorbing them
- **Answer: Critics argue gender socialisation practices have changed since the 1970s, so Oakley's original account may not fully describe how many families raise children today, and that it can understate how much children actively resist or reinterpret the messages they receive.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that ethnic identity refers to a shared sense of belonging based on factors such as shared ancestry, culture, language or history
- **B1** development, e.g. how ethnic identity is expressed and how important it feels to a person can vary depending on their upbringing, family and social context, rather than being fixed
- **B1** identifies that a person may hold more than one identity at once, e.g. a family, national and heritage-based identity together
- **B1** development, e.g. which identity feels most important can shift depending on the situation a person is in
- **Answer: Ethnic identity is a shared sense of belonging based on factors such as ancestry, culture or language, whose expression and importance can vary by upbringing and context; a person can hold more than one identity (family, national, heritage) at once, and which feels most important can shift by situation.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that Anderson used 'imagined community' to describe how members of a nation feel connected to millions of people they will never personally meet
- **B1** development, e.g. this shared sense of belonging is built and maintained through shared symbols, language, media and stories, not through personal acquaintance
- **B1** explains that this shows national identity is socially constructed: it depends on shared culture and imagination being actively maintained, rather than being a simple, automatic fact of birth
- **B1** correct source attribution, e.g. reference to Anderson's Imagined Communities (1983)
- **Answer: Anderson (1983) used 'imagined community' to describe how members of a nation feel connected to millions of people they will never meet, through shared symbols, language and media; this shows national identity is socially constructed and actively maintained, not simply an automatic fact of birth.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies that the children hold multiple identities at once (British, connected to grandparents' countries, and 'from this city')
- **B1** applies this to Item H, e.g. which identity they mention depends on who is asking and the situation, rather than there being one single, fixed answer
- **B1** development, e.g. this shows identity is actively shaped by social context and relationships, not simply a fixed biological or legal fact
- **B1** clear, accurate use of social-construction terminology
- **Answer: The children give different self-descriptions (British, connected to grandparents' countries, or 'from this city') depending on who is asking, showing that identity is actively shaped by social context and relationships rather than being one single, fixed fact.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies 'habitus' as the deeply learned tastes, habits and ways of behaving that a person absorbs from their upbringing, especially their social class background
- **B1** development, e.g. this includes things such as speech patterns, tastes in food, leisure and culture, and a general sense of what feels 'natural' or 'normal'
- **B1** explains that because habitus is learned early and feels natural to the person who has it, it can be experienced as simply 'who I am' rather than as something produced by class background
- **B1** correct source attribution, e.g. reference to Bourdieu's Distinction (1979)
- **Answer: Bourdieu's (1979) 'habitus' refers to the deeply learned tastes, habits and ways of behaving a person absorbs from their upbringing and class background, including speech, taste and a sense of what feels normal; because it is learned early, it can be experienced as simply 'who I am' rather than as class-produced.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. individuals can and do move between class backgrounds during their lives, e.g. through education or a change in occupation, which can complicate the idea of a single, fixed class habitus
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that focusing on learned taste and habit can understate the direct effect of income and material resources on a person's life chances
- **Answer: Individuals can move between class backgrounds during their lives, e.g. through education or a change in occupation, which can complicate the idea of a single, fixed class habitus, and the concept can understate the direct effect of income on life chances.**

Question 10

- **Level 4** (10-12): A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains how at least two forms of identity (gender, ethnic, national or class) are socially constructed, supported by accurate reference to named sociologists such as Oakley, Anderson or Bourdieu. Strengths and limitations of the 'social construction' argument are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached that neither denies biology any role nor treats identity as purely a free individual choice. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout. Where gender or ethnicity is discussed, no group's identity or culture is presented as more natural, normal or valid than another's.
- **Level 3** (7-9): A clear evaluation that explains at least two forms of identity, with some accurate reference to named sociologists. Some analysis of strengths/limitations. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of one or more forms of identity, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about identity, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Gender identity: Oakley's (1972) four processes (manipulation, canalisation, verbal appellation, activity exposure) show how gender identity is actively taught by parents and others, as illustrated by the relatives' language in Item H, even where families try to treat children similarly.
 - National identity: Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community' shows national belonging is built and maintained through shared culture, symbols and media, rather than through personally knowing every fellow citizen.
 - Class identity: Bourdieu's (1979) concept of habitus shows how deeply learned tastes and habits from a person's class background can feel like a natural personal identity, while still being socially produced.
 - Ethnic identity: as Item H shows, a person can hold multiple, situational identities (national, heritage-based, local) at once, supporting the view that identity is actively constructed through social context rather than fixed by ancestry alone.
 - Evaluation for social construction: this view usefully explains why identities can differ between societies, change over historical time, and shift depending on social situation, which a purely fixed or biological account would not predict.
 - Evaluation against/limiting social construction: critics note that some biological factors are not purely socially constructed (see the nature/nurture debate elsewhere in this strand), and that individuals are not entirely free to choose their identity, since social structures (such as how others categorise and treat them) also constrain it.
 - A balanced conclusion could argue that identity is best understood as actively shaped by society within real limits, some of which are biological and some of which are imposed by how others perceive and treat a person, rather than as either fully fixed or fully chosen.
 - A convincing top-level answer compares at least two named concepts (e.g. Oakley and Bourdieu, or Oakley and Anderson) and uses Item H as a worked illustration rather than treating each concept in isolation.

Question 11

- (a) **B1** oakley
- (a) **Answer: Ann Oakley (canalisation)**
- (b) **B1** anderson
- (b) **Answer: Benedict Anderson (imagined community)**
- (c) **B1** bourdieu
- (c) **Answer: Pierre Bourdieu (habitus)**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies that 'socially constructed' means shaped and given meaning by society, not that something is fake, unimportant or freely chosen
- **B1** development, e.g. gender, ethnic, national and class identities have very real effects on people's lives, opportunities and how others treat them, even though they are produced through social processes
- **Answer: Socially constructed means shaped and given meaning by society, not fake or unimportant; gender, ethnic, national and class identities have very real effects on people's lives and how others treat them, even though they are produced through social processes.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a plausible way, e.g. praising boys and girls using different language for similar achievements, or offering different subject/activity encouragement based on gender
- **B1** development of the example
- **B1** links this to Oakley's framework, e.g. identifying it as a form of verbal appellation, manipulation or activity exposure occurring in school rather than only at home
- **B1** development, e.g. explaining that because these patterns are usually unintentional, they can be harder for schools to notice and change than a formal, written school rule would be
- **Answer: A school might unintentionally encourage boys towards certain subjects or activities and girls towards others, a form of Oakley's 'activity exposure' happening at school rather than only at home; because such patterns are usually unintentional, they can be harder for a school to notice and change than a formal written rule.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies that people can hold multiple identities at once, and which one feels most relevant can depend on the specific social situation
- **B1** a correct example, e.g. national identity may feel more prominent during an international sporting event, but less prominent in an everyday local setting where a local or family identity feels more relevant
- **Answer: Because people can hold multiple identities at once, which one feels most relevant depends on the situation; national identity might feel prominent during an international sporting event but less prominent in an everyday local setting where a local or family identity feels more relevant.**