Exam skills

L015 • Gender patterns in attainment and choices • AQA A Level Sociology 7192

Measurable objective

Interpret gender patterns in attainment and subject choice without treating group averages as innate differences.

Explain the difference between a statistical pattern, a sociological mechanism and an evaluative judgement.

Theory reset: gender and education

Functionalist approaches ask how education prepares people for social roles, but can underplay unequal gender expectations.

Feminist approaches ask how education reproduces or challenges patriarchy and gendered opportunities.

Interactionist approaches examine how labels, expectations and everyday meanings shape learner identity.

Pattern is not explanation

A gender gap tells us that outcomes differ on average. It does not tell us why the difference exists.

A sociological explanation must identify a mechanism: for example expectations, subject images, role models, labour-market incentives or teacher interaction.

An evaluation asks whether the evidence really supports that mechanism, and whether another explanation fits better.

Attainment and participation

Attainment refers to measured achievement, such as grades or progress scores. Participation refers to who enters particular subjects or routes.

Girls may outperform boys in some measures while still being under-represented in some high-status or gendered subject routes.

Avoid the misconception that higher attainment automatically means equal choices, equal confidence or equal opportunities.

Liberal feminist lens

Liberal feminism emphasises equal rights, equal access and removal of barriers. It expects education to become fairer when formal discrimination is reduced.

This helps explain why changing laws, expectations and role models may support girls' attainment.

Evaluation: formal access does not guarantee equal experience, equal confidence or equal subject identity.

Socialisation and gender identity

Gender socialisation means learning norms about masculinity and femininity through family, peers, media and school.

Learners may internalise ideas about suitable subjects, confidence, behaviour and future work.

Evaluation: socialisation is powerful, but learners also resist, reinterpret and combine identities in different contexts.

Exam model

A developed paragraph should move from concept to mechanism to evidence to judgement.

Example: gendered subject images can make some choices feel natural or risky. This may shape participation even where attainment is strong. However, the claim needs evidence about pupils' meanings, not only entry data.

Use AO1 to define the concept accurately. Use AO2 to apply it to the specific pattern, item or case. Use AO3 to test the strength of the explanation, compare alternatives and reach a judgement.

Response space:

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Route choice

Access: define attainment, participation and gender socialisation.

Scaffold: complete a pattern -> mechanism -> evidence chain.

Core: explain two mechanisms behind gendered subject choices.

Stretch: evaluate whether participation data can prove gendered identity processes.

Response space:

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Assessment

6 marks: Outline and explain two reasons why gender differences in participation do not prove innate ability.

10 marks: Applying material from Item A, analyse two ways school practices may contribute to gender differences in subject choice.

30 marks: Evaluate sociological explanations of gender differences in educational achievement and choices.

Response space:

Recall and review

Retrieve one theory, one concept and one evidence limitation.

WWW: where did you apply a concept precisely?

EBI: where could your answer compare an alternative explanation?