A2 Level Sociology

Sociological Theory and Methods

Miss Sakine Koc

"I'm a social scientist, Michael. That means I can't explain electricity or anything like that, but if you ever want to know about people I'm your man."

Course outline

Section ONE:

Candidates should examine the following areas, which are also studied at AS Level:

- o Quantitative and qualitative methods of research; their strengths and limitations; research design.

- o Sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, observation (participant and nonparticipant), experiments, documents, and official statistics; the strengths and limitations of these sources.

- o The distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data.

- o The relationship between positivism, Interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of 'social facts'.

- o The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research.

A2 candidates should also:

- o Demonstrate a wider range and greater depth of knowledge and understanding than at AS Level.

- o Study the nature of sociological thought and methods of sociological enquiry in greater range and depth, and demonstrate more highly developed skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation than at AS Level.

Section TWO:

In addition, A2 candidates should examine:

- o Consensus, conflict, structural and social action theories.

- o The concepts of modernity and post-modernity in relation to sociological theory.

- o The nature of science and the extent to which sociology can be regarded as scientific.

- o The relationship between theory and methods.

- o Debates about subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom.

- o The relationship between sociology and social policy.

Section ONE:

Content you are expected to know from AS Level

Methodological Perspectives to Sociological Research Methods

o   There are two methodological perspectives to Sociological research; Positivism Interpretivism.

	Positivism
Aim	'**Scientific' quantitative** methodology – statistics**.**
Key writer	Developed by **Durkheim.**
Main assumptions	**Society** and **social reality** (what Durkheim calls **'social facts'**) have an **objective** nature as it exits **independent** and **external** to the **individual**. This is the idea that **human behaviour** is **shaped** by **external stimuli** (things that happen to us) rather than internal stimuli (what goes on in our mind). **Social facts**, according to Durkheim, can be expressed in **statistics** which can be **analysed** and **understood** in the same way **scientist's** study the **natural world** since they exists in **casual relationships** that can be **empirically observed**, **tested** and **measured**. Thus, we can only study **objective facts** that we can **observe**, **NOT** emotions, meanings and motives as they are subjective.
How to research society and people	For Durkheim there are **two important steps** to consider before beginning a research: 1) **Disregard all preconceptions** – abandon your personal ideas and be neutral. 2) **'Treat social facts as things'** – only study external objective facts not internal subjective thoughts. This way studies can be **replicated** by different investigators but should produce the same results.
Type of research method they prefer to use	**Field experiments** (take place in natural settings) and **questionnaires.**
Limitations	1) Social facts are difficult to identify objectively as its meanings can differ among observers. E.g. crime has different meaning for criminals, police, courts, and criminologist. 2) Causal relationships between social facts and their effects on individuals are assumed by the researcher rather than directly observed. 3) Ignores inter-subjective meanings of acts since laws (social facts) don't always reflect people in society. E.g. Capital punishment is forbidden in the UK but a poll found high support for it.

	Interpretivism
Aim	**Interpretive** and **qualitative** methodology –words and detail.
Key writer	Developed by **Weber**.
Main assumptions	Rejects positivism - They **don't** think human being can be studied using the same methods of **natural science** because such methods can only **describe people's actions** but sociologists don't just want **descriptions** they want **reasons**. **Interpretivism** argues people **do not** simply **react** to **external stimuli** BUT **interpret** the **meaning** of **stimuli** before **reacting**. Thus, we need to **understand people's unobservable subjective** states which cannot be measured by statistics. **Weber** argued **social reality** is more **complex** than Durkheim suggests because you can **never obtain objectivity** as **facts** are a **product** of **subjective interpretation** (e.g. the research we pick to study and how to investigate it is influenced by the researcher's experiences). **Weber** argues we need to **study social action** to **understand** why people **behave** in **particular ways**. Thus, data has to be **interpreted** by **extracting meaning** from **observation** since statistics can't speak for themselves. **Symbolic Interactionism** later added **individuals** maintain **images** of **themselves** that are **shaped** by the **reaction** of **other**. **Labelling theory** – social world is **first classified** (labelled by stereotypes or common sense) before it can be measured. They seek to **understand** this **process of labelling** and the **affect** it has on **people**.
How to research society and people	Interpretivism **advocates** Value freedom **which is the idea that researchers should not allow their personal beliefs and ideas (values) to affect data collection and analysis.**
Type of research method they prefer to use	**In-depth interviews** and **participant observations**.
Limitations	1) Overemphasizes and assumes individuals consciously attach meaning to their actions which can put across a narrow view of what constitutes social action. 2) Value freedom is impossible and un-sociological since sociologists react to political, economic and social events. 3) Research process is all value ridden –e.g. the topic we pick to study, how we research it and analyse it.

o In practice most sociologists use **both** Positivist and Interpretivist's methods: most positivists use some interpretation in their research and most Interpretivists use some social facts in their research. Thus, **disputes** between the two traditions have become **less common** today.

Choosing a research method

Types of data

- o There are two types of data which Sociologists commonly use:
  1. Primary and secondary data.
  2. Quantitative and qualitative data.

Primary vs. Secondary sources of data

- o **Primary sources** – data collected by Sociologists themselves through research. Includes the use of various research methods including:
  - Experiments
  - Social surveys
  - Questionnaires
  - Interviews
  - Participant observation

- o **Secondary sources** – data that is pre-existing/ collected by someone else. E.g. Official statistics or personal documents like photos, dairies, letters etc.

Quantitative and Qualitative data

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Objective	To quantify data and generalise results from a sample to the population of interest. To measure the incidence of various views and opinions in a chosen sample. Sometimes followed by qualitative research which is used to explore some findings further.	Social reality has a specific meaning and relevance structure for people living, thinking and acting within it. Thus, any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in people's experience of that social reality. Seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied. To gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations. To provide insights into the setting of a problem, generating ideas and/or hypotheses for later quantitative research. To uncover prevalent trends in thought and opinion.
Sample	Usually a large number of cases representing the population of interest. Randomly selected respondents.	Usually a small number of non-representative cases. Respondents selected to fulfil a given quota.
Data Collection	Structured techniques such as online questionnaires, on-street or telephone interviews.	Unstructured or semi-structured techniques e.g. individual depth interviews, group discussions or participant observations.

Data Analysis	Statistical data is usually in the form of tabulations (tabs). Findings are conclusive and usually descriptive in nature.	Non- statistical. Data analysis is interpretive which means it's a matter of the researcher's judgement. It seeks to explore the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of people to gain in-depth understanding.
Outcome	Used to recommend a final course of action.	Exploratory and/or investigative. Findings are not conclusive and cannot be used to make generalisations about the population of interest. Develop an initial understanding and sound base for further decision making.
Advantages	Easy to conduct and measure and analyse data and results – cause and effect results are obtained. Filters out external factors so results are unbiased. Results can be generalised to the wider public. Objective results – hard data – Doesn't matter who conducts the research findings should be similar	Useful during early stages of a study when the researcher may be unsure of exactly what will be studied or what to focus on – focus groups. Doesn't need a strict research design plan before it begins which gives the researcher freedom to let the study unfold more naturally. Detailed and rich data is collected in the form of comprehensive written descriptions or visual evidence which looks at context and social meaning and how it affects individuals. Studies people in their natural setting which means results are 'closer' to reality.
Disadvantages	Ignores people's interpretation of the world around the meaning things have for different people. Thus, it is too simplistic. Highly reliant on statistics which don't always reflect society. Context of the study is ignored as it does not study people in their natural setting. Hard to always gather a large sample of the population; the larger the sample of people researched, the more statistically accurate the results will be.	Too subjective as the researcher is heavily involved in the research process which can influence their view of the study. Moreover, soft data is produced as results are interpreted according to researchers own bias — thus, not reliable as there are problems with validity and generalisation Time consuming and expensive as interviews last at least an hour per person and can go on for months or years.

Quantitative Vs. Qualitative – which works best?

- o **Neither** method of research **is better** than the **other**.

- o They are **different** and both have their **strengths** and **weaknesses**.

- o They way to decide which one is **best suited** to a study depends on the **purpose** of the research itself and what it seeks to **accomplish**.
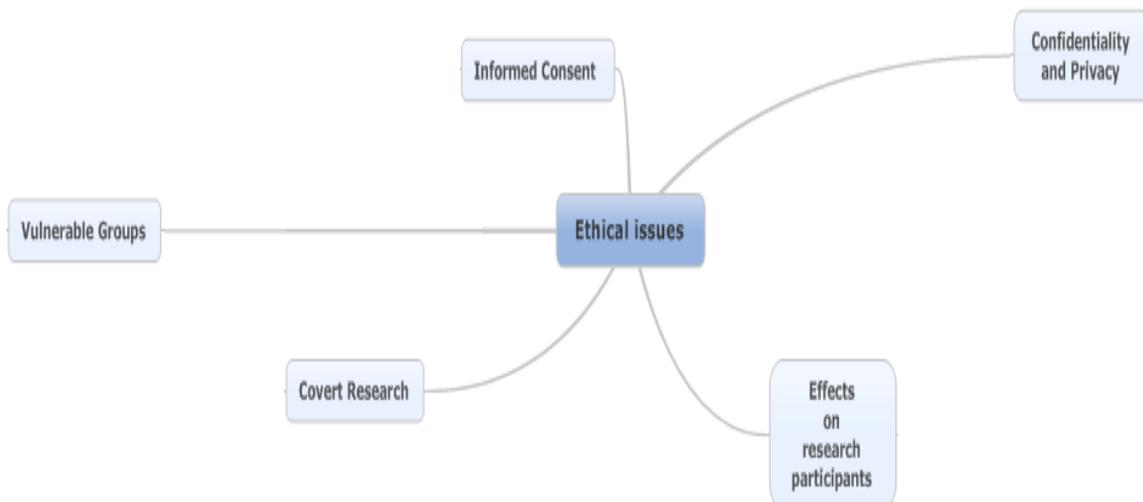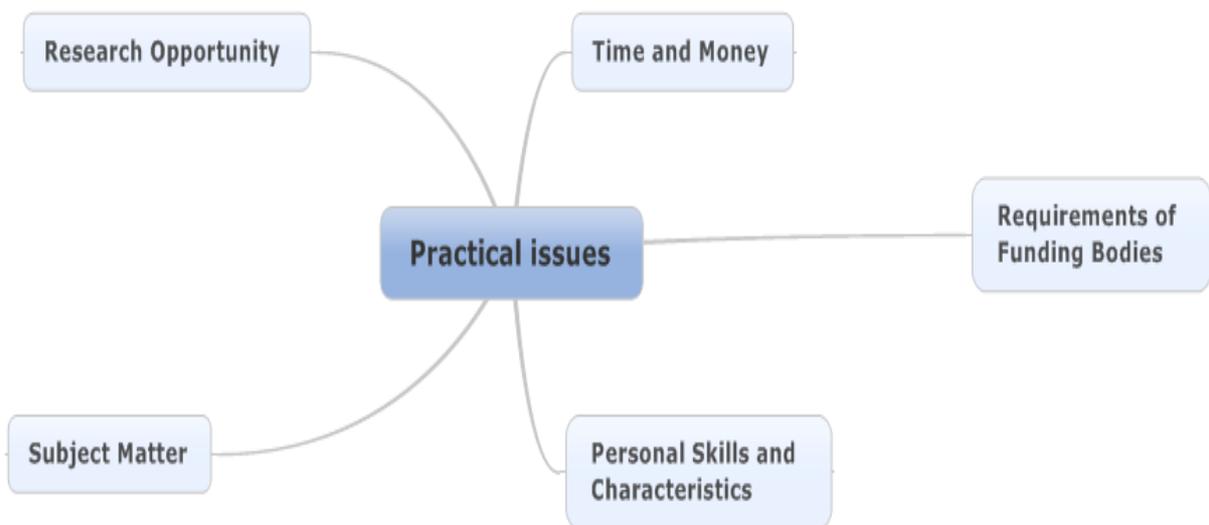
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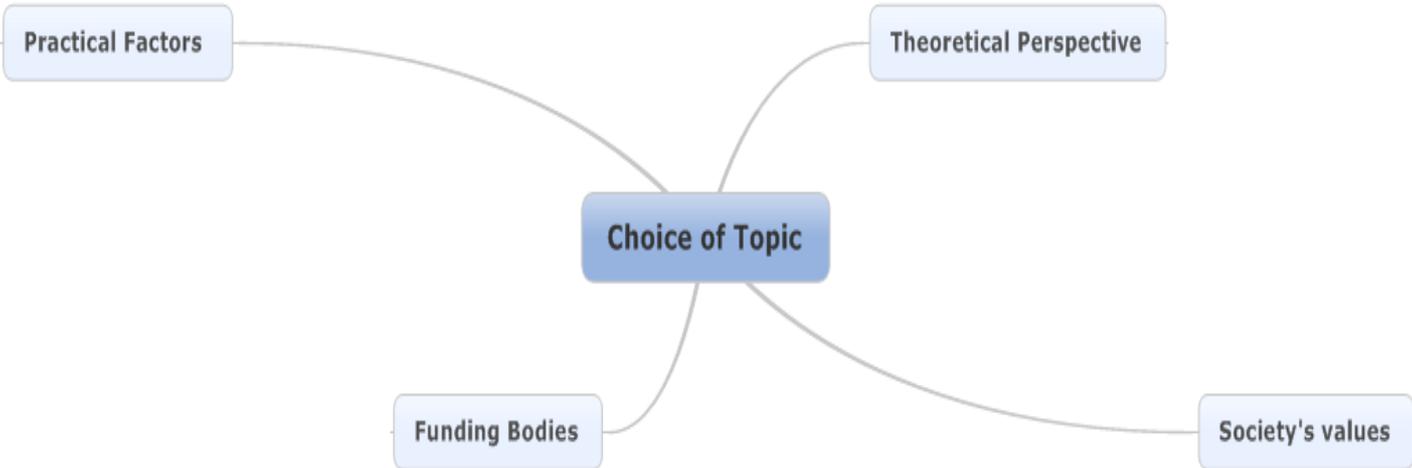
YES!

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Primary source	Questionnaires Structured interviews	Participant observation Unstructured interviews
Secondary source	Official statistics	Letters, newspapers, articles, pictures etc.

Can Primary and Secondary sources of data overlap with Quantitative and Qualitative methods?

Factors influencing choice of methods

o   Various factors influence a Sociologists choice of method. The most common are:

- Practical issues
- Ethical issues
- Theoretical issues
- Choice of topic

Research Opportunity

Time and Money

Practical issues

Requirements of Funding Bodies

Subject Matter

Personal Skills and Characteristics

Informed Consent

Confidentiality and Privacy

Vulnerable Groups

Ethical issues

Covert Research

Effects on research participants

Theoretical issues

- Methodological Perspective (Positivist or Interpretivist)
- Validity
- Representativeness
- Reliability

Choice of Topic

- Practical Factors
- Theoretical Perspective
- Funding Bodies
- Society's values

Research Method One; Experiments

o Experiments are more commonly used in Psychology and the Natural sciences. It involves testing the behaviour of participants and comparing results of two groups;

- **The Experimental Group** – is exposed to the conditions of the experiment.

- **The Control Group** – is **NOT** exposed to the conditions of the experiment and are not informed of this. In short, they are the placebo group.

o Logic of experiments is for scientists to manipulate variables in which they are interested to discover what effects they have.

o This method allows the researcher to develop a cause and effect relationship to predict or prevent future occurrences of behaviour.

o Experiments are mostly used by Positivist's since they favour scientific analysis.

❖ Evaluation of Experiments

1. Reliability

➢ Experiments increase reliability as they are easy to replicate by different researchers since there are certain steps and environmental conditions to follow and variables to manipulate.

2. Practical problems

➢ Society is complex and the social world is not easy to identify let alone manipulate it. E.g. if we wanted to study classroom interaction between 16 year olds is it best to observe them in a school or create an artificial classroom setting?

➢ Laboratory experiments cannot be used to study the past and compare social trends to contemporary society.

➢ Can only study a small sample which may not be representative of the whole population.

3. Ethical problems

➢ Researcher requires informed consent from research participants. However, this can be difficult to obtain from some groups like children or people with learning difficulties who may not fully understand the purpose of the experiment.

➢ Problems regarding the deception of participants since outlining the dull purpose of the research can lead to social desirability bias. E.g. Milgram's study of obedience.

➢ Experiments can also cause physical or psychological harm to participants depending on the nature of activities involved.

4. Social desirability bias

   ➢ A laboratory is not a natural environment. Thus, any behaviour within it can also be artificial since participants will try to guess what the study is about and act in the way they think the researcher may want them to behave.

5. Free will

   ➢ Assumes human action is deterministic like those of animals and plants and can be studied in the same way as natural sciences. Ignores free will and complex nature of human action.

❖ Two alternatives to the laboratory experiments

1. Field experiments

   o Takes place in the participant's natural setting rather than an artificial laboratory setting.

   o Participants are not usually aware they are being studied to reduce social desirability bias.

   o The researcher manipulates one or two of the variables in the situation to see what effect it has on participants. E.g. Rosenthal and Jacobson's study of labelling in schools.

Evaluation
   ➢ Ethical issues – informed consent are not obtained and involve deception.

   ➢ Difficult to gain access into a participant's natural setting. E.g. criminal gangs

   ➢ Difficult to always manipulate variables in one's natural setting.

2. The Comparative Method

   o This involves determining a cause and effect relationship by identifying two groups that are alike, besides the one variable we are interested in, and comparing the two groups together to determine causality.

   o Thus, a real study does not even have to be conducted. A sociologist can simply compare the behaviour of two groups using existing primary or secondary data.

   o E.g. Durkheim's study of suicide where he studied why different groups are more likely to commit suicide by looking at official statistics collected by coroners.

   o This method avoids: 1) an artificial setting, 2) can be used to study the past. 3) no ethical issues.

Evaluation
   ➢ Less control over variable. Thus cause and effect can be difficult to determine.

Research Method Two; Social Surveys

o Social surveys can be administered in two ways:

- **Written questionnaires** – which respondents complete and return in person, post or email.

- **Interviews** – either face-to-face or over the telephone.

o **Various steps need to be taken before a social survey can be administered to respondents:**

1. Choose a topic

o While surveys are used by Sociologists to study a wide variety of issues, it is not a suitable method for all topics. E.g. historical topics.

2. Formulate an aim or hypothesis

o **Aim**: statement which identifies what a sociologist intends to study. E.g. to collect data on gender and education.

o **Hypothesis**: more specific than the aim. It is a possible explanation that can be tested by collected evidence to prove it true or false. E.g. to test whether girls outperform boys at Duff Miller across all A-Level subjects.

o Both give the researcher direction on how to investigate their research, particularly the latter.

3. Select the types of questions you will ask

o All types of surveys, whether interviews or questionnaires require questions. Such questions can be asked in two specific ways;

1. **Closed-ended questions** – respondent chooses from possible answers. E.g. 'yes', 'no', 'don't know' or multiple choice options.

2. **Open-ended questions** – respondent is free to express their opinion as they please.

	Closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
Advantages	➢ Responses are easy to analyse and compare. ➢ Easy to replicate. ➢ Easy to complete for interviewers and interviewees. ➢ Are more specific, thus more likely to communicate similar issues. ➢ Higher response rate than open question surveys.	➢ Allows respondent to express themselves in their own words, reducing interviewer + social desirability bias. ➢ They can be used in a pilot study to formulate closed questions. ➢ Respondents will only answer if they 'know the answer' as opposed to picking anything from a list.
Disadvantages	➢ No flexibility in responses increasing investigator bias. ➢ Increases social desirability bias. ➢ Not always necessary. E.g. which state where you born in?	➢ Requires greater effort from the respondent. ➢ Times consuming and expensive since replies are contradictory, incomprehensible or irrelevant. ➢ Different interviewers may record the different answer. ➢ Responses are varied which means low reliability.

4. Operationalise concepts

o Before we can formulate research questions, a Sociologist has to conceptualise and operationalise their ideas.

o **Conceptualisation** – involves the process of identifying concepts that will be examined. E.g. teacher speech, body language, eye contact with students to assess teacher expectations.

o **Operationalization** – involves the process of breaking down concepts into questions which can be measured. E.g. how do you encourage/motivate students with low self-esteem?

5. Conduct a pilot study

o A pilot study is a small scale trial study that is carried out. This is done prior to the main study to test that there are no flaws in the methodology of the main research. E.g. practise interviews or a draft questionnaire.

6. Select a sample

o The purpose of sampling is to ensure that people chosen for the study are representative of the research population or group we are interest in. This was results can be generalised to a wider population.

The Sampling Frame

- o To select a sample we first need a sampling frame. This is a list of all the members of the population we are interested in. E.g. using school registers/data base to select the appropriate students for a study.
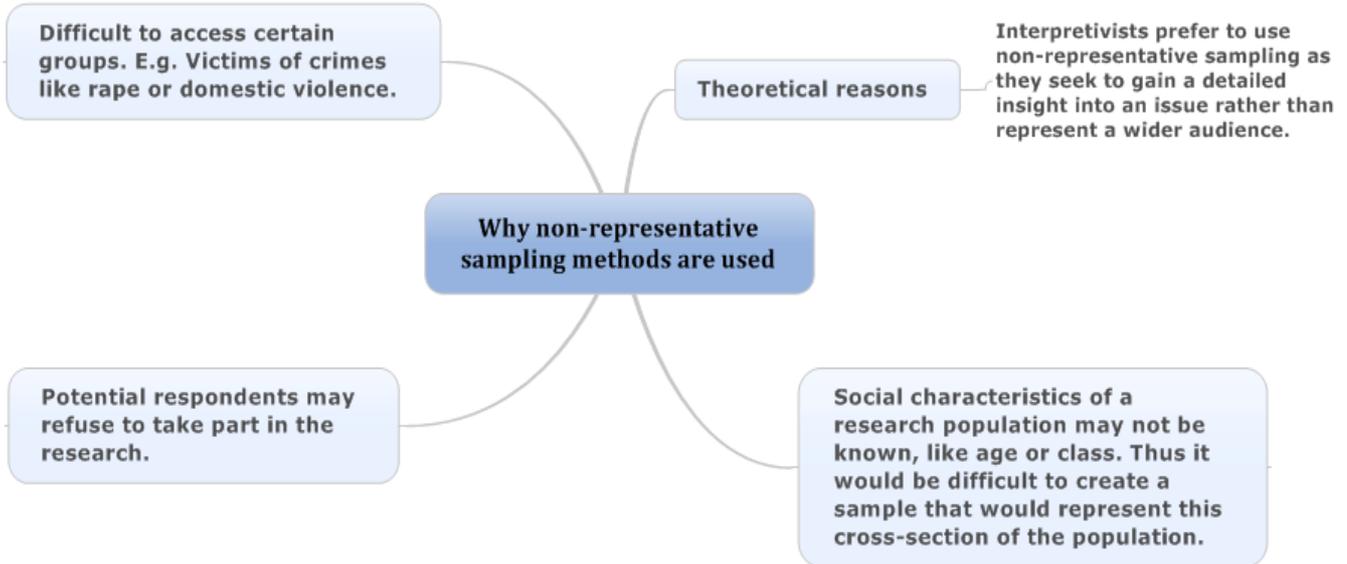
Sampling Techniques

- o Below is a list of all the **representative** sampling techniques, mostly used in **quantitative** research:

Sampling Technique	How it works	Advantage	Disadvantage
Random Sampling	Simplest technique, where the sample is selected purely by random chance. E.g. names drawn from a hat.	Representative sampling planning is possible. Researchers can specify the size of the sample. Possible to estimate extent to which sample findings are likely to differ from the population.	Expensive and time consuming. Always a chance that the sample selected is not truly representative.
Quasi-Random Sampling	Similar to random sampling. In this case every tenth or hundredth name is selected rather than any random one.		
Stratified Random Sampling	Population is divided into a number of parts or 'strata' according to characteristics chosen, like sex, ethnicity or age. A random sample is then drawn from each stratum and these are then put together.	Ensures a good cross selection of the population – more precise than random sampling. Not necessary for the sample to reflect composition of the population which saves time and is a good measure. Can be used in more complex studies where random sampling will be difficult & time consuming. Allows different sampling techniques to be used for different subpopulations.	Complex to organise and difficult to analyse results. Not useful with non-homogenous subgroups. Requires accurate information about the population, or can produce bias.
Quota Sampling	Similar to Stratified Random Sampling. But instead of choosing the samples for each stratum randomly, the researcher goes out to look for the right number of each sort of person required for each category. E.g. 500 men and 250 women.	Grantees inclusion of diverse population and proportions in which they occur in the population. Widely used in opinion polls as it produces 'close to reality' statistics. Quicker and cheaper than random sampling.	People may be unwilling to reveal personal details to see if they fit into a quota category. People in a given quota have an accidental chance of being selected for the study which isn't representative.

- o Below is a list of all the **non-representative** sampling techniques, mostly used in **qualitative** research:

Sampling Technique	How it works	Advantage	Disadvantage
Opportunity Sampling	Sometimes called accidental, or convince sampling, involves choosing individuals who are easy to access. E.g. Studying first 100 men willing to take part.	Fast and cheap. Good for small scale studies, like studying your collage or local hospital.	Not representative. Usually avoided if a more satisfactory alternative is available. Many biases occur in such sampling procedure and there is no way to evaluate such bias.

Snowball Sampling	This is a multistage sampling procedure in which a small initial group is selected, 'snowballs', who then introduce the researcher to other potential members of the population that can take part. This way sample size increases.	Good to use when members are difficult to reach

Sample size increases without much work being done by the researcher to find participants. | Networks connecting participants means the study becomes less representative.

Not representative when it comes to larger groups of people who are not difficult to reach. |

Difficult to access certain groups. E.g. Victims of crimes like rape or domestic violence.

Theoretical reasons

Interpretivists prefer to use non-representative sampling as they seek to gain a detailed insight into an issue rather than represent a wider audience.

Why non-representative sampling methods are used

Potential respondents may refuse to take part in the research.

Social characteristics of a research population may not be known, like age or class. Thus it would be difficult to create a sample that would represent this cross-section of the population.

7. Decide whether it face to face, postal, online survey

o Various way to conduct surveys, particularly questionnaires. A researcher can select from using online, postal or face-to-face questions. Interviews can also be conducted online over skype. This gives researchers the flexibility of studying participants abroad without incurring high costs.

8. Conduct survey and analyse data

o Once all the research preparation is completed. The survey is given to the sample population to complete. Once this stage is over, it is the role of the Sociologist to analyse the data collected to try and understand why people behave in certain ways (Interpretivists) or look for statistical relationships (Positivism).

Research Method Three; Questionnaires

o Questionnaires are a list of a research or survey questions asked to respondents, as it is designed to extract specific information from them about a particular topic.

o There are different ways to administer questionnaires; online, post or face-to-face.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Practical advantages ➢ Quick and cheap means of collecting data. ➢ A Large sample can be used. ➢ Data is easy to compare, analyse and evaluate. ➢ No need to recruit and train researchers. **Reliability** o **Easy to replicate and check for reliability.** **Hypothesis Testing** o **Useful for testing hypothesis as it established cause and effect relationship between different variables.** **Detachment and objectivity** o **Positivists argue questionnaires enable objectivity as the researcher is kept external to the research process. This is particularly the case for postal and online questionnaires.** **Representativeness** o **Since questionnaires can gather information form a large sample, the results are subsequently more representative of the wider population.** **Ethical issues** o Questionnaires pose fewer ethical problems than most research methods. However, while some questionnaires can be intrusive or sensitive, respondents don't have to answer them	**Practical problems** o Data tends to be limited and superficial since respondents are unlikely to complete and return long and time consuming questionnaires. **Response rate** o Low response rate, particularly among certain members of society. E.g. parents or full time workers which create a bias sample since most respondents are unemployed or socially isolated. o Postal and online questionnaires particularly have low response rates. **Inflexibility** o Once questions are finalised they are difficult to change or ask follow up questions. Thus a narrow area is explored. **Detachment** o Interpretivists argue questionnaires lack validity and do not give a true picture of what's being studied since research. **Lying, forgetting and social desirability bias** o Problems with validity arise as respondents may fail to provide a correct answer, forget, not know or understand the question. ➢ Social desirability bias can also occur, where the researcher gives a response to please the researcher. **Imposing the researchers meanings** o Questionnaires ignore meaning and experiences of respondents as questions are drawn by the researcher. This is particularly the case for closed questions which allows no flexibility.

Research Method Four; Interviews

o Interviewing is a research method in which the researcher asks questions orally and records the respondent's answers.

o Interviewing is typically done face-to-face, but can also be done via telephone.

o Interviews are usually one-to-one but can also be group ones too.

o There are two key types of interviews:

- **Structured Interviews** – strict set of questions for the interviewer to ask and respondent to answer.
- **Unstructured interviews** – are guided conversations. Interviewer is free to ask any questions.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews** – lies between the two above extremes above. The interviewer has set questions but also scope to ask additional probing questions.

Structured Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
Practical issues ➢ Training interviewers is straightforward and inexpensive since they have to follow a set of given instructions. However, this method is more costly than postal questionnaires. ➢ A larger number of participants can be studied in comparison to unstructured interviews. ➢ Suitable to gather factual information. E.g. age or occupation. ➢ Results are easy to compare and analyse as questions are closed ended. **Response Rate** ➢ Higher response rates than questionnaires. ➢ Researcher can increase response rate by calling back participants. **Reliability** ➢ Easy to replicate as it uses same questions in the same order. **Validity** ➢ Valid data due to its use of close ended questions.	Validity ➢ Little opportunity for participant to explain questions in depth or clarify misunderstandings. Social desirability bias ➢ Respondents may pick one of the multiple choice answers to avoid looking 'stupid'. ➢ They can also lie and exaggerate responses. Inflexible ➢ Can result in interviewer bias as questions reflect the concerns and priorities of researcher rather than the participant.

Unstructured Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
Rapport and sensitivity ➢ Interviewer is likely to build a rapport with interviewee, putting them at ease and encouraging them to be truthful; avoids social desirability bias. ➢ Good for sensitive topics. E.g. domestic violence. **Flexibility** ➢ **No set questions, allowing participants the flexibility to draw on issues/ideas they believe are important, thereby reducing Interviewer bias.** **Checking understanding** ➢ Researchers have the opportunity to ask questions when unsure, rather than select a multiple option. **Exploring unfamiliar topics** ➢ **Enable researchers to explore an under researched area and can be for pilot studies.**	**Practical problems** ➢ Interviews are time consuming, limiting the number of participants that can be studied. **Representative** ➢ Small sample is obtained, in comparison to structured interviews, which means there is a higher chance of it being un-representative of wider population. Harder to make valid generalisations. **Reliability** ➢ Difficult to replicate the research and compare results. **Validity** ➢ Rapport developed between interviewer and interviewee can distort data obtained; thereby leading to a lack of validity.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
➢ Obtains relevant data and allows flexibility for researcher to bring up additional information. ➢ Its structured aspect enables comparative analysis. ➢ Can be used for sensitive topics.	➢ Time consuming and resource intensive. ➢ Can't guarantee honesty of participants. ➢ Flexibility of interview may lessen reliability. ➢ Difficult to compare and analyse answers.

Group Interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
➢ Participants feel more comfortable in group interviews than one-to-one. Thus they are more likely to open up. ➢ Group discussions stimulate individual thought, enabling rich in-depth data. ➢ Useful method to generate initial ideas for a follow up research.	➢ One or two individuals may dominate discussion. ➢ Researcher must keep group focused at all times. ➢ Peer group pressure can affect responses. ➢ Data generated is difficult to analyse.

The Interview as a Social Interaction

Ethical Issues - Little ethical issues arise in interviews. However, as always researcher must gain informed consent, guarantee privacy and confidentiality and enable the participant to leave research at any point.

Interviewer Bias - This can occur mostly in structured interviews where the interviewers trail of thought becomes apparent. But it is also likely to occur when 'leading' questions are asked . Thus, interviews must avoid giving opinions and remain neutral throughout.

The Social Desirability Bias - This is when respondents seek to win the approval of researcher by giving answers that would make them appear in a favourable light. Thus, it can tamper the validity of results.

Artificiality - Even in the most relaxed setting interviews can be artificial since both parties know the purpose of the interaction is to obtain data. Thus, validity of results are thereby questionable.

Cultural differences - Different words and gestures have different meanings in various cultures. This can in effect reduce the validity of the study if researchers are unaware.

Status and Power Inequalities - Inequality between the researcher and respondent can lead to invalid responses. Similarly gender and ethnic differences in regards to power and equality can result in invalid responses. E.g. Black researcher interviewing white person on racism.

Research Method Five; Participant Observation

❖ Types of Observations
- o There are two way to distinguish between observations:

  1. Non-participant observation - researcher observes the group or event without taking part. E.g. Ofsted inspections.

     Vs.

     Participant observation – researcher actually takes part in the event or everyday life of group while observing it simultaneously.

  2. Overt observations – when researcher reveals their true identity.

     Vs.

     Covert observations - when researchers conceal their true identify and take on a fake identity instead.

o Conducting a participant observation
- o Two issues to address when conducting an observation:
  1. Getting access in, staying in and getting out of the group being studied.
  2. Whether to use overt or covert observations.

Gaining Access
- o Some groups are easier to join than others. E.g. criminal gang vs. football crowd.

- o **Making contact** – dependent upon the researcher's personal skills, connections, or even pure chance.

- o **Acceptance** – to retain entry researchers must be trusted and accepted by the group that they join. However, this is sometimes dependent on variables they cannot control like gender, sexuality and ethnicity. E.g. a Muslim cannot join EDL.

- o **Observers role** – researcher should not disrupt the groups normal activity nor offer their opinions on issues.

Staying In
- o In order to retain their role, researcher has to participate to an extent, particularly if it is covert research.

- o **Going native** – by over-identifying with the group the researcher could become bias. If this occurs they lose objectivity and simply become a member of the group. Moreover, the longer an observer stays in a group, the less likely they are to observe unusual events or actions noteworthy.

Getting Out
- o Leaving a group is usually easier than joining, but this is not always the case for covert research. E.g. trying to leave a criminal gang.

- o Researcher can also find it difficult to adjust to their ordinary life if they stay in for too long.

Overt Observations

Advantages	Disadvantages
➢ Avoids the ethical problem of not obtaining informed consent and collecting data through deception. ➢ Allows researchers to ask naïve but important questions a covert researcher wouldn't be able to. ➢ The observer can openly take notes and wouldn't be affected by hindsight. ➢ Quick and simple to carry out in comparison to covert observations. ➢ Researcher can be open in what they are interested and why.	➢ Groups can refuse permission for observations. E.g. criminal gangs or police force. ➢ Can lead to social desirability bias or the 'hawthorne effect' in which participants change behaviour knowing they are being observed. ➢ Can lead to interviewer effect and bias too.

Covert Observations

Advantages	Disadvantages
➢ Enables researchers to study groups which cannot be easily accessed in their natural setting. E.g. criminal groups. ➢ Avoids social desirability bias or the 'hawthorne effect' as participants are not aware they are being observed to alter behaviour. ➢ Avoids interviewer bias.	**Practical Problems** ➢ Requires the researcher to keep up an act. There is always risk of their cover being blown. ➢ Sociologist cannot note take openly and can experience problems with hindsight when trying to recall information. **Ethical Issues** ➢ Informed concept is not gained, and on top of it participants are deceived. ➢ Psychological harm can be caused to participants upon finding out the true identity of researcher. ➢ Researchers have to lie about their reasons to leave the group. ➢ Researchers can participate in immoral or illegal activities. Even if they witness it, they have a moral/legal duty to intervene.

Participant Observation

Advantages	Disadvantages
Practical advantages ➢ Sometimes participant observation may be the only way to study a group. E.g. deviant groups. ➢ Researchers can build rapport with participants and gain answers which reflect the truth the most in comparison to other methods. **Flexibility** ➢ The most flexible approach in comparison to all the other research methods. It allows researcher to discover things other methods may have overlooked. **Insight** ➢ Participant observation allows the researcher to gain empathy and thereby understand participant's experiences better. **Validity** ➢ Increases validity since people are studied in their natural setting, rather than via an artificial questionnaire or lab experiment.	Practical disadvantages ➢ Time consuming and expensive since researchers need to be fully trained before observations can begin. ➢ It can be personal stressful and demanding for researcher. ➢ Personal characteristics like gender, age and ethnicity can have an impact on certain groups studied. Ethical problems ➢ Covert observations bring up serious ethical issues, from deception to psychological harm of participants. Representativeness ➢ Small groups can only be studied in observations which mean results gathered are not representative to wider society. Reliability ➢ Observations are difficult to replicate since each observation is unique. Thus, results are not reliable. Bias, lack of objectivity and Validity ➢ The term 'going native' implies obtaining objectivity is difficult. Thus, results reflect the subjectivity of the researcher and are not valid according to Positivists.

Secondary Sources

Secondary Sources

Quantitative Research
- Official statistics
- Non-official statistics
- Existing quantitative research

Qualitative Research
- Existing quantitative sociological research.
- Public documents.
- Personal documents.
- Historical documents.

Official Statistics

- o Official statistics are quantitative data gathered by the government or other official bodies. E.g. National census conducted every ten years of UK population.

- o Two ways to collect official statistics:

    1. **Registration** – when registering someone or for something. E.g. Birth or to school.

    2. **Official surveys** – e.g. National census or school surveys.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Practical reasons	➢ It allows comparison between different groups and trends over time. ➢ Saves time and money.	➢ Statistics may not always be provided for each research area. ➢ Statistical trends can't always explain the reasons behind actions. ➢ Definitions are subjective which means official stats are not objective. E.g. crime has a different meaning for the police, courts, criminal and criminologist.
Represent-ative	➢ Official stats cover a large proportion of the population and are thus more representative of wider society. E.g. census.	➢ Not all official stats are representative. E.g. British Crime Survey or General Household Survey is not compulsory for citizens to complete and return, unlike the UK census.
Reliability	➢ Official stats are reliable as they can be easily replicated to reproduce similar results.	➢ However, they may not always be reliable if participants don't make it clear which option they selected or researcher computing data can also make errors.
Validity; the 'dark figure'	➢ On the whole official stats that gather 'hard' data like population size, marriage or divorce rates generate valid data.	➢ However, 'soft' data like police or school stats are all based on interpretation and are not always valid subsequently.

	Positivism	Interpretivism	Marxism
Official statistics and ideology;	➢ They prefer official statistics as it reflects 'Social facts'. ➢ It can be measured objectively. ➢ Data can be analysed and compared to find cause and affect relationships. ➢ Can be used to test a hypothesis.	➢ Official statistics lack validity since everything in society is socially constructed. ➢ Objectivity is impossible since everything is based on meaning and interpretation.	➢ Official statistics serve the interest of capitalists. ➢ It reflects their needs and thus lacks validity as it is a product of social construction rather than a real reflection of the truth.

Documents

- o Documents refer to any written text, like personal diaries, government reports, medical records, newspapers etc.

1. Public and Personal Documents

- o **Public documents** – created by organisations like government bodies, schools, welfare agencies etc. These documents may be available for researchers to use. E.g. Ofsted reports, school website, prospectus, textbooks etc

- o **Personal documents** - includes letters, diaries, photo albums, autobiographies etc. These are first person accounts of social events and experiences which can be used to reveal meaning. E.g. notes written by students, homework, graffiti on school building/property, etc.

2. Historical Documents

- o These are personal and public documents created in the past. Such documents allow us to study the past by also to draw comparative analyse with the present.

3. Content Analysis

- o Is a method used to analyse the content of documents, usually used to study documents produced by the media, such as adverts and magazines.

- o Although documents are qualitative, this method helps to generate quantitative data.

- o Steps taken to conduct a content analysis of the media:
  - What category to study - e.g. full time housewives.
  - What source to study them in – e.g. TV or magazine?
  - Count the number of times they appear and how they are presented.

- o **Advantages**; cheap, easy to access material, produces objective data that is scientific and quantitative.

❖ Questions to keep in mind when assessing documents:

- o **Authenticity** – is the document what it claims to be? Is it in tact? Is it missing pages or passages?

- o **Credibility** – who was the author? Could we trust the source?

- o **Representativeness** – does the evidence in the document reflect other sources from the time period or is it fiction? Does it represent all groups in a given society or the minority?

- o **Meaning** – researcher may need special skills to interpret the document. E.g. a foreign language or understanding of words that could change over time.

- o **Advantages** – gives insight into the life of social actors, sometimes the only sources of information to study the past, cheap, easy to gather and saves time.

Documents	
Interpretivists	**Positivists**
➢ Favour documents.	➢ Reject documents.

➢ Documents uphold validity, since they are not written with research in mind thus reflecting the truth. ➢ It provides qualitative data and gives insight into the author's world and meanings.	➢ Lacks reliability, representativeness and generalisation. ➢ Unreliable data since its subjective not objective. ➢ Interpreting documents imposes the view of the researcher.

➢ Documents uphold validity, since they are not written with research in mind thus reflecting the truth.

➢ It provides qualitative data and gives insight into the author's world and meanings.

➢ Lacks reliability, representativeness and generalisation.

➢ Unreliable data since its subjective not objective.

➢ Interpreting documents imposes the view of the researcher.

Other types of research

1. Case studies

- o   Involves a detailed examination of a single case. E.g. schools, family or workplace.

  ### Advantages
  - ➤ Provides a detailed insight into a particular group, interaction or event.
  - ➤ Can be used to study exceptional and unique cases. E.g. fait schools.
  - ➤ Can be used to test a theory or hypothesis.

  ### Limitations
  - ➤ Since it studies one case in depth, it lacks reliability and representativeness which means results cannot be generalised.

2. Longitudinal study

- o   Involves a study which follows the same sample for an extended period of time. E.g. progress of 5 boys throughout their time in education.

  ### Advantages
  - ➤ Can trace development over time rather than a snapshot view of the present.
  - ➤ Enables researchers to draw comparison between groups over time to identify different trends and causes.

  ### Limitations
  - ➤ Problems can arise tracking the sample. E.g. change of phone number and address.
  - ➤ Participants may choose to leave the study.
  - ➤ Demographic changes in the population may mean the original sample is no longer representative of the present population.
  - ➤ Large amount of data can be difficult to analyse and costly to collect.

3. Life histories

- o   Involves collecting and recording individual experiences through 1) autobiographies and 2) semi-structured or unstructured interviews.

- o   It is a qualitative method that tries to understand how individuals construct and interpret the world.
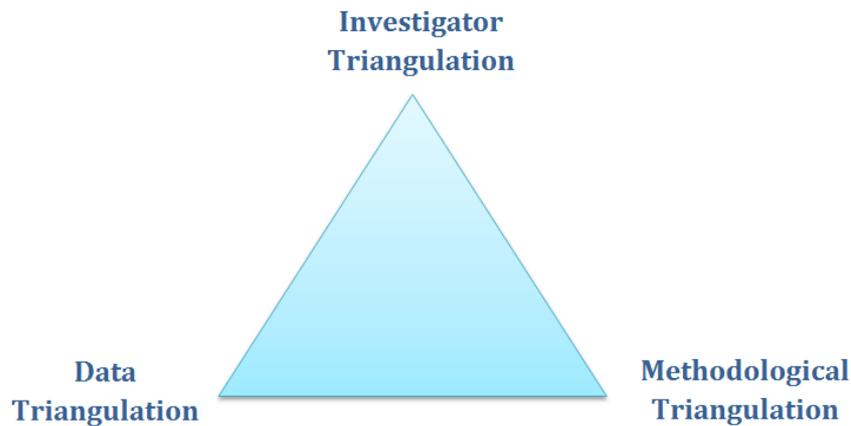
  ### Advantage
  - ➤ Rich insight into individual experiences.
  - ➤ No researcher or social desirability bias.

  ### Disadvantage
  - ➤ Life interviews conducted through interviews are subject to interview and social desirability bias.
  - ➤ Time consuming.
  - ➤ Very subjective data, not representative or reliable.

Triangulation

o   Triangulation is the use of more than one research method when carrying out a sociological study, so different types of data can complement one another.

o   Triangulation is also used to increase the validity and reliability of a study.

o   Triangulation can take various forms:

1.   **Investigator Triangulation** – involves using different researchers to check for investigator bias.

2.   **Data Triangulation** – involves collecting data at different time from different people in different places to check for validity. It involves combining primary and secondary data.

3.   **Methodological Triangulation** - takes two forms:

- *Within-Method Triangulation* – involves using a variety of techniques within the same method to check validity and reliability. E.g. open and closed questions within a questionnaire.

- *Between-Method Triangulation* – refers to a combination of different techniques

Advantages	Disadvantages
o Advantage of one method compensates for the disadvantages of another. o Studying from different perspectives give a fuller picture. o Qualitative and quantitative data can be obtained o Increases reliability and validity.	o It is time consuming o Expensive!

Functionalism on Society

Research Methods: supports Positivism (developed by Durkheim) and use of quantitative methods.

What type of theory is it? 1) Conflict vs. consensus 2) Structural or social action	o **Consensus** theory as it assumes there is **social solidarity** and **value consensus** in society. o **Structural** theory as it argues **society** or **'social facts'** exists **prior** and **independent** to individuals and subsequently impacts their behaviour.
Main assumption of the theory	o Society is **organic** as it works in the same way as the **human body**. All parts need to work together in order for society to work in harmony. E.g. if we remove education, society would be characterised by ignorance. o All societies need **'functional prerequisites'** which are basic needs for survival like food, shelter and money. E.g. family is needed to provide primary socialisation and economic needs for its members. o Any aspect of society that is dysfunctional is characterised by **anomie** (normlessness) - this occurs when norms and values or collective conscience breaks down. E.g. crime.
Durkheim's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Durkheim believed society is characterised by **'social facts'** – ways of acting, thinking, feeling etc. o He believed that social facts exist **prior** and **independent** to individuals and could therefore shape their **individual moral consciousness**. E.g. religion exists before individuals and dictates how they are to live their lives through its customs and practises. o All societies need to be characterised by **collective conscience**. However, this is less likely in modern day societies that experience **egoism**. E.g. New Age Religions are breaking down and undermining the collective conscience provided by religion. However, Durkheim believed once spiritual religion dies down in modern societies this function of unity will be carried out by civil religion. E.g. football.

Parson's assumption
 	
(Synoptic link)
	o Parsons argued all societies require **value consensus** and **shared goals**. He outlined **four** necessary **functional prerequisites**:
	
	    1. **Adaptation** – economic system.
	
	    2. **Goal attainment** – a goal set by the state. E.g. American Dream.
	
	    3. **Integration** – legal system to prevent conflict.
	
	    4. **Pattern maintenance** – maintenance of values taught through different institutions. E.g. education teaches us **universalistic** values (based on

	merit) rather than the **particularistic** values (ascribed status) given by our family. It therefore bridges the gap between family and education.

Merton's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Merton accepts that every society requires **value consensus** to work in harmony.
	
	o However, he also argues that for harmony to exist, a society must place **equal emphasis** on its **cultural goal** and the **legitimate means** to obtain in. e.g. education and hard work. When the latter is missing, it creates a situation of **anomie** in which there are five responses according to a persons social structure:
	
	    1. **Conformity** – accept foal and means.
	    2. **Innovation** – (working class) accept the goal but reject the means.
	    3. **Ritualism** – (lower middle class) reject the goal but accept the means.
	    4. **Retreatism** - (drop outs) reject both the goal and means.
	    5. **Rebellion** – (revolutionaries) reject both goal and means but seek to replace it with a new society.

Strengths	➢ Recognises importance of social structure in impacting individual behaviour and society. ➢ Provides and explanation for conformity and social stability in society.
Limitations	➢ Too deterministic – assumes individuals have no free will over their actions. ➢ Ignores conflict in society. E.g. London riots or War on Terror. ➢ Assumes everyone in society shares the same norms and values. Ignoring groups, which actively reject it. E.g. Marxists. ➢ Believes society functions for the benefit of all, ignoring marginalised groups. E.g. women, ethnic minorities, disabled etc. ➢ Can explain rapid social change in society. E.g. 1960s sexual revolution.

Marxism on Society

Research Methods: rejects all existing research methods and advocates Marxists scientific analysis instead;

What type of theory is it? 1) Conflict vs. consensus 2) Structural or social action	o **Conflict** theory as it assumes there is a **conflict** between the **bourgeoisie** and **proletariat** caused by **capitalism**. o **Structural** theory as it argues the **economy**, which is at the **base** of society, impacts all other **superstructures**; by which he means all social institutions and individual life.

Marx's main assumption
 	
(Synoptic link)
	o Marx's theory is called **Historical Materialism** which explains human history in five stages:
	
	    1. **Primitive Communism** – hunter gather society – everyone is EQUAL!
	    2. **Slave Society** – master vs. slave.
	    3. **Feudalism** – aristocracy vs. peasants.
	    4. **Capitalism** – bourgeoisie vs. proletariat.
	    5. **Communism** – everyone is EQUAL once again!
	
	o According to Marx all societies, besides primitive communism, is characterised by **two competing** classes.
	
	o The **ruling class** in each society **owns** the means of production, while the **working class sells** their **labour** to the means of production. E.g. the bourgeoisie in capitalism extracts **surplus value** from the proletariat by paying them a small value for their labour.
	
	o Workers are also **alienated** in various ways to uphold their oppression. E.g. they are controlled by managers, carry out anti social work and are made to produce useless **commodities**.
	
	o This results in **false conscio**usness (unawareness of class exploitation). E.g. religion acts as a form of false consciousness by working as the "opium of the people".
	
	o Marx believed that this oppression was upheld due to the **base vs. superstructure relationship**. This suggests that the **economy** is at the **base** of society and **determines** how all other **superstructures** (like religion, family, education and crime) are run. The superstructures in effect justify and uphold the economic system.
	
	o E.g. education is determined by the capitalist economic system as it teaches children through the **hidden curriculum** to be obedient students so that they are prepared to be obedient within the workplace too.
	
	o Marx believed that through the education of his theory, the proletariat would eventually develop **class-consciousness** and conduct a **revolution** in the name of the people to establish an equal **communist** society.

Neo-Marxism's assumption
 	
(Synoptic link)
	Gramsci
	
	o Gramsci revised Marx's theory regarding the base vs. superstructure relationship arguing that it does not work as rigidly as Marx argued, but rather that there is **relative autonomy** between the two aspects of society. Thus, while the base affected the superstructure, the same is true vice versa.
	
	o E.g. **Liberation Theology**, in Latin America, where Marxists and Catholic bishops joined forces to challenge dictatorships, shows how religion, as a superstructure, could challenge the economic base.
	
	o Gramsci also developed the concept of **hegemony**, which refers to the dominance of ruling class ideas over other groups in society and the acceptance of the proletariat over these ideas. E.g. the family continuously teaches children to accept the norm of values of capitalism without realising that it is its enemy.
	
	Althusser
	
	o Developed two key concepts:
	
	    1. **Repressive state apparatus** – refers to the states use of control through law and order, the army, police, courts and prison.
	
	    2. **Ideological state apparatus** – refers to agencies and institutions in society, which are responsible for transferring the ideas of the ruling class to the people.

Strengths	➤ Recognises the importance of the economy in impacting social life. E.g. times of recession or economic booms. ➤ It provides an explanation for conflict in society. ➤ Remains a highly influential theory, which has had significant impact on world history. E.g. Cold War.
Limitations	➤ Marx's predication of the five stages did not come true. E.g. Even in Russia where Marxism was advocated, they skipped the phase of capitalism, jumping from feudalism to communism. ➤ It over empathises conflict in society, ignoring harmony according to Functionalism. ➤ The base vs. superstructure relationship is too deterministic, ignoring individual free will.

Max Weber on Society

Research Methods – developed Interpretivism and advocates qualitative methods.

What type of theory is it? 1) Conflict vs. consensus 2) Structural or social action	o **Conflict** theory as it assumes there is **conflict** between different **social classes** and **status groups** in society. o Both a **structural** and a **social action** theory as he believes society has an impact upon individual behaviour but that individuals can also change society. E.g. Martin Luther King.
Max Weber's Main assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o According to Weber, social action has **meaningful** existence and should be used when studying and understanding society. o To understand social action we need to study **'verstehen'** which refers to understanding the meaning people attach to their action. o Thus, weber suggests while society has an impact upon individual action, individuals also impact society. o E.g. religion exists as a social institution before and independent to individuals. However, individuals can also change the institution of religion. For instance, the **protestant work ethic** led to the **spirit of capitalism** according to Weber. o He distinguishes between social action in **pre-modern** and **modern** societies, arguing the former is characterised by **'traditional social action'** in which people behave according to values assed down from their ancestors. Conversely, modern societies are characterised by **rational social action,** which is **calculative** and has room for **innovation**.
Gidden's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Gidden's developed the theory **structuration,** which also combines both structural and social action theories: thereby providing support for Weber. o He argues the existence of social structures, like social intuitions, beliefs and values, provide people with a framework of rules and values to follow. However, when engaging within this process people in effect reproduce or change that structure. o E.g. law and order is a fixed structure, which changes over time according to policy. For instance, while homosexuality was once illegal this is no longer the case today.

Strengths	➢ The combination of structural and social action theories outweigh the limitations of each and can explain progress in society whether gradual or revolutionary. ➢ There are many examples which support both Weber and Gidden's in which either individuals shape society (e.g. War on Terror) or when society shapes individual action (e.g. rise in tuition fees and the affect on social class within education).
Limitations	➢ Deterministic in assuming all individuals have the potential to change society ignoring marginalised or disadvantaged groups. ➢ Weber's theory of religion has been widely challenged and believed to be historically inaccurate. ➢ It can explain which comes first; the impact of structure or social action?

Symbolic Interactionism on Society

Research Methods: supports Interpretivism and qualitative methods.

What type of theory is it? 1) Conflict vs. consensus 2) Structural or social action	o **Conflict** theory as it assumes there are **different interpretations** of **symbols** and **meaning** by different groups in society. o **Social action** theory as it suggests individuals give **meaning** to their **behaviour** and **actions**, which in effect shapes society.
Main assumption of the theory	o Symbolic Interactionism argues society is built by the **interactions** between people that take place on the basis of **meaning** attached by **individuals**. o It assumes individuals **define** their **behaviour** and **society** and **react** according to these definitions. o Thus, they believe **"every action has a reaction"** which leads to the creation of the **labelling theory**. o E.g. **Families** are believed to be a **social construction**, which is defined by its individual members who each have a role to play. Thus, Interactionist compares the family to the **theatre**.
Mead's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Mead argues human behaviour is **social** because people **interact** in terms of **symbols**. E.g. words, flags, gestures etc. o He believes that we need **symbols** for **interaction** and **survival** and that symbols can have **different meanings**. E.g. suicide is frowned upon in western societies but in Eskimo societies it is common practise for the elderly Eskimo to commit suicide at times of food shortages. o However, Mead believes that **most** societies share the **same symbol** among its members – in short, the values of **mainstream** society. o Thus, to understand behaviour, individuals need to **read** the **roles** of others. This in effect helps us to build a **self-concept** about how we should personally behave – idea that "every action has a reaction". o Finally, he argues that each society has a **plurality** of **social roles**. E.g. one can be a father, worker, gym member and churchgoer simultaneously.
Bulmer's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o **Agrees** with **Meads** theory of symbols but adds more to his theory. o Bulmer argues that people do not react automatically to **external stimuli** (society) but rather interpret meaning before reacting, thereby using **internal stimuli** (ones psychology). E.g. drug use. o He argues **meanings** developed during **interactions** are **not fixed** but **open** to **change**. E.g. one can try drug, then oppose it at a latter time. o **Even rules** and **values** that **restrict** social action and interpretation of meaning are not **absolute** or **rigid**. E.g. homosexuality was once illegal but now the norm.

Phenomenology's assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Phenomenology is also concerned with how subjective meanings develop. o According to **Husserl**, people **organise** the world into **categories** or **phenomena's**. o Phenomena refer to things, which have **common characteristics**. E.g. the category 'dog' can be classified into pet, animal, mammal etc. o Thus, while the real world exists, it is categorised according to **subjective human choice** rather than an objective process. o E.g. Atkinson's study of suicide used this approach to understand why certain events are categorised as suicide rather than its causes.
Strengths	➢ Recognises that individual can shape society. E.g. changes in law or revolution. ➢ Language and symbols are manmade; in short they are a social construction not naturally given entities.
Limitations	➢ Fails to explain where the norms that shape behaviour originate. ➢ It overestimates individual action, ignoring the impact society can have. E.g. Islamic culture, which subordinates women. ➢ Ignores conflict within and between language and the use of symbols. E.g. the swastika has a meaning of peace and racism.

Feminism on Society

Research Methods: rejects all existing research methods and advocates a new feminist methodology.

What type of theory is it? 1. Conflict vs. consensus 2. Structural or social action	o **Conflict** theory as it assumes there is a **conflict** between **men** and **women** caused by **patriarchy**. o **Structural** theory as it assumes **patriarchal ideology** determined how society is run and impacts individual behaviour subsequently.
Main assumption of the theory	o Feminists argue that all **existing** and **historical** societies are **patriarchal**. o They seek to understand the **inequality** between **men** and **women**. o **Aim**: to **highlight** women are **oppressed** and that this oppression can and should be **overthrown**. o They argue Sociology is **'male stream'** for the following reasons: • Sociological research is **androcentric**. • It ignores the **concerns** of women. • Women are presented in a **sexist** way.
Radical Feminist assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Radical Feminists argue women are **exploited** by men due to patriarchal control. Thus, they argue men are the **enemy**. o They believe this oppression should be **overthrown** through a **sexual revolution**, to establish either **political lesbianism** or a **separatist** society. o The origins of gender equality are rooted within the **family** for Radical Feminists and exist **throughout all institutions** in society. o They reject the idea that **"biology is destiny"** and believe gender oppression is a **social construction**, which can be challenged through consciousness raising. o Millet believed that men sustained their **power** in different way including: • Physical violence and ideological factors (e.g. ideology or rape). • Socialisation. • Legal, political and economic inequalities. • Myths like romantic love or religion.
Liberal Feminist assumption **(Synoptic link)**	o Liberal feminists argue for **gender equality** for both men and women. o They believe gender inequality is a result of **sexism**, **discrimination**, **stereotypes** and **socialisation**, which can all be **overthrown** through **campaigning** for equal **rights** and **entitlements.** o Liberal Feminists also note the progress the women's movement has made, arguing society is becoming more equal as it moves forward. o However, some like Whenleham argue the gains of feminism has been lost due to: • Retro sexism in laddish culture and fear of becoming a singleton. • Popular culture, which still ignores female oppression and treats women as sex objects.

Marxist and Socialist Feminist Assumption
 	
(Synoptic link)
	o Socialist Feminists believe **sex** and **class** are **interlinked systems** of **oppression**. This is because women's oppression is a result of **capitalism** not patriarchy.
	
	o They believe female oppression **originated** due to:
	
	    • **Engels** – Development of private property and monogamous marriages.
	
	    • **Henderson** – the practise of patrilocality in which married women were expected to live with their husband's family.
	
	o **Women's inequality** serves the **interest** of **capitalism** in the following ways:
	    • Women reproduce the next generation of workers.
	    • They act as a reserve army of labour. E.g. WW1.
	    • They have unequal access to public life. E.g. pay gap and glass ceiling.
	
	o While **Socialist** Feminist advocate economic and **social policy change**, **Marxist** Feminist believe sexism and class oppression will disappear through a **class revolution**.

Postmodern Feminist Assumption	o Postmodern Feminists **reject feminism** for assuming all women share the **same interests** and **experiences** that can be represented in one ideology. o Instead, they argue the term 'woman' is an **out-dated metanarrative** as there are **differences between** men and women and **within** each. o Thus, they believe we are **unique people** and should **celebrate individual differences.** o Finally, they believe gender inequality can be **overthrown** by **deconstructing masculine language**, which treats women as the 'other'.
Black Feminist Assumption	o Black Feminists **reject Liberal Feminism** as it only addresses the **concerns** of **white middle class women**. o Instead, they argue **racism** and **sexism** are **interlinked systems** of **oppression** and that black women therefore experience a '**dual level of oppression'**. o Thus, they argue we need to **challenge** both **sexism** and **racism** for women to achieve true **emancipation**. o Nevertheless, they **differ** among themselves as to whether they support **revolution** or **reform**. o Moreover, today, Black Feminism is no longer limited to black women alone but now addresses to problem and experiences of all 'women of colour'.

Strengths	➤ Highlights the problem of 'male stream' sociology. ➤ Introduces new research topics. E.g. housework and the darker side of the family. ➤ Raised consciousness of gender inequality. ➤ Highlights and reduces the oppression of women.
Limitations	➤ Most branches of feminism assume <u>all</u> women experience the same form of oppression ignoring differences among them. ➤ Most feminists ignore the progress made by women, particularly in western societies. ➤ Radical feminism advocates hatred rather than a functionally working solution to female oppression. ➤ Feminists disagree more then they agree which can slow down the movement.

Feminism on Research Methods	o Feminists **reject** traditional approached to research (e.g. both positivism and Interpretivism).
	
	o They argue mainstream sociology is '**male stream**'.
	
	o Instead they argue **feminist methodology** should seek to highlight the following **three** key areas:
	
	    1. **Women's experiences** – feminist theory should seek to bright to light the experiences of women.
	
	    2. **New purpose of social science** – feminist research should seek to improve the position of women in society.
	
	    3. **Locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the subject** – feminist researchers should seek to understand the point of view of the participants.
	
	o Feminist argue the above objective can be achieved by using the three **research methods** outlined below:
	
	    1. The use of **focus groups** as its less artificial than face-to-face interviews, provides group insight, and establishes power structures.
	
	    2. The use of **feminist ethnography**, which is when the researcher participates in the daily lives of participants over a long period of time and collects data simultaneously. E.g. through interviews, personal data collection etc. this allows a full documentation and understanding of women's experiences.
	
	    3. **Qualitative interviewing** to understand the experiences of women as opposed to quantitative ones gather data the researchers thinks is relevant.

Postmodernism on Society

Research Methods: rejects all existing research methods and advocates a new Postmodernist methodology.

What type of theory is it? 1. Conflict vs. consensus. 2. Structural or social action.	o Neither conflict nor consensus. It's also not a structural or subcultural theory as it **rejects all existing** categorisations or **metanarratives.** o Postmodernism also rejects all sociological theories and research methods and developed their own methodology.

Main assumption of the theory	o Postmodernism refers to the **shift** from **modernity** to **Postmodernity** from 1980s onwards.
	
	o Thus it suggests there are **two types** of **theories**:
	
	    1. **Modernist Theories** – developed during the enlightenment onwards. They claim to have discovered an objective truth about society. E.g. Marxism, and Functionalism.
	
	    2. **Postmodernist Theories** – developed from 1980s onwards, in which modernist theories are all rejected. Instead they argue each individual decided their own truth for themselves.

Lyotard's assumption	o Lyotard believes postmodernism refers to changes in 'language games':
	
	    • **Pre-Industrial societies** – contained 'narrative' language in which the narrator has legitimacy over people due to their position in society. E.g. Jesus.
	
	    • **Modern societies** – developed during the enlightenment onwards in which 'denotive' language began being used. This is when statements or metanarratives are judged according to scientific truth.
	
	    • **Postmodern societies** – argues the metanarratives of modern societies failed to solve the world problems (e.g. Marxism with class exploitation). Thus, they have been replaced by 'technical' language, which seeks to develop useful knowledge rather than a scientific truth. Technical language also involves diversity, pluralism and tolerance of all views.

Baudrillard's assumption	o Baudrillard views society moving through stages according to **signs** and **images**. He believes signs develop in **four stages**:
	
	    1. Signs are a reflection of **basic reality**.
	    2. Signs become a **distortion** of **reality**.
	    3. Signs **disguise absence** of reality. E.g. god.
	    4. Signs bear **no relation** to **reality** and become **simulacra** (not a copy of reality, but becomes a truth in its own right).
	
	o He also believes **politics** has become a **meaningless** exchange of **sign** and that politicians have no real power. Thus, the **media** has blurred the distinction between **real** and **fake**.

Postmodernism and contemporary society **(Synoptic link)**	o Postmodernists argue that in modern societies **identities** like gender, class and race are also **no longer relevant**. o Instead, people now '**pick and mix**' and **choose** their own identity. o Thus, postmodernism is characterised by **diversity** and **choice**, **open lifestyles**, **consumption** and **myth** of **metanarratives**. o E.g. Postmodernist believe people can now pick and choose their own **religion** as it is just another form of consumerism – Lyon - Jesus in Disneyland. o Likewise, Beck argue we now have negotiated **families** which means each couple defines their own relationship which in effect means each family is unique.
Strengths	➢ Highlights cultural change in society. ➢ Identity construction has become more fluid in modern society due to pick and mix approach. ➢ Challenges sociological metanarratives, which may not apply to all individuals.
Limitations	➢ Some argue Postmodernism just criticises for the sake of criticising. ➢ Ignores progress made in society as well as ignoring widespread social problems. ➢ Exaggerates the level of social change and 'death' of metanarratives. ➢ Postmodernism is a contradiction in terms as it's a metanarrative itself. ➢ Assumes all individuals have the choice to form their identity ignoring other influences. E.g. religion.

Postmodernism on research	o Postmodernists **reject all existing research methods** used by modernist theorists, particularly positivism. This is because they believe there are no metanarratives that could be objectively studied.
	
	 o They outline **three** key **limitations** of existing research methods:
	
	    1. **Relativity** - an objective world does not exist for it to be discovered. Knowledge is only true if individuals believe it to be true.
	
	    2. **Knowledge as control** – scientists or sociologists are not objective in their research process as they claim. This is because they accept the existing methodologies and work within a paradigm where knowledge is controlled.
	
	    3. **Narrative and discourse** - sociology seeks to understand and explain the social world with 'grand' theories not realising that this is impossible, as metanarratives no longer exist. Moreover, it also limits discussion and debate due to its rigid framework.
	
	 o **Postmodernist methodology** instead involves **two** key principles:
	
	    1. **Deconstruction** – refers to breaking down existing knowledge and metanarratives to understand who constructs knowledge, why and whether it serves anyone's interest.
	
	    2. **Transgression** – idea that we should transgress (or move beyond) existing categories and think in new way. E.g. instead of studying the criminal in crime why not study harm caused to others like torture, low wages, child labour etc.

Is Sociology a Science?

Intro:

What is science? **Why might Sociology seek to be scientific?**	o **Science** is a **set** of **principles** used to **understand** the **world. I**t includes, empirical testing, objectivity, representativeness, reliable and valid data etc. o Whether Sociology is a science or not has been heavily debated. The answer depends on a sociologist's **methodological perspective**. E.g. while Positivists agree that Sociology is a science, Interpretivist's reject it. o It is important for Sociology to be regarded as scientific to; 1) obtain **funding** for future research, 2) have **credibility** when publishing research, and 3) have an impact upon **social policy**.

Arguments FOR:

Positivism
 	
(Synoptic Link)
	o **Positivism** agrees that **Sociology** is a **science.**
	
	o They advocate that **society** can be studied in the same way **scientist** study the **natural world** with **little modification**.
	
	o **Comte** and **Durkheim** advocate **different ways** in which this can be **achieved**:
	
	Comte:
	o Comte believed it was possible to discover the **laws** that **control** and **shape** the **behaviour** of people in society.
	
	o He argued science isn't there to tell us WHY something happened but rather to EXPLAIN **how** things **relate to each other**, using **law**.
	
	o The task of Sociology is, therefore, to **discover general laws** of **social development** through:
	    • **Laws of co-existence** – looking at relationships between different parts of society.
	    • **Laws of succession** – laws that govern social change.
	
	Durkheim:
	o Durkheim sought to establish **Sociology** as a **science** and urged that it must adopt **scientific quantitative methods**.
	
	o He believed that society or **social facts** have an **objective reality** as it exists **prior** and **independent** to individuals. E.g. religion, which governs behaviour through its norms and values.
	
	o To study **social facts scientifically** Durkheim advocated **two** key principles:
	    1. "Disregard all preconceptions".
	    2. "Treat social facts as things"

Main features of Positivism in Sociological research	o Positivist's argue a **scientific approach** to Sociology involves the following **features**: • Belief that **human behaviour** can be **observed** through **social facts**, to establish **cause** and **effect relationships**. • The use of **quantitative methods** to collect data in order to **quantify** it, **replicate** with ease and **generalise** to a wider population. • Research should establish a **hypothesis** to test and look for causes of things by studying **official statistics**. • Purpose of sociology is to study **social institutions** and **structures** NOT individual states of mind (psychology)
Popper – the Scientific Method **(Synoptic Link)**	o Popper suggests **science** involve **five** steps; 1. **Hypothesis formation** – forming ideas, which are capable of being tested. 2. **Falsification** – testing hypothesis against evidence to try and prove it wrong. 3. **Prediction** – making a prediction regarding the cause and effects of the research. 4. **Theory formation** – once hypothesis has been tested and stood strong, a theory can be formed from the results, which becomes a 'scientific truth'. 5. **Scrutiny** – the theory is scrutinised by other scientists and will only be regarded as a scientific truth until it is falsified by another theory. o According to Popper all academic subjects that wish to be called a science should aim **not** to **prove** their **hypotheses** true, **but** to **falsify** it, o Thus, Sociology must come up with **testable hypothesis** that it can **falsify** if it is to become a science.
Limitations of studying society scientifically	o There are many problems in trying to study Sociology scientifically: • **Empirical Observation** - Not all social phenomenon is observable by the naked eye. Thus, how can we scientifically study such issues? • **Ethical Issues** - Laboratory experiments can arises serious ethical concerns regarding informed consent, deception, harm to participants etc. • **The problem of hypothesis formulation** - It is difficult to predict human action. Thus, in this sense Sociology cannot be studied in the same way as natural sciences. • **The Hawthorne effect** - The presence of a scientist can alter the behaviour of participants. Otherwise known as social desirability bias. • **Validity** - Difficult to ensure that research produces results in regards to what it set out to measure. While this is easy to establish in the natural sciences, it is difficult when studying human participants in Sociology. • **Artificiality** - Laboratory experiments do not reflect reality and thus scientific experiments are artificial.

Arguments AGAINST:

Interpretivism **(Synoptic Link)**	o Interpretivism **rejects positivism** and the idea that **society** can be studied in the same way as the **natural sciences**. Thus, they **don't believe Sociology** could be **regarded** as a science! o They believe people don't just react to external stimuli, as Positivists claim, but give **meaning** to **situations**. o For instance, Weber believed for Sociology to explain human societies, it must study **verstehen**, which refers to **process of understanding**, by allowing people to 'speak for themselves'. o Thus, Interpretivist's argue Sociology should study the **perspectives** of **people** to understand **how** and **why** things happen. They, therefore, advocate **qualitative subjective methodology** rather than objective research.
Popper – the social construction of scientific knowledge	o Popper's theory of **falsification** can be used for **both** sides of the **debate**. o This is because his theory of **falsification** suggests no hypothesis can ever be **proven true**, as there is always the **possibility** of a **future exception**, which can disprove it. o Thus, Popper argues the aim of research should **not** be to **prove** their **hypothesis true**, but to **falsify** it. The more a hypothesis stands to such attempts, the more likely it is to be `**scientific truth'**. o Nevertheless, Sociological research will find it difficult to falsify data as it involves studying **human beings** who differ among themselves **within** and **between** different **societies**.

Kuhn – paradigms and scientific revolutions
 	
(Synoptic Link)
	o **Kuhn** challenges Popper's idea of falsification by arguing scientists work within a **paradigm** (a framework based on particular set of values), which **colours** their views of their **research**.
	
	o Thus, when scientists **test** their **hypotheses** they try to fit their findings into an **existing paradigm**, rather than attempt to falsify, thereby dismissing evidence, which contradicts them as experimental errors or outliers. Thus, he suggests what passes as **science** is **not** always a '**fact'** as it is affected by **scientific values**. Sociology, therefore, cannot be a science.
	
	o According to Kuhn, there are **three key paradigms** within **science**:
	
	   1. **Pre-science**: period of discovery where there was no central paradigm.
	
	   2. **Normal science**: where scientists used an established paradigm, like the theory of evolution, to support theories.
	
	   3. **Revolutionary science**: where the paradigms are challenged.
	
	o According to Kuhn Sociology behaves like a pre-science as there are no dominant perspectives but lots of competing theories and perspectives.

Feminist Critique	o Feminists raise **three concerns** regarding Sociology being a 'science': 1. **Scientific assumptions** about society are based on **'male stream' knowledge**. Women **understand** and **experience** the world **differently**. 2. Majority of Sociological research is based on the **lives of men**, **ignoring women's experiences**. 3. Feminists reject the idea that for research to be scientific it must be **neutral**. Instead they argue feminist opinions are necessary for research to **transform gender relationships** and bring about an **equal society** for all.
Post modern Critique	o Postmodernism challenge the idea of **science**, arguing it is a **metanarrative** of the **modern world**. They argue that **scientists** have **replaced priests** as the **source of truth**. o Moreover, Postmodernists claim that in a **postmodern world** there is no such thing as science, objectivity and truth that is waiting to be discovered. o Instead each **individual picks** and **chooses** their own truth.

Subjectivity, Objectivity and Value freedom

'Sociology can be value-free and should be value free'
To what extent do sociological arguments and evidence support this claim? (33 marks)

Intro:

Objectivity means approaching research with an open mind to avoid bias and being prepared to have ones research scrutinised by other social scientists. (Note: objectivity is dependent on value pluralism).

Subjectivity means approaching research with the opinions, feelings and beliefs of the researcher.

Value Freedom is the idea that a researcher beliefs and prejudices should not be involved within the research process to prevent it influencing the outcome of the research.

Main body:

1. Why is it important for sociological research to be value free?

1. Sociology's desire to be regarded as a **'science'.**

2. If Sociological research is not value free it is less likely to be taken serious and have an **impact on social policy**.

3. Any research claiming to be value free is in itself value laden. Thus, scientists at best can only make empirical statements about the world.

2. Is a value free Sociology possible?

Positivism:

- **Durkheim** regarded Sociology as a **science** and thus argued it is **possible** for Sociology to be **value free.**

- He believed **Sociology** could be studied in the **same way scientists** study the **natural world**. This involved being **objective** and **value free** for the researcher to reach **factual conclusions** without his/her subjective views influencing the process.

- According to Durkheim, **two principles** had to be adopted for a sociologists to be value free:

    1. "Disregard all preconception".

    2. "Treat social facts as things".

Evaluation:

- Sociologists themselves live within society and so it's impossible for them to be completely value free.

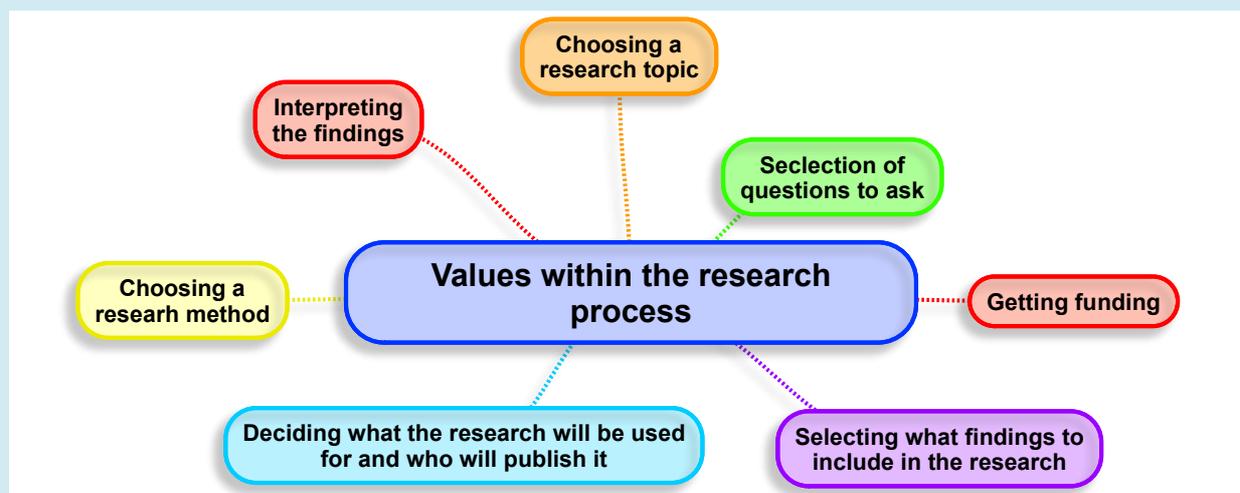- Social facts are not objective categories but rather subjectively defined.

Interpretivism	Evaluation:
o **Weber** sought to establish Sociology as a **social science independent** from the natural sciences concerned with understanding human social action. Thus, he supported value freedom **to an extent.**	- Assumes people consciously attach meaning to their action, ignoring the impact of tradition or law and order.
o He argued that a Sociologists **choice of topic** will **inevitability** be influenced by their **values**. HOWEVER, he/she must **not** allow their values to influence the **research process** of **data collection** and **analysis.**	- Ideal types are based on the values of researchers.
o Instead, he advocated **two steps** to ensure value freedom:	+ Symbolic Interactionism also supports and advocates the use of Interpretivist methodology.
1. Sociologists should use **'ideal types'** to make comparisons about the social world in a value free fashion. To achieve this one must construct an ideal picture of a social action if it was perfectly conformed to and draw connections between this image and their findings to find causal links, change, dysfunctions etc.	
2. He also believed a Sociologists must **outline** their **values** within the research to enable effective scrutiny by other.	

3. The myth of value freedom

o It is impossible to obtain value freedom in both natural and social sciences since researchers **live within society** and carry out research within an **existing paradigm**. Thus, **Sociological facts** are **subjective** and therefore not meaningful.

o Sociological research is ultimately based on the **researchers assumptions** about the nature of people in society. E.g. are they a positivist or interpretivist? A Marxist or a Functionalist? Thus, a sociologist's perspective would inevitably influence their data collection and analysis. E.g. when studying suicide positivists study statistics, while interpretivist examine the process of labelling an act as suicide.

o The **personal prejudices** and **political views** of the researcher may influence the research process. E.g. feminists would seek to study women that are oppressed to establish patriarchy.

4. Dealing with values in social research

o While Sociology may not be 100% value free, it still needs to aim to be objective in collecting reliable data to be taken seriously as a discipline and impact policy. The following **three methods** can be taken to **reduce** the impact on values upon research:

1. **Values and personal opinions should not enter the research process** – evidence should be collected and analysed objectively based on evidence not the researchers subjective view.

2. **Values and personal opinions SHOULD be considered when examining ethic** – e.g. if a Sociologist is undercover studying a gang should they engage in crime or report those about to murder another? They must rely on their own moral judgement and ethical principle.

3. **Values cannot be avoided when choosing a topic** – thus the Sociologist should outline their **positionality** for others to scrutinise their work for objectivity.

5. Is value freedom desirable?

o Some Sociologists argue **value freedom** and **objectivity** are themselves **value laden concepts**:

- **Gomm-** value free Sociology is impossible and not sociological since sociologists react to political, economic and social events in their research. Thus, it is political by nature.

- **Gouldner –** value freedom is only a refusal to criticise society. Not taking sides in research supports the powerful in society. Instead we should use research to change society so it's more equal to all groups**.**

- **Becker –** "its impossible to study anything without using your personal opinions and political beliefs to understand and judge it". Sociology cannot avoid values as society and group interactions are made up of values themselves. Thus, researchers must outline their positionality before data collection and analysis.

- **Marxism** - rejects value freedom arguing "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch ruling ideas". They argue such concepts are formed by the bourgeoisie to meet their needs. Instead, we need to reject all existing approaches to research and examine society using our values of Marx's historical materialism to understand power structures.

- **Feminism** – rejects value pluralism as it suggests Sociology is male stream. Instead they advocate the use of focus groups, qualitative interviews and feminist ethnography where values are present so that researchers can have a full understanding of power relationships in society and change it for a more gender equal society.

- **Postmodernism** – rejects value pluralism and all existing metanarratives. Instead they argue research should be focused on the deconstruction of knowledge and transgression.

Assess the view that positivist methods are inappropriate for investigating society (33 marks)

- o   Assess the view that positivist methods are inappropriate for investigating society. (33 marks)

- o   Assess the view that interpretivist methods are the most appropriate methods for researching society. (33 marks)

The relationship between Sociology and Social Policy

Introduction:

Define	<u>**Sociology**</u> is the study of human social behaviour; its origins, development, organisation and institutions. E.g. areas of society such as family, education and religion are studied.
	<u>**Social Policy**</u> refers to plans or actions adopted by national and local governments to solve social problems or achieve other goal through policy implementation. E.g. Gay Marriage Act 2013
What is the relationship between Sociology and social Policy?	Sociology and social policy can have a number of relationships: While Sociology seeks to understand and explain social problems and issues in society through research, social policy seeks to change and transform society by implementing laws and policies that it perceives to be in the best interest of its people. Moreover, while some Sociologists, like Max Weber, believe the subject should be value free and only concerned with understanding the social world, most, like feminists, argue that sociology must try to influence social policy. However, three key relationships can be identified between the two: 1. Social policy may influence Sociology. 2. Sociology may influence Social Policy. 3. Policy makers might use sociology selectively to justify their policy.

Main body:

How is Social Policy formulated?

Social policy can be influenced by many factors not simply sociology. For instance, the following can lead to the formulation of social policy;

o   Desire of a policy party to remain in power or get elected.
o   Religious groups. E.g. abortion laws.
o   Public perception or the existence of pressure groups.
o   Media attention on certain issues. E.g. ASBOs.

1. <u>**The influence of Social Policy on Sociology**</u> **(Include synoptic links)** Sociological research can be influenced by social policy introduced by a government. E.g. o Introduction of marketization and selection policies into **education** by Margret Thatcher (1988 Education Act) led to research into the effects this has upon social class, gender and ethnicity. E.g. Gewirtz found that such policies led to three types of parental choosers; privileged choosers, disconnected local choosers and semi-skilled choosers. o Changes of the welfare state have been researched in many areas. E.g. Charles Murray studies the impact welfarism had on **families** and found that it led to a dependency culture, which in affect caused a significant rise in lone parent families.	**Evaluation** - Ignores the use of sociology by policy makers. E.g. Blair borrowed the name Third Way from Gidden's who developed the term and was one of his main advisors. - Some sociologists, like max weber who advocate value freedom would reject this link as it undermined the purpose of sociological research.

Thus, social policy can contribute to the creation of new sociological theories. The most prominent has been the rise of New Right policies, which in turn led to New Right perspectives in sociology.	

2. <u>The influence of Sociology on Social Policy</u> (Include synoptic links)
 	
Sociology can also affect social policy in a number of ways:
 	
   o The Left Realist policies on crime have had a great influence on the policies of Blair's New Labour government in which he advocated to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime". Thus, this led to social justice polices in welfare, youth centres and education to reduce subcultures, marginalisation and relative deprivation, which cause criminal behaviour.
 	
   o Similarly feminist campaigns have led to changes in education to prevent bias against girls (e.g. GIST and WISE policies), as well as policies regarding the inclusion of women within religion (women can become bishops from 2014).
 	
Sociology, thus contributes to social policy in many ways as it helps to provide an awareness of social class, gender and ethnic differences, identifies social problems and provides a theoretical framework, as well as assessing and identifying the consequences of policy.
	Evaluation
	
	- Ignores sociologists who reject social policy. E.g. Marxists believe revolution, not policy change, can make a real difference.
	
	- Social policy can also have an impact on sociology.

o **<u>The selective use of Sociology by Social Policy</u> (Include synoptic links)**
 	
Many Sociologists do not believe that the government regularly consults all Sociologists, but rather select the work of a few Sociologists that may support their existing or proposed policy. E.g.
 	
   o E.g. Blair borrowed the Third Way from Gidden's who developed the term and was one of his main advisors.
 	
   o David Cameron has used Right Realists views on crime to support his 'hard' policies. E.g. he advocated "the criminal is to blame" which implies rational calculation.
	Evaluation
	
	- Ignores the impact of sociology has on social policy without selective use.

Synoptic link to Methods:

Functionalists would accept social policy but only ones that are conservative and maintain the existing status quo in order to maintain collective conscience and social solidarity.

Marxists would reject social policy, as it's created by the bourgeoisie to serve their own interest, and prevent revolutionary change.

Feminists are split; liberal and socialist ones would advocate change through social policy. Marxist and Radical ones would argue for change through revolution.

Max Weber would argue sociology should only seek to understand issues without considering social policy, thereby advocating value freedom.

Postmodernists would reject national social policy and advocate small groups of people should decide how their area is run themselves through direct democracy.