

Studying Society

Social Processes

(These are the processes by which we learn the norms and values of our society and include socialisation and social control.)

Socialisation:

This is how we learn our norms and values in society. For example, a norm (something we consider to be normal) is to wear clothes, go to school and queue for the bus whereas our values (things we consider important) are to listen to our parents, obey the law and value education.

Primary Socialisation: This is the socialisation which happens to us as young children and the agency of primary socialisation is our parents. They teach us norms such as 'girls play with dolls' or table manners. In primary socialisation we learn values such as 'obey the rules'

Secondary Socialisation: This is the socialisation which happens through our entire lives and there are many agencies of secondary socialisation including school, work, religion, peers and the media. They all teach us norms and values (see below)

	Peers	School	Work	Media	Religion
Norm	It could be normal to smoke, do drugs or swear when with peers	Work quietly, ask permission for things, call people above you 'Sir'	Arrive on time, dress smartly, be polite	Women should be on a diet, men should earn money	Christians: Buy presents at Christmas Jews: Men wear a Kippah
Value	Being part of a group is important	Respect for authority and education	Working as a team, value money	Materialistic values- wanting money	Love God

Socialisation and Gender

Our gender is how masculine or feminine we feel we are- it is not the same as sex! We are socialised into our gender through primary and secondary socialisation. E.g. A parent buys girls dolls and boys cars, school uniforms have skirts for girls and the PE lessons for boys include more aggressive sports.

Socialisation and Ethnicity

An ethnic group is a group which shares a culture (this is the whole way of life for a society such as norms, values, language, religion and heritage.) Our ethnicity is the ethnic group we feel we belong to- it is not the same as race! We are socialised into our ethnicity through primary and secondary socialisation. E.g. Schools teach British values through an ethnocentric curriculum (a curriculum which is centred on one culture- British history, no foreign languages)

Social Control:

This is how we are encouraged to follow the norms and values of our society through sanctions (rewards or punishments.)

Formal Social Control: This is where we are encouraged to follow the law and the sanctions are formal punishments such as prison or fines. The agencies of formal social control are the judiciary (the people who enforce the law such as police and judges) and the legislature (the government who makes the law.)

Informal Social Control: This is where we are encouraged to follow the norms and values of our society and the sanctions are informal such as detentions (negative) or being promoted (positive.) Agencies of informal social control include schools, parents, peers, work, religion and the media.

Social Change:

This is the way in which the norms and values have changed over time. For example, it used to be a norm for women not to work and for there to be a nuclear family, now more families are symmetrical and many women work. An important value used to be to disapprove of homosexuality, now we value tolerance and gay couples can get married.

The way we work has changed as well, there has been an embourgeoisement of jobs such as plumbing, this means that the job used to be working class but now it pays enough money for plumbers to live a middle class lifestyle. There has been a proletarianisation of jobs such as administration clerks, this means that the job used to be middle class but now doesn't pay enough money for clerks to live a middle class lifestyle.

Social Structures

These are structures which tie us together as a social group- for example families, education and stratification systems such as social class. Social structures teach us our role (our place) in society.

Social Stratification

This is a hierarchy in society where one layer is above another and has more power, status or money than the layers below. In our society we have a social class system with royalty and the upper class at the top and the working class and underclass (people on benefits) at the bottom.

We measure social class using occupational scales- these are scales which rank jobs in order of income, skills and power with the jobs at the top being the most important/well paid and those at the bottom being the least important/well paid.

Problems with using occupational scales to define class:

1. There is no room for those who have never worked such as the royal family or the underclass
2. Some jobs are low down but are well paid e.g. plumber
3. Two people could do the same job but be paid very different salaries such as salesmen
4. Doesn't take into account wealth

Roles in Society

Our place in society can be one of high or low status. Some people are born into a high status role (this is ascribed status) whereas others have to earn their place in society (this is achieved status.) We sometimes have role conflict where we fulfil two roles that want us to do opposite actions e.g. you may have the role of a student and of a friend, a good student would not allow someone to copy their work but a good friend would do- how do you figure out which one you should do?

Social Issues

These are issues which are controversial and which affect everyone in society such as crime, poverty and inequality.

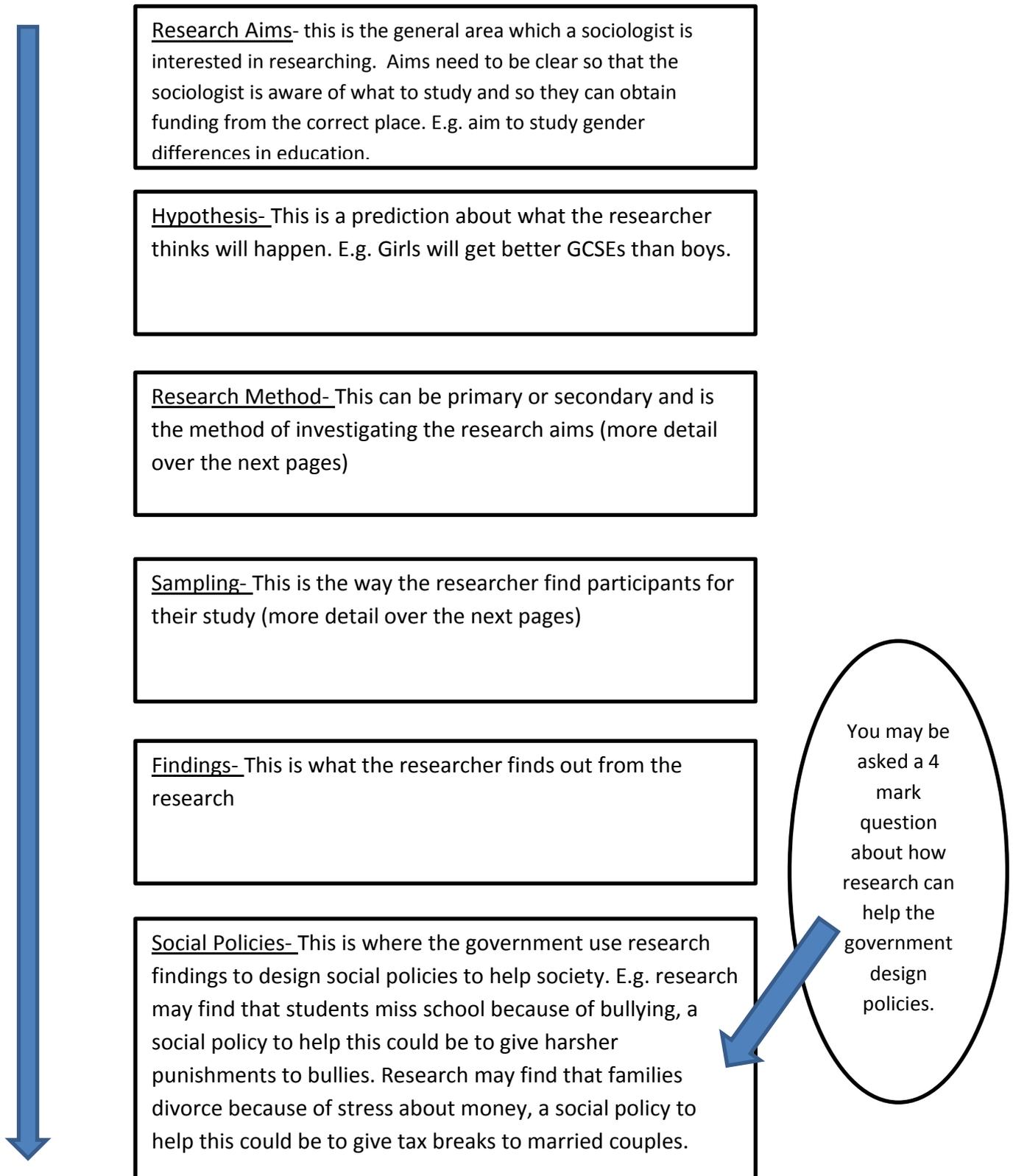
There are many issues with power in society- some say that the rich have more power than they should over the poor and that they will only want to keep the poor, poor (Marxists.) Others say that power is distributed unfairly to men and that they will use it to control women (Feminists.) These two theories are called conflict theories as they assume society is unfair and we are in conflict with each other.

A consensus theory is functionalism as it assumes that power is distributed equally to those who work hard to get it and deserve it. This theory assumes that we work together as a society and everyone performs an important role.

Research In Sociology

There is no 12 mark essay in studying society- instead you will be given a research task.

The Research Process- this is the path that research takes in sociology (shown below in a flow diagram)



Sampling

What is sampling?

This is where we take a group from the population (the people our study is about e.g. students, Year 7) and do a piece of research using them. We do this when we can't use the whole population because that could be really expensive and time consuming.

How do I get a sample?

You get a sampling frame (a list of all the people in the population who are available for research e.g. the electoral roll or a class register) and choose people using the techniques in the table below.

Does it matter which sampling technique I use?

Yes! You want to get a representative sample (a group of people whose thoughts and opinions truly reflect those of the population) if you end up with a biased sample e.g. all boys or all one subculture, then your research isn't valid (it isn't truly what you tried to find out.)

What is the best sampling technique?

That depends on your study. A stratified sample is the most representative but you may not have much time or money, in this case a volunteer sample may be better because they will come to you (they will also want to be part of the study so they are less likely to drop out!) If you don't have a sampling frame (e.g. if you wanted to study students who do drugs at school- there is no list for this) then a snowball sample may be best as you can get the 'hard to reach' participants to recruit each other, on the other hand you may only get a small sample as they may worry they are going to get in trouble.

Sampling Strategy	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Random Sample	Everyone in the population has an equal chance of being chosen e.g. names out of a hat	The researcher can't just pick the people they like- less biased	You could accidentally end up with a biased sample.
Stratified Sample	You work out the proportions which are important and are in your population and make sure that these are in your sample. E.g. if there are 60% males in your population, you make sure there are 60% males in your sample.	The most representative sample because your sample truly reflects the proportions of the population	Time consuming and expensive to do
Volunteer Sample	You put an advert out for volunteers and people turn up for the study	Cheap, quick and easy. People in the study want to be there so may not drop out.	Likely to be biased- you may only get men or only get students. There is a certain personality type who volunteers for a study.
Quota Sample	You decide on characteristics which are important (e.g. female, wearing trainers, has an iPhone) and keep recruiting people until you have enough	Representative as you know that everyone in the study is relevant to the population	Time consuming and people could drop out while they wait for you to recruit enough people.
Systematic Sample	You look at the sampling frame and use a system such as every 5 th /10 th /15 th person to pick your sample	Quick, cheap and easy. The researcher can't bias the sample by just picking people they like.	Could accidentally pick a biased sample. Only works if you have a sampling frame to work from.
Snowball Sample	You find one person who fits your criteria and ask them if they know anyone else who also fits the criteria. E.g. ask a teenage mum if they know any other teenage mums.	Good for people who don't appear on a sampling frame (e.g. people who have had an informal police caution) or people who are unlikely to volunteer for a study (e.g. rule breakers at school)	Could end up with a very small sample

Our research is only valid if our sample is representative of the population.

Research Methods

Are there different types of research methods?

Yes. There are primary research methods: These are methods which the sociologist collects the data themselves (e.g. through experiments, observations, social surveys, case studies and focus groups.) There are also secondary research methods: These are methods where the sociologist uses data which they have not collected themselves (e.g. official statistics or by asking participants to submit a diary, photo or other personal document.)

Does it matter which research methods I use?

Yes. The method may not be appropriate for the researcher's aims, e.g. if a researcher is aiming to study people who take drugs in school then it may not be a good idea to do an observation as students who take drugs at school are not likely to do it when people are watching.

Primary Research Methods

Observation: When a researcher watches for a behaviour this can be a covert observation (where the participant doesn't know they're there) or overt (where the participant is aware they are being watched.) It can also be participant observation (where the researcher takes part in the activity the participant is doing) or non-participant observation (where the researcher just watches.)

Type of Observation	Strength	Weaknesses
Covert	If the participant doesn't know they are being watched they won't change their behaviour and it makes the study more valid.	It is unethical to deceive participants as they have not given informed consent for this to happen (see ethics for further details)
Overt	This is more ethical and allows us to get informed consent (see ethics for further details)	The participant may not act in a way they normally would if someone is watching
Participant	The researcher will more fully understand the reasons why a participant behaves the way they do if they take part in the activity. It may help the researcher gain the trust of the group	Some researchers who go undercover can 'go native' this means that they begin to identify more with the observed group than their usual social group
Non-Participant	The researcher is protected from dangerous activities and cannot go native. Also, the researcher doesn't lose focus from watching the behaviour.	The group may not trust that the researcher will not get them in trouble unless they take part in an activity with them- plus it is harder to be covert if you do not take part in the activity.

Examples of observations:

A police undercover in a gang- this is a covert, participant observation.

OFSTED in lessons- this is an overt, non-participant observation

Social surveys: This is when you ask participants for their opinions (this can be through an interview or a questionnaire. They involve open and closed questions.

Type of Question	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Open	When a question allows participants to give their opinion e.g. 'what do you think of...'	Allow participants to clarify their answers and give more detailed information.	Time consuming to analyse. Answers may not be relevant and people may not want to answer if it takes too long so drop out.
Closed	When a question has a restricted range of responses e.g. age, gender.	Quick to analyse. Ensures that the response is relevant to the question.	Participants can't explain their answers or add extra details e.g. why they did something.

Social Surveys: Interviews

These can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. It depends on the study as to which one the researcher would use.

Type of Interview	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Structured	An interview where the interviewer has a set list of questions and doesn't say anything else.	Quick, easy to train someone to be an interviewer	The participant may not understand the question and cannot give extra detail
Semi-Structured	The interviewer has some formal questions but there is chance for the participant to talk if they wish.	There is a good mixture of closed and open questions	You need to train someone to be an interviewer, more expensive
Unstructured	There are general points to discuss but the participant can talk as much as they like and change topic if they want.	The participant may feel more comfortable if they can ask questions or go off topic	Takes a long time to do and to analyse the results.

Problems with interviews in general:

- Interviewer effects: When a participant changes their responses due to the characteristics of the interviewer e.g. they won't admit to being racist if the interviewer is an ethnic minority.

- Interviewer bias: When the interviewer biases the results because they are racist, sexist or just don't like the answers they hear.
- Demand characteristics: when a participant changes their answers e.g. they lie

Social Surveys: Questionnaires

In questionnaires participants are known as respondents.

Type of Questionnaire	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Face-to-face questionnaire	When a questionnaire is filled out in front of the researcher	Lower drop-out rate, quick and cheap to produce. People may not lie if it is anonymous.	You may not get a large sample as you have to do it face to face. People may rush through the questions or lie.
Postal questionnaire	When a questionnaire is posted out to a respondent and they post it back	People can fill it in, in their own time. You can send them out to a large sample. People may not lie if it is anonymous.	People may not bother to send it back or someone else may fill the questionnaire in instead.

Focus Groups: When a small group are asked for their opinions on a topic- the group can discuss ideas and share stories.

Strengths	Weaknesses
The participants can talk to each other- making them more relaxed. They can prompt each other to help out with answering questions.	Participants may feel self-conscious and change their answers. One participant may speak more than the others.

Case Studies: When one person or a small group are intensively studies through lots of methods to get lots of data.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Useful for special cases such as abused children. Generate lots of data for analysis.	Time consuming. Can be unethical if the participant gets stressed about how much focus is on them. Small sample.

Opinion Polls: A way of surveying public opinion- especially used to find out about the government (think of a market researcher asking for opinions.)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Useful for surveying lots of people Quick, easy, cheap	Sample may be biased Questions may be misunderstood

Secondary Research Methods

Official Statistics: These are statistics gathered by the government. E.g. Official crime statistics, league tables and OFSTED results.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Already gathered so quick, easy and cheap to use If they are gathered by the government then someone will have been well trained to collect it and won't make mistakes. Useful starting point for research	We don't know the reasons why the statistics show what they do. They are not always valid e.g. league tables could tell us that a school is no good, however, this could be due to a high number of special needs students not poor teaching.

Diaries: A sociologist may ask participants to keep a diary of their thoughts, feelings or actions.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Participants may be more honest because the diary is anonymous. Can be filled in, in their own time and can contain lots of rich data.	Takes a long time to analyse. They may lie, not fill it in or write about irrelevant things.

Another sociologist's research: This is when a sociologist uses the results of someone else's research.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Easy, quick and cheap to use. Sociologists are well trained to do research so it is probably reliable.	Some results could be irrelevant. The research could be out of date.

Other Types of Research

Longitudinal Research: These are studies which are done over a long piece of time.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Lots of data Get to see changes over time	People could drop out Time consuming and expensive

Pilot Study: A small study done before the main study

Strengths	Weaknesses
A chance to pick up an errors with the research method Can test out research aims to see if it's worth investigating further	More expensive as it is an extra study with extra analysis

Triangulation: When researchers use many different methods to investigate their aims.

Ethical Issues

What are ethical issues?

These are issues of whether a piece of researcher is morally right to do. The BPS has created a list of ethical issues which they are concerned with (see the table below.)

Why should I care about ethical issues?

Because researchers have a responsibility to their participants and also so that you don't get sued.

Ethical Issue	Description	Why is it an issue?	How to deal with it?
Informed Consent	Participants can only give informed consent if they are aware of everything that will happen to them in a study and are happy with it.	Some people cannot give consent (e.g. children or the mentally ill.) These people need a <u>gatekeeper</u> to give permission for them. If you do not get consent then you cannot do the study- but if people know what will happen they may lie.	Deceive people first and then ask people later if its ok to use their information. Be completely truthful when you ask for consent. Tell people you are going to lie to them but that you won't tell them what about.
Anonymity	When a participant's identity is kept secret	Participants may not want to be involved in a study if people will know who they are. Some studies are about sensitive information and people's identity should be protected.	Give participants a fake name or a number
Confidentiality	When the study is only discussed with people who are involved in the study	Participant's data should be kept private and only told to those who need to know- especially if it is sensitive research.	Keep details private and ensure no-one outside of the study knows who gave which answer.
Protection from Harm	The study shouldn't make participants	Some studies ask questions which cause participants to be upset	Offer counselling after the study if participants

	stressed, embarrassed or upset in any way.	or argue with others around them. Some studies may put participants on the spot which could embarrass them.	have been negatively affected. Let participants answer in private and anonymously.
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Types of Data

Type of Data	Research Method it Comes From	Strengths	Weaknesses
Primary: Data the sociologist collects themselves	Observation, social surveys, opinion polls, focus groups, case studies	More relevant to the aims of research and up to date.	More expensive, time consuming.
Secondary: Data that someone else collects or has already been collected	Diaries, official statistics, the results of other people's research	Cheap, quick and useful to look at before beginning the main study	May not be relevant to the aims or may be dated.
Quantitative: numerical data	Social surveys with closed questions, observations, content analysis, official statistics	Objective (can't be misread) and easy to turn into graphs and charts for analysis	Don't get the reasons behind the data.
Qualitative: non-numerical data	Social surveys with open questions, case studies, diaries, photographs	Lots of rich data with the reasons for the behaviour	Time consuming to analyse and may be subjective

Analysing Data

Content analysis: This is used when a sociologist wants to turn qualitative data into quantitative data (e.g. when analysing diaries, answers to open questions, photographs.) The researcher will create categories of things they are looking for (e.g. swearing, anti-school terminology) and create a tally chart whenever they see it. They can turn this tally chart into graphs for analysis.

Trusting Data

We can only trust data if it is reliable and valid. Data is reliable if we get the same results when we do the research again, data is valid as long as we can trust that the results can be generalised to the population and as long as there were no demand characteristics.

Approaches

Different types of researchers approach research in different ways, for the exam you must know about sociologists, psychologists, biologists and journalists.

	Sociology	Psychology	Biology	Journalist
What are they interested in?	Researching things fairly and using a representative sample. Not interested in the biological cause of things just socialisation.	Researching things fairly and using a representative sample. Interested in individual cases and investigate the biological causes as well as social causes of things. Interested in mental illness.	Only interested in biological causes of things and don't believe in socialisation. Create fair, scientific tests.	Only interested in extreme cases as these are more likely to sell newspapers.
What methods do they use?	All methods- observation, surveys, focus groups	All methods including experiments.	Biological tests such as blood tests.	Mostly interviews.
How ethical are they?	Very- they cannot lie or exaggerate their stories.	Very- they cannot lie or exaggerate stories.	Very- biological tests cannot be faked.	Not very- they may lie or exaggerate to make a story more interesting.
What makes us who we are?	Socialisation	Socialisation and biology combined.	Biology	Don't care! Whatever is interesting will be in the story.

Think about how these people would investigate:

- Crime
- Families
- Poor behaviour in schools

They also define key terms differently:

A family is...

Sociology	Psychology	Biology	Journalist
The people who socialise you	The people who socialise you and the people you are genetically related to	The people you are genetically related to	Don't care- just want to study interested ones!

Gender is...

Sociology	Psychology	Biology	Journalist
How we are raised to be masculine or feminine	The way we feel about our physical sex- including gender identity disorder.	Our physical sex characteristics	Don't care- just want to write about interesting cases!