

Theory and Methods knowledge organiser

Key terms

The definition of Sociology = The systematic study of society and its institutions

Social Sciences = are a group of subjects which focus on society and how it functions as well as how the individuals within that society function and behave. They include Sociology, Psychology and Politics.

Social Institutions = structures in society which influence how society is structured and managed, they include: the family, media, education and government.

Values = the goals that society tells us we should be aiming for in order to be considered a success.

Norms = the unwritten rule of behaviour within a society. The rules which the difference between right and wrong as well as rude and polite.

Consensus theory = one which believes that the institutions of society are working together to maintain social cohesion and stability

Structural theory = one which looks at how the social institutions influence the running of society and individuals behaviour.

Sociological Perspectives

	Outline	Key Thinkers
Functionalism	Structural consensus approach to society. Believe that the institutions of society work together in order to maintain social cohesion and social order. They believe that society is similar to the human body – Organic Analogy.	Durkheim Parsons Merton
Marxism	A structural conflict approach that believes that society is in conflict between the classes. They believe that the Bourgeoisie oppress the Proletariat through various social institutions without their full knowledge.	Marx Engels Althusser Gramsci
Feminism	A set of structural conflict approaches which see society as a conflict between men and women. They look at ways that women are oppressed/disadvantaged by various social institutions and the means by which equality can be achieved.	Oakley Firestone
Interactionism	A micro set of approaches which look at how the individual influences their society through their interactions with others and the social institutions. Interactionism includes Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, Social Action theory and Symbolic interactionism	Goffman Cooley Weber
Postmodernism	A broad approach which sees society in a more diverse and less structured way. They believe that people have much more choice which means that they shape their reality and culture to their own needs.	Lyotard Baudrillard Foucault Giddens

Social facts are things such as institutions, norms and values which exist external to the individual and constrain the individual.

Sociologists

Durkheim
Comte

Positivism

Sociological Perspectives

Structural Approaches such as Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism

Approach to sociological research

Sociology should approach research in the same way as the natural sciences. It should be objective and logical.

Preferred data type and methods

Quantitative Data

Methods such as:

- Closed Questions
- Structured Interviews
- Experiments

Induction involves accumulating data about the world through careful observation and measurement

Causality means the relationships between cause and effect. How one stimuli can lead to a certain action.

Objective Quantitative Research

Positivists prefer quantitative data and as far as possible should follow the experimental method of the natural sciences. This will allow them to uncover and measure patterns of behaviour which will lead them to create social facts which govern society. Also by using quantitative data the positivists believe that they are able to uncover cause and effect that determine human behaviour.

Positivists believe that research should be detached from subjective feelings and interpretations it is claimed that a scientist's beliefs and values have no impact on their findings and sociologists should be the same.

Interpretivism

Verstehen means empathic understanding of human behaviour. Walking in someone else's shoes.

Social Construction means phenomena that is created by society and not naturally occurring. It will vary from culture to culture.

Approach to sociological research

To understand the world you need to be empathetic in order to understand the meanings attached to action.

Preferred data type and methods

Qualitative data

Methods such as:

- Unstructured Interviews
- Observations
- Open Questionnaires

Sociological Perspectives

Social Action theories such as Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenology, ethnomethodology.

Sociologists

Weber
Garfinkle
Bulmer
Goffman
Cooley
Mead
Husserl

Natural Science V Sociology

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Causation | • Meanings and interpretations |
| • Observable phenomena | • Unobservable |
| • External Stimuli | • Conscious beings / Free Will |

Types of Interpretivism

1 Interactionism:

There can be causal explanation in sociology but there is no need for a hypothesis before starting research. By stating an hypothesis at the start of the study Glaser and Strauss argue that researchers run the risk of imposing their own views on the data rather than those of the actors being researched. Instead there should be a grounded theory which means allowing ideas to emerge as the data is collected which can later be used to produce a testable hypothesis.

2

Phenomenology & Ethnomethodology

Rejects the idea that there can be cause explanations for human behaviour and that society is not out there determining our actions. Instead they argue that society is a shared set of meanings and knowledge. They are interested in finding out what these shared meanings are and where they originate from.

Sociology & Science

YES -

Positivist Approach

⇒ Durkheim
"Suicide"

NO

Interpretivist approach

⇒ Karl Popper

Value Freedom

Value freedom refers to the ability of researchers to keep their own personal biases and opinions out of the research which they are conducting.

Positivists believe that all sociology should be value free, while post-modernists believe that value freedom is impossible and undesirable.

Social Policy

Social policy is a very broad term to refer to any actual or proposed government action or programme that impacts on society. While that could arguably be all government policy, it usually refers to policies designed to improve human welfare, such as initiatives relating to social security, health, education and crime and justice.