

Sociology - Year 12 to 13 Summer Independent Learning 2023

Introduction

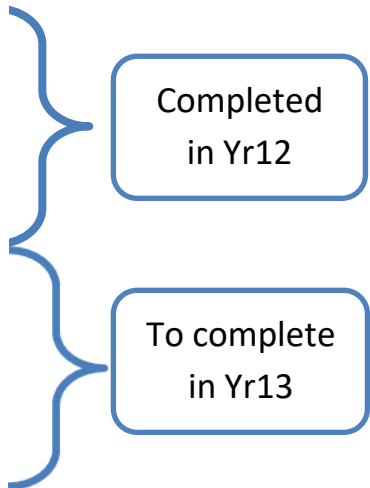
One of the topics you study in A Level Sociology is “Theory and Methods”. This topic appears on both Papers 1 and 3 of your AQA Sociology exams in June 2024. In April/May, you learned about the “Methods” that sociologists use to do their research. In Sept/Oct we will be learning the “Theory” part. This builds on the knowledge you have already gained from learning about the theories in Family/Education, and also the Methods topic.

The specification detail – Theory and Methods:

4.1.3 Theory and Methods

Students must examine the following areas:

- quantitative and qualitative methods of research; research design
- sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, participant and non-participant observation, experiments, documents and official statistics
- the distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data
- the relationship between positivism, interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of ‘social facts’
- the theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research
- consensus, conflict, structural and social action theories
- the concepts of modernity and post-modernity in relation to sociological theory
- the nature of science and the extent to which Sociology can be regarded as scientific
- the relationship between theory and methods
- debates about subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom
- the relationship between Sociology and social policy.



Completed
in Yr12

To complete
in Yr13

On the following pages are the next few core handouts for the “Theory and Methods” topic after [1, 2 and 3 T&M](#) which was introduced in lessons. You will need copies of these in your folders in September.

Complete the work and tasks in this booklet on additional paper.

Marxism: a Conflict Theory

4T&M

Learning Objectives

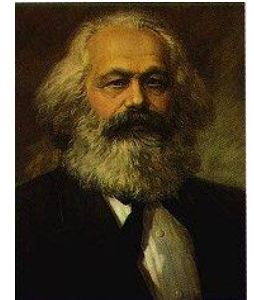
- Understand and be able to criticise the Marxist explanation of society.
- Understand the Neo-Marxist theory, including the views of Gramsci and Althusser. Know some criticisms of Neo-Marxism.

Like functionalists, Marxists also believe that society is a structure or system that shapes individuals' behaviour and ideas. Marxism differs from functionalism in two ways:

- **Conflict of interests:** Marxists reject the functionalist view that the social structure is a harmonious one based on value consensus. Instead, they see it as based on conflict of interests – between social classes of unequal power and wealth.
- **Instability and change:** Marxists also reject the functionalist view of society as stable, and stress the possibility of sudden revolutionary change. Stability is merely the result of the dominant class being able to impose their will on society.

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Karl Marx was a German-born philosopher, economist and sociologist. He attempted to explain the social world in which he lived which, at that time, was seeing the development of industrialisation and capitalism.



Marx's theory

1. Historical materialism

Materialism is the view that humans are beings with material needs such as food, clothing and shelter and must therefore work to meet them. In doing so, they use the **forces of production** (or means of production). In the early stages of human history, these forces were just unaided human labour, but over time, people develop tools and machines to assist them. In working to meet their needs, people cooperated with one another – they enter into the **social relations of production** – ways of organising production. As this develops, so does a division of labour. This creates a division between two classes:

- A class that owns the means of production – the ruling class (bourgeoisie)
- A class of labourers – the subject class (proletariat).

2. The history of class societies

Most societies through history have been divided:

- Primitive communism – early human history, where there were no classes, no private ownership and no exploitation.
- Ancient society – based on exploitation of slaves legally tied to their owners.
- Feudal society – based on the exploitation of serfs legally tied to the land.
- Capitalist society – based on the exploitation of free wage labourers.

In capitalist society, the subject class do not own the means of production and therefore can only survive by selling their labour to the capitalist in exchange for wages. According to Marx, this is a system of exploitation and oppression. This is because the workers do not receive the value of the goods that their labour produces, only the cost of their subsistence (keeping them alive). The difference between the two is **surplus value** – the profit the capitalists make by selling the commodities that the proletariat have produced. Competition forces capitalists to pay the lowest wages possible. This produced class polarisation – society divides into a minority capitalist class and a majority working class.

3. Alienation

Marx believed that our true nature as human beings is based on our capacity to create things to meet our needs. Alienation is the result of our loss of control over our labour and its production and therefore our separation from our true nature.

Alienation exists in all class societies, because the owners control the production process for their own needs. However, under capitalism alienation reaches its peak for two reasons:

- Workers are completely separated from and have no control over the forces of production.
- The division of labour is at this most intense and detailed. The worker is reduced to an unskilled labourer mindlessly repeating a meaningless task. The worker is “alienated” from the goods they produce.

4. False consciousness and Class consciousness

Marx believed the subject class were in a state of “false consciousness” in that they were unaware of the exploitation of capitalism.

The reason for this false consciousness is that the economic base of society influences the superstructure of society (the system of values and beliefs). Therefore, capitalism influences what the subject class thinks through society’s institutions. The ruling class have power in all areas of social life and this allows their ideology to be passed down to the rest of society through the superstructure. In other words, what occurs in the economic system directly affects what occurs in the education system, the political system and the legal system (the institutions of society).

Eventually, Marx believed that the polarisation of the classes would lead to the “class consciousness” of the subject class and result in them beginning the revolution. Class consciousness means that the subject class will develop an understanding of the exploitative and unfair nature of capitalism. Marx wished for a “communist utopia” in which everything was shared equally amongst the people.

TASK 1: Evaluation of Marxism

1. Outline how a functionalist might criticise Marxism.
2. Outline how a postmodernist might criticise Marxism.
3. Outline three ways in which Marxism may no longer apply to contemporary society.
4. Briefly outline any other ways we could criticise Marxism.

Neo-Marxism: Humanistic Marxism: Gramsci



Gramsci was the lead of the Italian Communist Party during the 1920s. He developed the concept of **hegemony** to explain how the ruling class maintains its position. He argues the proletariat (subject class) must develop its own “counter-hegemony” to win leadership of society from the bourgeoisie.

He rejects economic determinism as the main explanation of social change. He believes that the change from capitalism to communism will never come about simply due to economic forces (e.g. unemployment and falling wages).

Economic determinism – the idea that the way society is organised is based on the economic system (capitalism).

Instead, Gramsci believes that ideas play a central role in determining whether or not change will actually occur. This is seen through his concept of **hegemony**.

Gramsci sees the ruling class maintaining its dominance over society in two ways:

- **Coercion** – through force (army, police, prisons, courts) – forces the subject class to accept the rule of the ruling class.
- **Consent (hegemony)** – the ruling class uses ideas and values to persuade the subject class that its rule is legitimate and acceptable.

In advanced capitalist societies, the ruling class rely heavily on consent to maintain their rule. They use the institutions such as the media and education to make the rest of society accept their rule. They do this through the spreading of values and ideas that make the subject class accept capitalism (i.e. they consent to it)

Gramsci believed the hegemony of the ruling class is never complete because:

The ruling class are the minority – therefore, they must create a power bloc by aligning themselves with other groups, such as the middle classes. They do this by making compromises to take account of the interests of their allies.

The subject class have a dual consciousness – their ideas are influenced not only by ruling class ideology, but also by the material conditions of their life – poverty and exploitation they experience. This means they can see through the dominant ideology to some degree. There is always the chance of the ruling class being undermined by the subject class as they begin to question the status quo.

Gramsci believed this will only lead to revolution if the proletariat are able to construct a **counter-hegemonic bloc** – in other words, they must be able to offer moral and ideological leadership in society and an alternative to ruling class hegemony.

He believed the subject class can only win this battle by producing their own organised body that are able to formulate an alternative vision of how society could be run.

Evaluation

- The subject class may accept capitalism because they feel they have no choice, not because they accept the leadership of the ruling class.
- Gramsci may underestimate the role of economic factors in developing a revolutionary working class.

Neo-Marxism: Structuralist Marxism: Althusser

While Humanistic Marxism sees humans as creative beings, able to make history through their conscious actions, for Structural Marxists, it is not people's actions but social structures that really shape history. The task of the sociologist is to reveal how these structures work.



Louis Althusser was a leading intellectual of the French Communist Party. He rejects both economic determinism and humanism.

Althusser is critical of Marx's base-superstructure model (the belief that everything in society is shaped by the economic system). Instead, he sees capitalist society as having three levels:

1. The Economic level – all activities that involve producing something to satisfy a need.
2. The Political level – all forms of organisation.
3. The Ideological level – the ways that people see themselves and their world.

In the base-superstructure model, there is only **one way causality** – the economic level affects everything in the other levels. In Althusser's model, the political and ideological levels have relative autonomy or partial independence from the economic level. They are not mere reflections of the economic level, and they can even effect what happens to the economy. Instead of one-way causality, we have **two way causality**, in Althusser's theory.

In Althusser's model, the state performs political and ideological functions that ensures the reproduction and continuation of capitalism. He divides the state into two apparatuses:

1. **The repressive state apparatus:** army, police, prisons – they coerce the working class into complying with the will of the ruling class. This is how Marxists have traditionally seen the state.
2. **The ideological state apparatus:** the media, the education system, the family. These manipulate the working class into accepting capitalism as legitimate and right.

This is similar to Gramsci's idea of coercion and consent.

Althusser's criticism of humanism: Humanistic Marxists believe that people can use their free will to change society. They believed that a revolution will come about as a result of the working class actively choosing to develop class consciousness and actively choosing to overthrow capitalism.

Althusser is critical of this point of view. He argues that we are not free agents. In reality, we are merely the products of social structures that determine everything about us, preparing us to fit into the structure of capitalism.

He argues that change will not come about because of a change in consciousness, but because of a crisis in capitalism. This crisis will come about when the contradictions in the three structures results in the collapse of the system as a whole.

Evaluation

Humanistic Marxists would argue that Althusser's scientific approach discourages political action because it stresses the role of the structural factors that individuals can do little about.

TASK 2: Marxism and Neo-Marxism – Explain the following key terms/concepts:

Karl Marx:

- Capitalism
- Ideology
- Superstructure
- Ruling class
- Alienation
- Historical materialism
- Surplus value
- Polarisation of the classes
- Class consciousness

Gramsci:

- Counter-hegemony
- Coercion
- Consent
- Power bloc
- Dual consciousness
- Dominant ideology
- Counter-hegemonic bloc

Althusser:

- The economic level
- The political level
- The ideological level
- Base-superstructure model
- One-way causality
- Two way causality
- Repressive state apparatus
- Ideological state apparatus

The Relationship between Theory and Methods: Structural theories and Positivism

5 T&M

Learning Objectives

- Understand the relationship between structural theories of society and positivist approaches to doing research.
- Know some of the processes and issues involved in carrying out positivist, scientific research.
- Know some of the research methods used by positivists – their strengths and limitations.

Functionalism and Marxism are Structural theories. This means that they both analyse how society shapes the individual and they focus on the structures and systems of society. Structural theorists are more likely to use Positivist research methods which allow them to examine the big picture.

The **Functionalists** look at the structure of society (value consensus, the organic analogy), and are therefore more likely to take a positivist approach to research e.g. Durkheim.

Marxists also look at structures, focusing on the economic structure of society and how it shapes individuals.

This concept of “structure”, however, has been criticised by other sociological theories such as the interpretivist or social action theorists.

The process of doing scientific/positivist research

Positivist research often follows the hypothetico-deductive model. This is a series of steps which need to be followed when carrying out scientific research. It includes:

1. Hypothesis
2. Carry out the research
3. Data collection and analysis
4. Prove/disprove the hypothesis



Research Methods used by Positivists

- Quantitative approaches: structured interviews/questionnaires
- Statistical comparative methods: official statistics
- Experiments

Features of Positivist Research

- 1. Variables:** Positivist research may involve testing the impact of one variable on another (in a hypothesis). The variable that causes the change is known as the independent variable. The variable that is changed is known as the dependent variable.
So in scientific research, researchers examine the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.
- 2. Indicators:** A positivist needs to find a way to make these variables clear and easy to classify, otherwise it makes them difficult to test. This is called an indicator.

Blauner carried out a study of alienation in the workplace.

He had to redefine the concept of alienation to make it possible to measure.

He came up with four indicators:

1. Degrees of powerlessness
2. Degrees of meaninglessness
3. Isolation from colleagues
4. Sense of self-estrangement (how they viewed employment in terms of wages rather than job satisfaction)

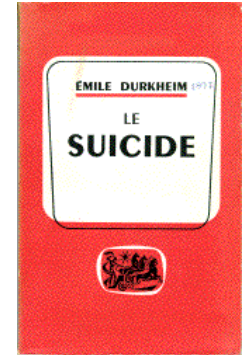
He believed all these were measurable and therefore he could relate the extent of alienation (dependent variable) to the sort of job people did (independent variable).



- 3. Validity:** Positivists are keen to ensure their indicators are accurate reflections of what they are trying to measure. Interpretivists, however, are critical of the validity of positivist research, as they would argue it doesn't uncover meanings behind action.
- 4. Reliability:** Positivists are keen to ensure their work is reliable – can be tested and repeated and the same results found.
- 5. Objectivity:** Positivists believe it is possible to be objective if you use scientific methods. Objectivity means that the research and findings are value-free and impartial.

Emile Durkheim (1897) Suicide [an example of positivist research]

As a functionalist, Durkheim can be regarded as a Structural theorist, focusing on studying society as a system and viewing individuals as the “puppets of society”. He looked at how societies achieve social order by having a shared value system or “collective conscience”. He was also interested in the role of social solidarity and how members felt a sense of belonging to a society.



Durkheim chose to study suicide to show that sociology was a science with its own distinct subject matter. He believed that if he could prove that even such a highly individual act had social causes, this would establish sociology’s status as a genuinely scientific discipline.

Using quantitative data from official statistics, Durkheim observed that there were patterns in the suicide rate. For example, rates for Protestants were higher than for Catholics. He concluded that these patterns could not be the product of the motives of individuals, but were social facts. As such, they must be caused by other social facts – social forces acting upon members of society to determine their behaviour.

According to Durkheim, the social facts responsible for determining the suicide rate were the levels of integration and regulation found in society. Thus, for example, Catholics were less likely than Protestants to commit suicide because Catholicism was more successful in integrating individuals.

Thus, Durkheim claimed to have discovered a “real law”: that different levels of integration and regulation produce different rates of suicide. He claimed to have demonstrated that sociology had its own unique subject matter – social facts – and that these could be explained scientifically.

This makes Durkheim a good example of the relationship between theory and methods – a structural theorist using a positivist method.

A criticism of Durkheim’s approach

J Maxwell Atkinson, an Interpretivist, argues that Durkheim relied on official statistics of suicide which may be flawed. Coroners decide on whether or not a death is a suicide, and they can be wrong. So the statistics come from human decision-making and therefore are not “facts”. This means that the correlations that Durkheim makes between suicide and social regulation/integration in society lack validity.

TASK 3: Complete the following questions on the positivist approach to research methods.

1. Which of these methods is preferred by positivists? (tick all that apply)

- a) Closed-ended questionnaires
- b) Unstructured interviews
- c) Participant observation
- d) Official statistics
- e) Personal and historical documents
- f) Structured interviews
- g) Experiments
- h) Non-participant observation
- i) Structured observation

2. Identify two indicators of the following concepts:

Domestic violence:

Working class:

Emotion work:

3. Which of the following are more likely to have high reliability? (tick all that apply)

- a) Crime statistics.
- b) A personal diary.
- c) An unstructured interview where the respondent is allowed to answer questions in their own words.
- d) An observation of a lesson in a primary school where the researcher takes notes describing what they see.
- e) An observation of a lesson in a school where the researcher uses a structured observation schedule.
- f) An anonymous questionnaire containing fixed response questions that asks young people about drug use.

4. Explain why objectivity is likely to be higher in....

- a) A study that uses questionnaires rather than unstructured interviews.

- b) A study that uses official statistics rather than media reports.

Feminism

6 T&M

Learning Objectives

- Know and be able to explain the different types of feminism.
- Evaluate different types of feminism.
- Know how feminists do research and the methods they prefer.

Feminism: Introduction

Feminism is a theory of society which focuses on gender inequality. It champions the cause of women, arguing that women are disadvantaged in society and are not seen as equal to men.

History

First wave feminism	Late 19 th , early 20 th century	Suffragettes fought for women’s right to vote in elections
Second wave feminism	1960s/70s	Many different feminist groups protested in Western societies against all forms of inequality. They also fought for women’s rights on abortion and contraception.

Feminism as a theory looks at gender inequality but there are differences within the theory:

- Radical feminism.
- Marxist feminism.
- Liberal feminism.
- Black feminism.
- Difference feminism.

Radical Feminism

This theory argues that it is the system of **patriarchy** which is to blame for gender inequality. Patriarchy = Male-dominated society. Society is a system which is controlled and dominated by men. This can be seen in marriage, the family and in employment.

Firestone 1974: The origins of patriarchy lie in women’s biological capacity to bear and care for infants, since performing this role means they become dependent on men.

Patriarchy can only be overcome by radical change, i.e. a revolution in which women will overthrow patriarchy and an equal society will result. More radical solutions include separatism and political lesbianism

Evaluation

- Critics argue some of the radical solutions are unworkable e.g. All female households.
- Patriarchy may be in decline – women have gained more equality and attitudes have changed.

Marxist Feminism

This theory argues that gender inequality is a result of the capitalist system. Capitalism benefits from the subordination of women in a number of ways:

- Women have children which grow up to be the next workforce for the capitalist to exploit.
- Women provide free housework and childcare services which the capitalist would have to pay for otherwise.
- Women are a reserve army of labour which capitalism can use when necessary for lower pay.

This theory argues that the only way for this gender inequality to change is through a revolution which overthrows capitalism and replaces it with a more equal society.

Barrett “the ideology of familism”

An ideology of “familism” is used to present nuclear families and the sexual division of labour in them as normal and natural. This maintains the idea that women are subordinate to men, and this benefits capitalism.

Evaluation

- As women’s subordination can be found in non-capitalist societies, we cannot blame capitalism for women’s oppression.
- It does not explain why it is women who perform the domestic role, and not men.

Dual systems feminism

Dual systems feminism examines women’s role in the home (patriarchy) and women’s role in work (capitalism).

Domestic work limits women’s availability for paid work, and lack of work opportunities drives women into marriage and dependence on men. The two systems reinforce each other.

Liberal Feminism

This theory is less radical than the two previous feminisms.

Liberal feminists argue that gender inequality benefits no one – both men and women lose out. Because:

- Women are prevented from gaining satisfaction through employment.
- Men are denied the opportunity to gain a close relationship with their children.

Rather than revolutionary change, liberal feminists support evolutionary change. This includes the end of stereotypical images of men and women, particularly in the media and education systems.

Evaluation

- Marxist and radical feminists accuse liberal feminists of being naive in believing that changes in the law or attitudes is enough to bring equality.

Black Feminism

This theory is critical of the other feminisms because it argues that they do not deal with the situation of black women.

- Black women suffer from not only sex discrimination but also racial discrimination.
- Black feminists want to see the end of sex and racial discrimination.

Difference Feminism

Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminists assume that all women's experiences are the same. They fail to reflect the diversity of experience of different ethnicities, social classes etc.

Poststructuralist feminism

This approach is similar to difference feminism. It studies **discourse** about gender – the way we think and talk about gender

There is no fixed discourse or “essence” that applies to being female. It varies through different times and cultures.

Evaluation of Feminism

Good points

- Feminism has raised awareness about gender issues and gender relations.
- It has brought attention to the issues previously hidden such as domestic violence.

Bad points

- With the exception of Black/Difference Feminism, it only looks at gender relations and does not take into account other forms of inequality such as social class.

So is feminism over?

Naomi Wolf – third-wave feminism

Wolf argues that women are exposed to an unattainable standard that is then used to punish women physically and psychologically for their failure to achieve and conform to it.

Wolf criticised the fashion and beauty industries as exploitative of women, but claimed the beauty myth extended into all areas of life.

Wolf wrote that women should have "the choice to do whatever we want with our faces and bodies without being punished by an ideology that is using attitudes, economic pressure, and even legal judgments regarding women's appearance to undermine us psychologically and politically". Wolf argues that women were under assault by the "beauty myth". Ultimately, Wolf argues for a relaxation of normative standards of beauty.

Feminist Methodology

Although generally regarded as a structural theory (examine structures in society such as patriarchy and capitalism), feminists are more likely to use interpretivist methods such as unstructured interviews.

Feminists attack what they call "**malestream**" sociological research methods. By this they mean the scientific, positivist research methods used to establish correlations and trends in society. These are methods that are used by male sociologists to study male societal issues, according to feminists.

Feminists argue that they use a distinctive set of feminist research methods which will reveal a particular feminist knowledge.

There are a number of elements to feminist research:

1. Attack on malestream research

Abbott & Wallace: Sociology is mainly concerned with research on men. Research findings from all male samples were used to generalise for the whole population. Areas and issues of concern to women were not seen as important. Women included in research often are so in a sexist way.

2. Feminist Research Methods

Ann Oakley: There is a feminist way of doing interviews which is better than the more dominant, masculine method. The male interview is traditionally related to objectivity, detachment and science – the interviewer maintains a distance.

Oakley's study of first-time motherhood involved her helping with the housework and childcare, advising the mothers, they asked questions and collaborated with her. Oakley argues that this is preferable to masculine research.

Ray Pawson criticises Oakley's research as no different to ordinary unstructured interviews. She simply elaborated on this existing model. However, Oakley did go further than most unstructured interviewers would.

3. A distinctive feminist knowledge

This comes from examining the unique experiences of women in societies where men and women experience social life in different ways. Feminists try to find the truth through understanding women's experiences.

Therefore, the feminist view of the world has developed through the experiences of oppressed women.

Ray Pawson argues, however, that this idea that we should view the world from a female standpoint runs into problems when feminist researchers hear things that don't agree with their views. E.g. a woman who feels it is "natural" that women should do the housework.

TASK 4: Complete the following work on Feminism.

1. What do Radical feminism and Marxist feminist have in common and how are they different?
2. Identify as many ways you can think of that gender equality/women's rights have been achieved.
3. Read the evaluation points below and decide which type of feminism each one best applies to.

This type of feminism.....

- a. emphasises the variation in women's situation and experience
 - b. exposes the exploitation within family life
 - c. shows the importance of structural factors in determining women's position
 - d. has helped to improve the position of women at work and in law
 - e. largely ignores the increased economic independence of women
 - f. fails to address the underlying causes of gender inequality
 - g. ignores the fact that women may choose to live with men
 - h. focuses too much on differences between women and too little on the experiences all women face
4. What does Wolf mean by "the beauty myth"?
 5. Give three examples of the way in which society may promote the "beauty myth".
 6. Do some online research and find out about "fourth-wave feminism".

TASK 5: Complete the following “Methods in Context” Essay Question

Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

Item B

Investigating pupils’ decisions on future education and careers

At various stages in school, all children are faced with decisions about their future. For example, some pupils may choose to go to university for a variety of reasons. Other pupils may consider options such as apprenticeships or going directly into a job.

Some sociologists may use structured interviews to study pupils’ decisions on their future education and choice of career. They are conducted face to face in a formal way, as each interviewee is usually asked the same questions in the same order. However, structured interviews may be influenced by the assumptions of the researcher about how and why career choices are made.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using structured interviews to investigate pupils’ decisions on their future education and careers.

[20 marks]