

Outline and explain TWO reasons why sociologists might not be value free in their research (10)

One way that sociologists may not be value free in their research is due to their theoretical perspective. Whilst structural theories such as Functionalism and traditional Marxism look to remain objective and value free in their research, other sociologists such as neo-Marxists and Interactionists prefer to examine the lives of individuals through a more subjective lens and therefore their research is criticised as being value-laden. Whereas Functionalists may adopt a more positivist approach to research, opting for a scientific, cause and effect view of a social issue, neo-Marxists and Interactionists would suggest that in order to study human behaviour, an interpretivist methodology is more desirable, as it provides the researcher with more insight into the experiences of those being studied and provides more validity than positivist methods such as official statistics and closed questionnaires. Interpretivist methods, such as unstructured interviews and participant observations rely more heavily upon the interpretation of the researcher, and therefore it is inevitable that the values of the researcher and indeed the participant will interfere with the findings made as human experiences are difficult to quantify or measure scientifically.

A second reason that sociologists might not be value free in their research is due to their career aspirations or need to attract funding. All research is guided by funding bodies, such as the government, universities and charities and therefore there are hidden agendas behind why the research is being conducted. For example, governments are unlikely to commission research that may be critical of their own policies and as such if a researcher is to secure funding, they may have to abandon their own personal values in exchange for their career progression or funding. Whilst some may argue that this may make them value-free, undertaking research that looks to support the principles of the funding body, then this makes the research value-laden. Funding bodies often target specific causes and issues, for example the Joseph Rowntree Foundation looks at the impact of poverty in the UK, and therefore researchers wanting to secure funding from the foundation would be looking specifically at poverty and its negative impacts on society and as such would be value-laden.