

Outline and explain two reasons why values will influence a sociologist's choice of research method (10)

One way in which values will influence a sociologist's choice of research method is through their methodological preference. Whilst positivist sociologists prefer objective and value free research methods, such as structured interviews and official statistics, interpretivists prefer to use more value-laden methods, such as unstructured interviews and participant observations. Sociologists, such as Weber would suggest that despite choosing methods that are more subjective, sociologists have a duty to remain objective in the collection of data. They should also look to disclose their own theoretical preferences ahead of research so that once they have interpreted the data objectively it can be held up to the scrutiny of peer review to see if their theoretical bias has been contained. However, it is unlikely that those preferring an interpretivist methodology would be able to refrain from forming subjective opinions on methods such as unstructured interviews and participant observations as their goal in using these methods is to gain an insight into the lives of those they are studying. Showing empathy is paramount to understanding the views of those being researched, as both Becker and Goffman suggest that interpretivists should take the side of the 'under-dog' and therefore, values will influence interpretivist methodology.

A second way in which values will influence a sociologist's choice of research is their own career trajectory. Sociology, like most social sciences, will have areas of contemporary interest that funding bodies would like to investigate. These may not match up with the interests of the researcher, however in order to progress, particularly in the early years of their academic careers, researchers may opt to research topics out of their field of interest. Whilst it can be argued that this may make them more objective in their research, ultimately their research is controlled by the values of the funding bodies and as such researchers will be pressurised into using the methodology preferred by those groups. For example, Governments tend to prefer objective and large-scale quantitative data and whilst a researcher who prefers qualitative data may be more neutral in this aspect, conducting the research will be subject to the values of the government. According to Gouldner, this is inevitable whether

the researcher chooses the methodology, or it is chosen for them by a funding body.