

1. Outline and explain two ethical limitations of using experiments in sociological research [10]

One ethical limitation of using experiments in sociological research is deception. Both field experiments and lab experiments rely upon researchers manipulating the independent variable and measuring the dependent variable in order to see if there is a relationship between the two. In some experiments, this may mean the participants are not informed of which variable is being altered or not informed of the true purpose of the research. An example of this is in Rosenthal and Jacobsen's research into the halo effect, where they informed teachers that some pupils had been assessed as having the potential to bloom academically. This was not accurate, but rather a manipulation of the truth and teachers were unaware of this; Rosenthal and Jacobsen had deliberately deceived them. However, as this was necessary for the purposes of the experiment, it was allowed. Had Rosenthal and Jacobsen revealed the true aims, to see if teachers having high expectations improved performance, teachers may have altered their behaviour to either prove or disprove the relationship, and so deception was deemed to be appropriate in this case.

A second ethical limitation of using experiments in sociological research is protection from harm. One of the ethical guidelines for experiments in the social sciences is to protect participants from psychological or physical harm. Some experiments, particularly lab experiments may cause distress to participants as they attempt to alter an individual's behaviour through manipulating variables in their environment. Whilst this is usually consensual, it can cause harm. For example, Milgram's infamous experiment into obedience caused participants stress and psychological trauma, as they were manipulated into delivering what they thought was a fatal shock to another participant. Whilst counselling and reassurance was given after the experiment that the participants had not caused harm to the other participant (a confederate of Milgram's), participants were concerned that they could have caused harm based upon the orders of others. Furthermore, participants in the experiment showed physical signs of distress and yet were asked to continue.

2. Outline and explain two ways values can influence a researcher's choice of topic [10]

One way values can influence a researcher's choice of topic is through their methodological preference. Sociologists have different views of the role of sociology, and this is reflected in their choice of methods. Some view sociology as a science and look to adopt quantitative methods of research, seeing social behaviour as predictable. Others argue that sociology has a role to play in raising awareness of issues that others cannot, and as such prefer to examine smaller sections of society using qualitative methods. The

choice of methods can influence the topic choice as topics that require more detail, such as domestic violence, experiences of education and identity formation would require more in-depth approaches to understand the range of issues involved. Furthermore, other topics, such as inequality in the workplace between males and females, may be best analysed using quantitative methods such as statistics to enable researchers to collect enough data for the findings to be reliable and push for social policies to address those issues.

A second way in which values can influence a researcher's choice of topic is through their theoretical perspective. For example, Marxists and feminists will look to address issues of class and gender respectively. Whilst this can be done on a macro scale or a micro scale, the theoretical position of the researcher will look to address the issues from a critical viewpoint, examining the disadvantages faced by those from a lower social class, or differences between experiences of males and females. For example, Marxists looking to examine the life chances of individuals, will make comparisons between the life chances of those in different social classes as their theoretical perspective is focused on class conflict. Additionally, feminist will select topic areas that are of concern to females or where females are facing disadvantaged positions, such as employment or domestic labour. This can also be said of interactionists, who look to study individuals and their concerns, leading to research of smaller groups and sociological rather than social issues – e.g., interactions within schools, how the working-class negotiate the criminal justice system.