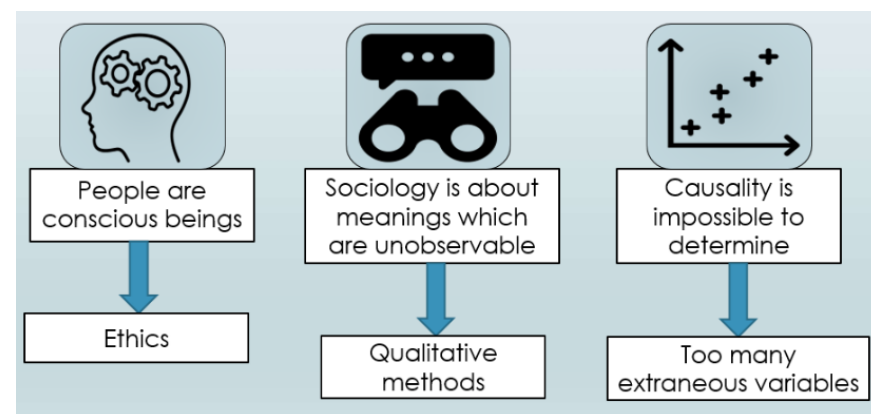


Interpretivist views of Sociology



Interpretivism provides an alternative to positivism. Interpretivists argue that society cannot be studied in the same way a subject in the natural sciences.

Unlike inanimate objects, people engage in **meaningful interaction**.

Therefore, interpretivists criticise positivism's 'scientific' approach as inadequate or even as completely unsuited to the study of human beings.

Meanings are **NOT** observable. Meanings are **NOT** measurable.

Key Sociologist: Kuhn - Scientific Paradigms

Sociology as a Science Theory & Methods

Part 2: Can't and shouldn't be considered a Science

Post Modernist views of Sociology

Postmodernists argue against the idea of a scientific sociology. This is because they regard science as simply a **meta-narrative**. Despite its claim to have special access to the truth, science is no more than just one more '**big story**'

The scientific approach of sociology is dangerous because it claims a "**monopoly of the truth**".

Examples:



Realist View of Sociology as a Science

A third view of science comes from the approach known as realism. **Keat and Urry** stress similarities between sociology and certain types of natural science in terms of the degree of control the researcher has over variables being researched.

So sociology MAY be considered a science if you follow an OPEN belief system, however it MAY NOT be considered a science if you follow a CLOSED belief system.

Key sociologist: Sayar - Open / Closed Systems

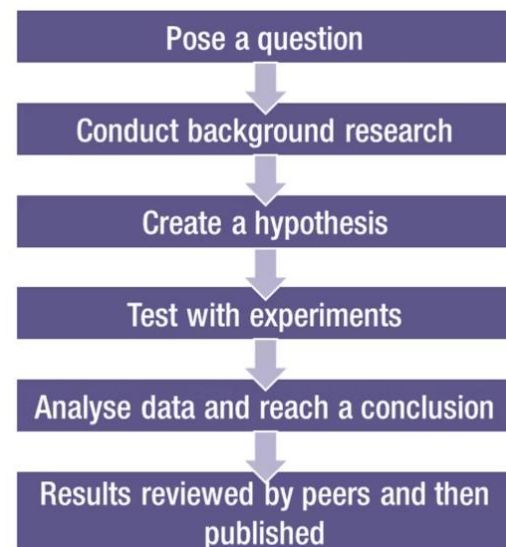
Early Positivist view of Sociology

Some sociologists believe that we should study society in a scientific way by utilising qualitative data, qualitative research methods to spot patterns and trends about human behaviour.

Positivists argue that sociology can and should be studied as a science.

They believe that society is not random but follows patterns and regularities, much like the natural world. These patterns, which positivists call "**social facts**," exist independently of what individuals think or feel. By observing, measuring, and testing these social facts, sociologists can discover laws about how society works—just like scientists uncover laws about the natural world.

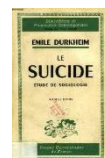
Positivist sociologists believe that it is possible to establish objective facts through scientific research methods and the thorough collection and analysis of empirical evidence. They argue that their research follows the scientific method shown below.



Key Sociologist: Durkheim – Research on Suicide:

One famous example of positivist sociology is **Émile Durkheim's study on suicide**. At first, suicide seems like a deeply personal and individual act. Using **official statistics** from 19th-century Europe, Durkheim analysed suicide rates and identified four distinct types of suicide. This research highlighted the importance of using scientific methods to research society.

AO3: Criticism of Durkheim:



Key Sociologist: Karl Popper: Falsification



Falsification:

Key concept = **falsification** (when a scientist tries to find evidence to falsify / prove wrong a theory)

He believed that a valid science should aim to refute (or falsify) hypotheses, **not** verify them as Positivists believed. Karl Popper argued that any research that wishes to be considered scientific must subject its hypotheses to falsification; **to test it, to try and prove it incorrect**.

Falsification is also known as **deductive reasoning** as opposed to the **inductive reasoning** which is the method that *positivist* sociologists such as Durkheim used.

So, if Sociology was based on falsification, sociology could be accepted as a science.

Black Swan analogy:

We can use “falsification” to test the following statement:

All swans are white

If we can find a black swan, we can prove this statement to be false and therefore not a scientific truth. Rather than confirming this is true by finding more white swans.

Applying this to sociology:

Sociology as a Science Theory & Methods

Part 1: Sociology **CAN** and **SHOULD** be viewed as a Science

Key Sociologist: Comte- Founder of Positivism

Auguste Comte is the founder of Positivism. The key idea of Positivism was that science can be used to understand society and build a better world.

Only directly observable ‘facts’ were acceptable as evidence in his science of society – anything that could not be directly measured such as subjective meanings should be ruled out.

The facts of society must be put into a numerical form to be measured and quantified. Cause and effect relationships about behaviour could then be discovered

Positivism	Popper
Use an inductive method where they examine data, create a theory and defend the theory, i.e. theories should come from evidence.	Popper thought that a deductive method should be used. This is where you start with a theory and then test it against evidence. You should operate with the concept of falsification.

Evaluation of Popper's theory - Falsification:

1:

2:

3: