

## Chapter 3 Research Methods

### Topic 6 Participant observation

#### Answers to QuickCheck Questions on page 143

1. Overt: the researcher makes their true identity and purpose known to those being studied.  
Covert: the researcher's real identity and purpose are kept concealed from the group.
2. A structured observational schedule is a pre-determined list of the types of behaviour or situations the sociologist is interested in. When an instance of such behaviour occurs, the sociologist records it on the schedule.
3. So that they do not disrupt the group's normal behaviour patterns.
4. Differences of age/gender/class/ethnicity between researcher and group; observer may be seen as a representative of authority by deviant/secretive groups; group may suspect researcher's motives (e.g. to sell a sensationalised story to the media); in covert PO, researcher not knowing group's norms of behaviour.
5. Because it does not normally start with a fixed hypothesis and the sociologist enters the setting with a relatively open mind. As new situations are encountered, new explanations can be formulated and the sociologist can change direction to follow them up there and then.
6. There is a risk of the observer becoming too involved/'going native' and presenting a biased view of the group. Loyalty to the group or fear of reprisals may lead the observer to conceal sensitive information. PO often attracts sociologists who sympathise with the underdog. But 'telling it like it is' from the actor's point of view may result in bias in favour of their subjects' viewpoint.
7. By allowing the sociologist to become an insider, it produces an authentic account of the actor's world. It avoids imposing the sociologist's own categories and ideas on the facts.
8. The findings of PO may be merely the observer's subjective/biased impressions. The researcher selects what facts they think are worth recording, and these are likely to fit in with their pre-existing views. The observer's presence may make the subjects act differently, defeating the aim of producing a 'naturalistic' account of human behaviour.