



Sikh pilgrims at the Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab. Its four entrance doors symbolise openness to all people and religions.

Introduction

Understanding beliefs is central to sociology because beliefs shape the way we see the world and influence how we live. In this chapter, our main focus is on religious beliefs, practices and organisations.

Topic 1 investigates the social role of religion and its functions for individuals, groups and society. Religion is often seen as maintaining the status quo, but as **Topic 2** shows, it can also be a force for change.

Some sociologists argue that religion today is in long-term decline. However, others believe we are witnessing a move from traditional religion to a more personal spirituality. **Topics 3 and 4** focus on debates about the future of religion.

In **Topic 5**, we examine religion in its global context to understand causes of religious fundamentalism and conflict, as well as the ways religion and development are related.

There are many kinds of religious organisations, from churches to cults. **Topic 6** examines different religious organisations and movements, their beliefs and the groups they attract.

In **Topic 7**, we look at science as a belief system. How do scientific explanations differ from those of religion or witchcraft? We also examine the concept of ideology and the way ideas can serve the interests of particular groups.

The AQA Specification

The specification is the syllabus produced by the exam board telling you what to study. The AQA Specification for Beliefs in Society requires you to examine sociological explanations of the following:

- Ideology, science and religion, including both Christian and non-Christian religious traditions.
- The relationship between social change and social stability, and religious beliefs, practices and organisations.
- Religious organisations, including cults, sects, denominations, churches and New Age movements, and their relationship to religious and spiritual belief and practice.
- The relationship between different social groups and religious/spiritual organisations and movements, beliefs and practices.
- The significance of religion and religiosity in the contemporary world, including the nature and extent of secularisation in a global context, and globalisation and the spread of religions.

CHAPTER 1

more attracted to ideas that give them a passive role, such as belief in an all-powerful God or fatalistic ideas such as superstition, horoscopes and lucky charms.

These differences fit with other class differences in areas such as education, where the middle-class belief in the ability of individuals to control their own destiny contrasts with fatalistic working-class attitudes.

Women, compensators and sects

Bruce (1996) estimates that there are twice as many women as men involved in sects. One explanation for this comes from the religious market theorists, Stark and Bainbridge (1985). They argue that people may participate in sects because they offer compensators for organismic, ethical and social deprivation. These forms of deprivation are more common among women and this explains their higher level of sect membership:

- **Organismic deprivation** stems from physical and mental health problems. Women are more likely to suffer ill health and thus to seek the healing that sects offer.
- **Ethical deprivation** Women tend to be more morally conservative. They are thus more likely to regard the world as being in moral decline and be attracted to sects, which often share this view.
- **Social deprivation** Sects attract poorer groups and women are more likely to be poor.

The Pentecostal gender paradox

Since the 1970s, Pentecostalism has grown rapidly in many parts of the world, particularly among the poor. For example, in Latin America an estimated 13% of the continent's population are now members of Pentecostal churches.

Pentecostalism is generally regarded as a patriarchal form of religion: men are seen both as heads of the household and as heads of the church (all its clergy are male). Despite this, however, Pentecostalism has proved attractive to women. Bernice Martin (2000) describes this as the 'Pentecostal gender paradox': why should a conservative patriarchal religion be attractive to women?

According to Elizabeth Brusco's (1995; 2012) study of Pentecostals in Colombia, the answer lies in the fact that Pentecostalism demands that its followers adopt an ascetic (self-denying) lifestyle. As we saw in [Topic 5](#), this resembles the personal discipline of the 16th century Calvinists. Pentecostalism also insists on a traditional gender division of labour that requires men to provide for their family.

Pentecostal women can use these ideas to combat a widespread culture of machismo in Latin America, where men often spend 20-40% of the household's income on alcohol, as well as further spending on tobacco, gambling and prostitutes. Pentecostal men are pressured by their



▲ York Minster, 2015: the Church of England's first female bishop is consecrated.

pastor and church community to change their ways, act responsibly and redirect their income back into the household, thereby raising the standard of living of women and children.

Pentecostalism is not offering Western-style women's liberation: men retain their headship role in the family and church. But as Brusco shows, Latin American women can and do use Pentecostalism as a means of improving their position. Thus, although Pentecostalism is patriarchal, its critique of the sexual irresponsibility and wastefulness of machismo culture makes it popular with women. Carol Ann Drogus (1994) also notes that although official Pentecostal doctrine is that men should have authority over women, church magazines and educational materials often encourage more equal relations within marriage.

Recent trends

Although women remain more likely to be religious than men, there has been a decline in their participation in religious activities in the UK. We have already encountered some possible reasons for these trends, notably the movement of women into paid work and, related to this, their rejection of traditional subordinate gender roles.

Because traditional religions have tended to be closely bound up with traditional gender roles, women's rejection of subordination has led them to reject traditional religion at the same time. Although some women are now attracted

TOPIC 2



Arizona, USA: female prisoners in a chain gang.

GETTING STARTED

In pairs, consider the following three scenarios in which an individual is caught apparently shoplifting:

- a** The shop takes the goods back and warns the individual not to do it again.
 - b** The shop immediately calls the police. The individual is arrested, taken to the police station and given a caution.
 - c** The shop immediately calls the police. The individual is arrested, charged, tried and convicted.
- 1** For each scenario, who would be aware of the crime?
 - 2** For each scenario, what might be the impact on the individual?
 - 3** What would be the impact of each scenario if the person was innocent?

Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Understand why interactionists regard crime and deviance, and official statistics on crime, suicide and mental illness, as socially constructed.
- Understand the labelling process and its consequences for those who are labelled.
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of labelling theory in explaining crime and deviance.

INTERACTIONISM AND LABELLING THEORY

The theories we have looked at so far have all been described as 'problem takers'. That is, they take the official definitions of crime and criminals for granted. Crime is activity that breaks the criminal law, and criminals are the people who behave in this way. They also take it for granted that the official crime statistics are a reasonably accurate picture of the real patterns of crime and who commits it. The main aim of these theories is to discover the causes of crime (for example as a reaction to blocked opportunities or other external forces) and to provide solutions to the 'problem of crime'.

Labelling theorists take a very different approach. Instead of seeking the causes of criminal behaviour, they ask how and why some people and actions come to be labelled as

criminal or deviant, and what effects this has on those who are so labelled.

Similarly, instead of accepting official statistics as a valid picture of crime, they regard them not as hard facts, but as social constructs. This reflects the origins of labelling theory in symbolic interactionism, which takes the view that individuals construct the social world through their face-to-face interactions.

For labelling theorists, this constructionist view applies also to crime and deviance. Crime is the product of interactions between suspects and police, for example, rather than the result of wider external social forces such as blocked opportunity structures.

The social construction of crime

Rather than simply taking the definition of crime for granted, labelling theorists are interested in how and why certain acts come to be defined or labelled as criminal in the first place. They argue that no act is inherently criminal or deviant *in itself*, in all situations and at all times. Instead, it only comes to be so when others label it as such. In other words, it is not the nature of the act that makes it deviant, but the nature of society's *reaction* to the act.

In this view, therefore, deviance is in the eye of the beholder. As Howard Becker (1963) puts it:

'Social groups create deviance by creating the rules whose infraction [breaking] constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders.'

For Becker, therefore, a deviant is simply someone to whom the label has been successfully applied, and deviant behaviour is simply behaviour that people so label.

This leads labelling theorists to look at how and why rules and laws get made. They are particularly interested in the role of what Becker calls *moral entrepreneurs*. These are people who lead a moral 'crusade' to change the law. However, Becker argues that this new law invariably has two effects:

- The creation of a new group of 'outsiders' – outlaws or deviants who break the new rule.
- The creation or expansion of a social control agency (such as the police, courts, probation officers etc) to enforce the rule and impose labels on offenders.

For example, Platt (1969) argues that the idea of 'juvenile delinquency' was originally created as a result of a campaign by upper-class Victorian moral entrepreneurs, aimed at protecting young people at risk. This established 'juveniles'

as a separate category of offender with their own courts, and it enabled the state to extend its powers beyond criminal offences involving the young, into so-called 'status offences' (where their behaviour is only an offence because of their age) such as truancy and sexual promiscuity.

Becker notes that social control agencies themselves may also campaign for a change in the law to increase their own power. For example, the US Federal Bureau of Narcotics successfully campaigned for the passing of the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937 to outlaw marijuana use. Supposedly, this was on the grounds of its ill effects on young people, but Becker argues it was really to extend the Bureau's sphere of influence. Thus it is not the inherent harmfulness of a particular behaviour that leads to new laws being created, but rather the efforts of powerful individuals and groups to redefine that behaviour as unacceptable.

Who gets labelled?

Not everyone who commits an offence is punished for it. Whether a person is arrested, charged and convicted depends on factors such as:

- Their interactions with agencies of social control.
- Their appearance, background and personal biography.
- The situation and circumstances of the offence.

This leads labelling theorists to look at how the laws are applied and enforced. Their studies show that agencies of social control are more likely to label certain groups of people as deviant or criminal.

For example, Piliavin and Briar (1964) found that police decisions to arrest a youth were mainly based on physical cues (such as manner and dress), from which they made

Social and community crime prevention

While Wilson and Kelling show some recognition of the role of the community and informal controls in preventing crime, the main emphasis of policies based on their ideas has been in terms of policing.

By contrast, social and community prevention strategies place the emphasis firmly on the potential offender and their social context. The aim of these strategies is to remove the conditions that predispose individuals to crime in the first place. These are longer-term strategies, since they attempt to tackle the root causes of offending, rather than simply removing opportunities for crime.

Because the causes of crime are often rooted in social conditions such as poverty, unemployment and poor housing, more general social reform programmes addressing these issues may have a crime prevention role, even if this is not their main focus. For example, policies to promote full employment are likely to reduce crime as a 'side effect'.

The Perry pre-school project

One of the best-known community programmes aimed at reducing criminality is the experimental Perry pre-school project for disadvantaged black children in Ypsilanti, Michigan. An experimental group of 3-4 year olds was offered a two-year intellectual enrichment programme, during which time the children also received weekly home visits.

A longitudinal study followed the children's subsequent progress. It showed striking differences with a control group who had not undergone the programme. By age 40, they had significantly fewer lifetime arrests for violent crime, property crime and drugs, while more had graduated from high school and were in employment. It was calculated that for every dollar spent on the programme, \$17 were saved on welfare, prison and other costs.

What is missing?

The approaches that we have discussed above take for granted the nature and definition of crime. They generally

focus on fairly low-level crimes and/or interpersonal crimes of violence. This disregards the crimes of the powerful and environmental crimes.

This definition of the 'crime problem' reflects the priorities of politicians and agencies tasked with crime prevention. For example, Whyte conducted a survey of 26 crime and disorder area partnerships in the North West of England to discover what crimes their strategies were targeting. The results are in Table 2B.

Table 2B Targets of crime reduction strategies in the North West of England

Vehicle crime	26
Burglary	24
Drug related crime	15
Violent crime	15
Anti social behaviour	12
Youth offending/causing a nuisance	12
Road safety/speeding	11
Domestic violence	8
Robbery	8
Fear of crime	7

Source: Walklate (2005)

Yet, at the same time, the Environment Agency instituted 98 prosecutions in 2001-02 in the North West, including 62 for waste offences, 32 for water quality offences, and two for radioactive substance offences. The North West also has one of the most heavily concentrated sites of chemical production in Europe, where just two plants between them release into the air about 40% of all the factory-produced cancer-causing chemicals in the UK every year.

Whyte points out that there is no logical reason why such activities should not be included in the crime and disorder partnership agendas – yet despite their potential and actual effect on the health of local communities, they are not.

Surveillance

Another important way of attempting to control people's behaviour and prevent crime is by means of surveillance. Surveillance can be defined as:

the monitoring of public behaviour for the purposes of population or crime control. It therefore involves

observing people's behaviour to gather data about it, and typically, using the data to regulate, manage or 'correct' their behaviour.

Surveillance has a long history and takes many forms. During the 14th century plague, communities had

TOPIC 2



Can we understand just by observing?

GETTING STARTED

In the first year of your course, you will probably have studied research methods. This activity will help you to recall some of the issues associated with qualitative research methods.

Work in pairs to answer the following:

1 State whether qualitative methods are likely to give you:

- a** reliable data
- b** valid data
- c** representative data

Explain your answers and give examples of particular qualitative methods to illustrate your explanation.

2 List three topics that you might investigate using qualitative methods. Explain why these methods might be suitable for the topics you have chosen.

3 How do the reasons you gave in your answers to Question 2 compare with the ones you gave in your answers to the questions in the Getting Started activity for **Topic 1** of this chapter?

Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the main features and types of the following qualitative research methods and sources of data: unstructured interviews, participant observation and documents.
- Be able to evaluate the practical, ethical and theoretical strengths and limitations of each of these methods and sources.
- Understand the usefulness of each of these methods and sources in relation to wider issues of methodological and theoretical perspective, science, values and objectivity.

Interpretivism and qualitative methods

As we saw in **Topic 1**, positivists see sociology as a science, and they favour using methods that collect quantitative data in order to discover causal laws about society.

By contrast, interpretivists reject the idea that sociology should model itself on the natural sciences. In their view, this approach is inappropriate for the study of humans.

Interpretivists reject the positivist view of social reality as a set of objective facts 'out there'. Instead, they see it as the subjective meanings internal to people's consciousness. They argue that we can only understand society by interpreting the meanings people give to their actions.

This means we need to use qualitative research methods, since only these can give us a 'feel' for what the world is like from the actor's point of view. These methods include unstructured interviews, participant observation and the analysis of personal documents.

Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews differ from the structured interviews we examined in **Topic 1**. Rather than having to follow the fixed, standardised format of a structured interview, the interviewer is free to vary the questions, their wording or order as seems appropriate to the situation. They can pursue whatever line of questioning they wish, probing for further details, asking follow-up questions and so on.

Probably the main attraction of unstructured interviews is that they can produce rich, detailed qualitative data that give an insight into the meanings and life-world of the interviewee.

Practical issues

- Their informality allows the interviewer to develop a rapport (relationship of trust and understanding). This helps to put the interviewee at ease and encourage them to open up, and is particularly useful when researching sensitive topics. Empathy can enable interviewees to discuss difficult subjects such as abuse.
- Training needs to be more thorough than for structured interviews. Interviewers need to have a background in sociology so they can recognise when the interviewee has made a sociologically important point and can probe further with appropriate questioning. All this adds to the cost. Interviewers also need good interpersonal skills to establish rapport with interviewees.
- They take a long time – often several hours each. This limits the number that can be carried out and means the researcher will have a relatively small sample.
- They produce large amounts of data, which can take time to transcribe (e.g. from recordings of the interviews). There are no pre-coded answers, making analysis and categorisation of data time-consuming and difficult.
- Unstructured interviews make it much easier for interviewer and interviewee to check they have understood each other's meanings. If the interviewee doesn't understand a question, it can be explained. If the

interviewer doesn't understand an answer, they can ask follow-up questions to clarify matters.

- They are very flexible. The interviewer is not restricted to a fixed set of questions, but can explore whatever seems interesting. The researcher can formulate new hypotheses and put them to the test as they arise during the interview.
- They are useful where the subject is one we know little about, because they are open-ended and exploratory – they allow us to learn as we go along. Some sociologists use unstructured interviews as a starting point to develop their initial ideas before using more structured methods.
- Because there are no pre-set questions, unstructured interviews allow the interviewee more opportunity to speak about those things they think are important.

Theoretical issues: interpretivism

A major factor in deciding whether to use unstructured interviews is the sociologist's methodological and theoretical perspective. While positivists reject their use, interpretivists favour unstructured interviews. The key criterion by which interpretivists judge the usefulness of a method is how far it produces valid (true and authentic) data.

Interpretivists are concerned with understanding actors' meanings. They prefer to use qualitative methods such as unstructured interviews, because they regard these as producing a more valid picture of how actors give meaning to their actions. They argue that there are several reasons for this, as follows.

Validity through involvement

For interpretivists, valid data can only be obtained by getting close to people's experiences and meanings – understanding only comes through involvement. They argue that unstructured interviews allow us to do this. By becoming involved and developing a rapport with the interviewee, we can see the world through their eyes and appreciate what is important to them and why they act as they do.

A level practice papers

A Level Paper 1 Education with Theory and Methods

Answer all questions.

Time allowed: 2 hours

Item A Some government education policies aim to introduce a market into the education system. This is done in part by creating competition among schools to attract pupils and their parents to apply for places. Supporters believe that this competition for 'customers' will drive up educational standards. Other education policies include selection of pupils for places in different types of school on the basis of their ability as measured through tests and examinations.

Item B The role of the education system is central to most sociological theories of education. For example, for conflict theorists such as Marxists, education is a vital institution that both reproduces and legitimates social class inequality for capitalism. Not only is the education of working-class pupils structured so as to produce their underachievement, but the system justifies their failure by claiming to give everyone an equal opportunity to achieve.

However, functionalists argue that the education system performs positive functions for society as a whole, for example by generating social solidarity and preparing individuals for work that fits their abilities.

Item C

Investigating ethnic differences in educational achievement

There are pupils from many different ethnic groups in UK schools today. Pupils from some ethnic groups achieve very highly on average, while those from other groups are often less successful. Pupils' different experiences within school may play a part in this, as well as factors connected with their home background.

Sociologists may use unstructured interviews to investigate ethnic differences in educational achievement. These make it easy for interviewer and interviewee to check that they understand each other's meanings. Unstructured interviews also allow the interviewee the opportunity to speak about the things they think are important. However, interviewers require good interpersonal skills in order to conduct successful interviews with different pupils.

Education

- 1 Outline **two** processes within schools that may lead to working-class pupils underachieving. (4 marks)
- 2 Outline **three** factors outside the education system that may affect gender differences in achievement. (6 marks)
- 3 Applying material from **Item A**, analyse the effects of **two** government education policies on class differences in achievement. (10 marks)
- 4 Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of the role of the education system. (30 marks)

Methods in Context

- 5 Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using unstructured interviews to study ethnic differences in achievement. (20 marks)

Theory and Methods

- 6 Outline and explain **two** problems of using experiments in sociology. (10 marks)

The examiner's advice can be found at the end of this chapter.

The Examiner's Advice

This section contains advice on how to tackle the 10, 20 and 30 mark questions in the A level practice papers in this chapter.

A level Practice Paper 1

Question 3

Spend about 15 minutes on this. Divide your time fairly equally between the two policies. Don't write a separate introduction; just start on your first policy. You must take two points from the Item and show through a chain of reasoning (see **Box 4.1**) the effect of each. Quote from the Item for each policy.

You could use different marketisation policies (such as free schools, competition, league tables, specialist schools, parental choice etc), or selection on ability such as the 11+ examination. For example, parental choice supposedly gives every pupil an equal chance of a place at a successful school. However, middle-class parents have more economic and cultural capital, and this enables them to make better informed choices. This means their children are more likely to get into 'better' schools.

Use concepts such as privileged-skilled and other choosers, parentocracy, cream-skimming and silt-shifting, selection by mortgage, economic and cultural capital, material and cultural deprivation, meritocracy, reproduction of inequality, and tripartite and comprehensive systems.

Include some brief evaluation, e.g. the Pupil Premium is not necessarily spent on the poorest pupils.

Question 4

Spend about 45 minutes on this. The question specifies explanations plural, so you need to discuss two or more. You could organise your answer around the key issues sociologists focus on in relation to the role of education. You can focus mainly on functionalist and Marxist views, but also make some reference to feminist and New Right/neoliberal views.

Rather than list the theories one by one in sequence, take the key issues in turn and examine how each theory deals with it. For example, functionalists see education as transmitting society's shared values, whereas Marxists argue that these are merely ruling-class values, and feminists argue that they are patriarchal values.

Use concepts such as social solidarity, shared values, specialist skills, selection and role allocation, meritocracy, particularistic and universalistic standards, economic and

social functions, capitalism, ideological state apparatus, reproduction and legitimation, the myth of meritocracy, consensus versus conflict views, patriarchy. Use evidence from studies such as Durkheim, Parsons, Davis and Moore, Althusser, Bowles and Gintis, Willis, and Chubb and Moe, and develop the points in the Item.

Question 5

Spend about 30 minutes on this. You must apply your knowledge of unstructured interviews to the study of the particular issue of ethnic differences in achievement. It's not enough simply to discuss unstructured interviews in general.

Use the Item to help you. For example, it suggests that one research characteristic of ethnic differences in achievement is that there are a wide range of ethnic groups in UK schools today. However, unstructured interviews take a long time to complete and it may therefore be difficult to study a sample of all the different ethnic groups in schools.

Link other research characteristics of ethnic differences in achievement to the strengths and limitations of the method. For example, some pupils may not be fully fluent in English, which may make interviewing more difficult. However, because unstructured interviews are flexible, they may overcome this problem by rephrasing questions or asking for clarification of answers that are unclear.

Other characteristics include schools' possible reluctance to allow interviews on this issue, the influence of ethnic differences between interviewer and interviewee etc. Link these to particular strengths or limitations of the method.

Question 6

Spend about 15 minutes on this. Divide your time fairly equally between the two problems. Don't write a separate introduction; just start on your first problem. You could consider the problems of laboratory and/or field experiments. Possible problems include lack of informed consent, deception, harm to participants, studying the past or large-scale phenomena, the Hawthorne effect, representativeness, artificiality, difficulties identifying or controlling variables.

Choose two problems and describe each problem in some detail, explaining how it may arise in research. Do this by creating a chain of reasoning (see **Box 4.1**). For example, in laboratory experiments, participants should be told the true purpose of the research, so that they can give their informed consent. However, if this is done, they will know the researcher's aims and this may lead to the Hawthorne effect, where participants act in the way they believe the researcher