

**Lesson
Thirteen****Politics (2)****Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- understand the nature of political parties
- distinguish between political parties and pressure groups
- describe the different types of pressure or interest groups
- appreciate the influence of pressure groups on the political process
- formulate appropriate hypotheses for your project work

Context

The second lesson on politics follows on naturally from the first. Having looked at the nature of power in the last lesson, we take a closer look at the different political parties in Britain and, beyond that, consider the nature and influence of pressure groups who stand up for their point of view on particular issues. In the next lesson we will shift our attention to the subject of work.

In this lesson, we will also look in some detail at how to get your project started.



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Party Politics

Do you feel the **Conservatives** did a good job? Or are your sympathies more with **Labour**?

What do 'Conservative' and 'Labour' refer to? Political parties, of course. And what are political parties? Groups to which the candidates in elections belong. Groups which place certain policies before the electorate for approval and election. The parties are not registered or formally recognised in law, but in practice most candidates in elections, and almost all winning candidates, belong to one of the main parties.

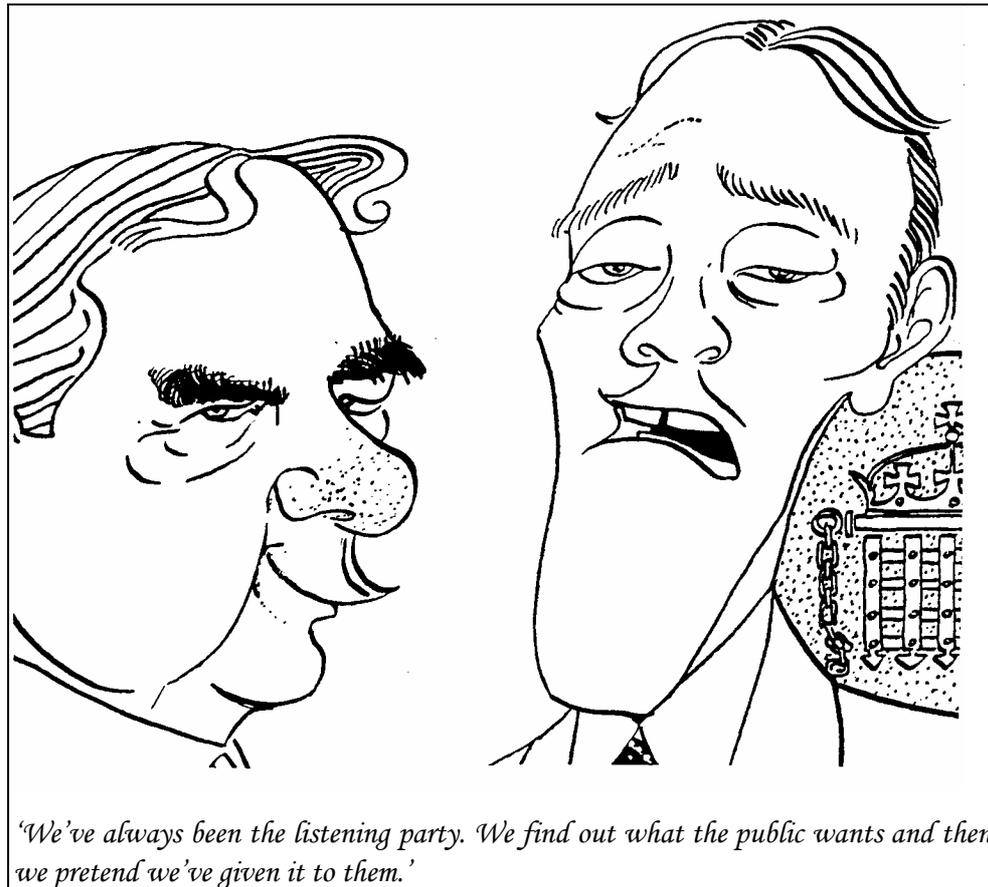
The system of political parties has existed in Britain since the 18th century, and is an essential element in the working of the constitution. The constitutional process in Britain consists of the main political parties competing in elections for political power. Since 1945, either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party has held power in Britain. Competition between two or more political parties is an essential feature of representative government.

What makes a Political Party?

Any political party then, is a group of people which comes together to contest for or to maintain itself in political power. According to **F.W. Riggs**, a political party is 'any organisation which nominates candidates for election to a legislature'. And it is the competition for office between political parties which gives the electorate (us, the general public!), a chance to select its leaders and to influence government policy. The party which wins the most seats at a general election usually forms the government.

Political parties are held to be representative for the following reasons :

- 1) Party policy is influenced by the public — it must reflect the interests and wishes of the people in its programmes if it wishes to be elected!
- 2) If certain sections of the public are not represented by the existing parties, new parties will emerge — e.g. the Labour Party, at the turn of the century in Britain, or the Green Party (?) as the century reaches its close.
- 3) Parties in power will not be elected again if they disregard the interests and opinions of the public.



- 4) To be elected to power, parties need the support of all sections of the people, so they cannot represent just sectional interests.

Activity 1	Fill in the blanks:
	A political party is any which nominates for to a legislature.

Project Work	Imagine you have one month to write a project about one of the main political parties and its attitude to a particular social or political issue. Decide which party you would choose and what issue you would explore.
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Write an outline plan for your project, saying what issue you have chosen and the aims of your project. This might include a list of questions you would like to find answers to and/or the hypotheses you would want to test.

Think of at least three sources of information that you would make use of to write your project. Explain what kind of information you would expect to get from them. You might write to the political party itself, for instance.

Pressure Groups

Those who hold political power are constantly being badgered — one group wants the local council to refuse permission to builders to erect modern buildings in historical cities, the environmentalists want the cutting of trees to be banned, the mine-workers want safety regulations made more stringent, and it goes on and on !

Such groups, which are organised to influence those who hold political power in order to protect the interests of its members or to promote some legal or social change, are **pressure groups** or **interest groups**.

According to **S. Finer**, **pressure groups** are organisations 'trying to influence the policy of public bodies, in their own chosen direction, though, unlike political parties, never themselves prepared to undertake the direct government of the country'.

What are then the basic differences between a political party and a pressure group?

- 1) The political party seeks power while the pressure group seeks only to influence those who hold it.
- 2) The pressure group has a specified objective which is limited to a specific issue or group of issues, but the political party will normally have a policy on every issue of importance to the elector.
- 3) The political party is generally long-lasting, while many pressure groups quickly disband once a particular issue has been resolved.
- 4) The political party is organised on the basis of electoral districts (council wards and parliamentary constituencies), while the pressure group simply organises where it has sufficient potential members.

Activity 2	Name the two fundamental differences between a political party and a pressure group.
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Different Kinds of Pressure Group

Name all the pressure groups you can think of!

Here are a few: TGWU — The Transport and General Workers Union, BMA — British Medical Association, The National Farmers Union, Shelter, Age Concern, SPCA — Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Abortion Law Reform Group, Campaign for Homosexual Equality, etc., etc.

Of course, many of these organisations undertake other activities besides the pressuring of those in power.

Pressure groups, then, are of diverse kinds. They vary widely in their aims, membership, methods and organisation.

The Transport and General Workers Union has well over a million members, and its main aim is to safeguard the employment and improve the wages and working conditions of its members. In order to do this, it sponsors Members of Parliament in the sense of making large contributions to their election expenses, and it has full-time elected officers and paid members of staff.

On the other hand, a pressure group can arise to fight a local council plan to permit a builder to erect a new housing estate; it will probably have very few members, no paid officers, one issue on which it is fighting, and it will cease to exist once the relevant issue has been resolved.

So, some pressure groups continue in existence for many years, while others are short lived. Some are very concerned with economic matters while others have no direct economic interests. Some are concerned with maximising public knowledge and support, while others work largely behind the scenes. Some are work-centred, while others are consumer-oriented.

The most common way of classifying these groups is to divide them into two categories — **sectional/ protective** groups and **promotional** groups.

Sectional/Protective groups: These are essentially formed to protect the interests of particular sections of society in their relations with the government and other bodies.

Obvious examples are Trade Unions such as the TGWU, employers' associations such as the Confederation of British Industries (CBI), and professional associations such as the BMA. They may occasionally wish to have a new law passed on a particular subject, but in general they aim to prevent legal and policy changes that could harm the interests of their members. They are often very large organisations that employ full-time staff to maintain links with government and political parties.

Promotional groups: These are groups which seek to promote a 'cause', not usually of direct economic benefit to members. They aim at changing government policy and public opinion on particular issues. Some are concerned with social behaviour e.g. the 'Howard League' for penal reform or the 'League Against Cruel Sports'.

Some are concerned with culture and the environment, e.g. the 'Council for the Preservation of Rural England' and 'Greenpeace'. Others are concerned with moral and religious matters, e.g. the 'Lord's Day Observance Society'. Many rely on voluntary support. They vary widely in terms of size, length of existence, range of policy, and so on.

Activity 3

Name the basic categories of pressure groups.



Pressure Group Tactics

We have seen what the aims of pressure groups are.

How do they realise these aims? How do they work?

Pressure group tactics are very interesting — they bring pressure to bear in a variety of ways:

- 1) Pressure groups contribute to the funds of political parties — trade unions contribute to the Labour Party.

- 2) Members of Parliament are employed by pressure groups to sponsor their aims. The Miners and Engineers Unions regularly had between 15 and 20 sponsored MP's in the House to act as their spokesmen.
- 3) Pressure groups may **petition** relevant officials, by collecting and sending in signatures of all those supporting their objectives. They can also LOBBY MP's by sending members in a mass to parliament to inform MP's of their views or to demand action.
- 4) Pressure groups may appeal to public opinion. An effective campaign can mobilise extensive public support especially if it attracts widespread media coverage. **Mass meetings**, with prominent figures as speakers, are one of the effective methods used by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and various other groups. **Demonstrations** carry this a stage further by involving supporters in a march or mass protest.
- 5) Various forms of **civil disobedience** are also used by pressure groups, e.g., black organisations breaking segregation laws.
- 6) Conscious use of **violence** in support of a cause is sometimes used as a means of protest. This may be because other non-violent tactics have had no effect.
- 7) Pressure groups in modern society provide the expert knowledge to governments without which they could not function properly. Groups such as the National Farmers Union are regularly represented on advisory committees to Ministers, and they are consulted before any new legislation is drawn up.

We see, then, that pressure groups use a variety of ways to achieve their aims and thus participate in the running of society, and make representative government possible in modern, complex society.

Activity 4	<p>What methods would you expect a group to use:</p> <p>(a) to protest against the visit of a foreign Head of State?</p> <p>(b) to campaign for Nuclear Disarmament?</p>
	<p>(a)</p> <p>(b)</p>

New Social Movements

This term is generally applied to groups such as feminists, environmentalists, anti-racists, anti-nuclear and civil rights movements which emerged in the 1960's and 1970's. They are movements which pose new challenges to the established culture and political systems of Western democracies. They focus on a particular social issue.

They divide roughly into two groups:

1. Those which are concerned with an issue to do with the natural environment which is seen as under threat (for example, animal rights, anti-nuclear and environmental groups);
2. Those committed to furthering the rights of historically marginalised groups (for instance, women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, the disabled).

These new movements tend to be informally organised and operate without a formal structure or centralised leadership. They tend to use a variety of tactics such as direct action, the media and even violence to pursue their aims. Their membership tends to be young and often drawn from those who work in the public sector, are students or who are unemployed. They have become an important new force in the political landscape.

Is Britain Democratic?

In a democracy, real power is supposed to lie with the people. The government which they elect is expected to follow their wishes and govern on their behalf. Does this happen in Britain? It is difficult to say. What should we measure? Who influences the decisions which the government makes or who benefits from them?

One person who has attempted to research this tricky question is **Christopher J Hewitt**. He starts off with the generally accepted premise that is democracy is to work then there needs to be at least two political parties from which the electorate can choose and a variety of pressure groups. To be elected, political parties must represent peoples' main concerns and continue to do so if they are to be re-elected.

In addition, a variety of pressure groups represents people's sectional interests, that is, the concerns of particular sections of society (for example, Friends of the Earth are concerned with conservation and the environment, the Confederation of British

Industry is concern with privately owned industry). They pressurise the government. In a democracy, since government represents everyone, they must not consistently favour one pressure group over another when passing legislation but be open to different shades of opinion.

Hewitt examined 24 policy issues which arose in the British parliament between 1944 and 1964, including such issues as Common Market entry, air pollution and education. His findings were that government took account of various pressure groups and the decision finally made represented a compromise between the various interested parties. He also found that governments took account of the views of the public on various issues since they paid attention to public opinion polls.

In summary, Hewitt's research seems to support the view that Britain is governed democratically.

Activity 5

Which researcher has tried to answer the question 'Is Britain a democracy?'



Project Work

Here are some more ideas that might make suitable titles for a sociological enquiry on politics:

Study of one pressure group — mostly secondary sources (topic suggested by SEG/AQA)

A study of two different pressure groups (CND and CAMRA) and how they work.

Summary

Lesson Thirteen: Politics (2)

You now understand the nature of political parties. You can distinguish between political parties and pressure groups. You can describe the different types of interest groups and can appreciate their influence on the political process.



Now read:

- o *Sociology: A New Approach*, ch. 8 and/or
- o *An Introduction to Sociology* (Ken Browne), pp. 115-142.

Project Work (continued from Lesson Ten)

It will now be assumed that you have an appropriate topic for a project. If not, refer back to Lesson Ten for advice on topic selection or ask your tutor for assistance. But having fixed on your subject, how should you go about deciding on the aims of your research and collecting information?

Although much of sociology may seem to be common sense, sociology is in fact the **science** of group interaction and behaviour, in which we strive to find objective answers to questions about why groups of people behave in certain ways in various situations. Most sociologists attempt to be as scientific as possible in formulating their theories.

Let's start right at the beginning of the whole process and look at the way in which the research question is posed.

Formulation of Research Questions

The first stage is to form a **hypothesis**. A hypothesis is a testable statement which the sociologist will attempt to either verify or refute. There are two types of hypothesis:

1. An Experimental Hypothesis

This predicts that there **will** be a reliable difference between the groups which are being studied. For example, our choice of television viewing **will** be affected by the newspaper(s) we read.

2. A Null Hypothesis

This predicts that there will be **no** reliable difference between the performances of the two groups. In the above example, the null hypothesis would be that our choice of newspaper **will not** have any effect on our viewing behaviour.

If you are studying the influence of other aspects of our culture on television viewing, here are some experimental hypotheses which you might want to consider at the planning stage:

Experimental Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis
Watching news programmes is more common amongst those who contribute to charities	Watching news programmes is not linked to our charitable donations
Certain programme choices result from compromise between different generations in a family	TV programme choices are unaffected by inter-generational family relationships
Regular watchers of “soaps” like <i>East Enders</i> and <i>Coronation Street</i> are more likely to be buyers of <i>Hello</i> magazine.	Regular watchers of “soaps” are no more likely to be buyers of <i>Hello</i> magazine than others.
Fans of violent sports programmes are more likely to have been uninterested in team sports at school.	Fans of violent sports programmes are no more likely to have been uninterested in team sports at school than their peers.

Some of these are better ideas than others and it is up to you to select one or two hypotheses from this list, or think up one or two of your own.

You will need to keep a record of the pros and cons of each chosen hypothesis. Here are two of the most important questions you should be asking about each of these ideas:

- is this a valid concern of a sociologist? (some of these questions might be better suited to a psychologist, for instance)
- what sort of worthwhile research can be done?

For instance, you might think of finding out whether watching *London’s Burning* makes people more likely to become arsonists. But do you know any arsonists? If not, you have probably reached a dead end straightaway.

It is not easy to find a good testable hypothesis. Do your best, but don’t worry too much if your hypothesis is less than perfect. The important thing is to be aware of (and to write down) your own limitations. You don’t have access to the same facilities as a professional sociologist and you should not be ashamed to admit it.

Subjects and Samples

Once he has formulated his hypothesis, a sociologist must then decide who is going to participate in the study. The people who take part in an experiment are called **subjects**. Sociologists have important decisions to make concerning the kind of subjects to be included in the study. Although most investigations only study a relatively small number of subjects, the aim is to be able to **generalise** the findings to the entire **population** from which the sample has been drawn.

Once a sociologist has decided on the kinds of subject he is going to investigate, for example, watchers of *East Enders* or school-age children or a particular ethnic group, he then has to find a way of selecting this group or **sample** of subjects from the total population of those viewers/children.

For example, he may wish to study a sample of just one hundred schoolchildren out of the total population of 15-year-olds in the whole of the country. If these subjects are selected in an **unbiased** way from the total population, it is more likely that we will be able to generalise the findings of the study to the population as a whole.

Random Sampling

Random sampling is probably the simplest and most widely used technique for drawing a sample from a population. In random sampling each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample and these selections are made in a purely chance, unbiased way.

In practice we're often limited in the extent to which we can select our subjects. For example, we might only be able to select our sample of school children from just two schools. However, random sampling can still be of use within these limitations — for example, randomly selecting ten subjects from each of the schools.

Sample Size

Another major decision is how many subjects to include in our investigation. There is no straightforward answer here, however; if the number is too small, the results are less likely to be reliable and generalisable to the population as a whole.

What's most important about the sample size is that it's representative of the population as a whole, otherwise it will be impossible to generalise any findings to the population.

Let's look in detail now at the formal experimental method.

The Experimental Method

The most important feature of the experimental method is the **control of variables**. By variables we mean, simply, anything that varies or changes or is made to vary or change. In conducting a formal experiment the sociologist deliberately changes one variable in order to see what effect this has on another variable.

For example, deliberately altering the amount of violent television a child watches and measuring the effect this has on his subsequent behaviour.

Independent and Dependent Variables

In the experimental set-up which we have just described, the variable which is directly altered is called the *independent variable*. The variable which we observe and measure any changes in is called the *dependent variable*.

Here are three hypothetical experiments in which we have pointed out the independent and dependent variables.

Example 1

In a study into the relationship between reading the *Guardian* newspaper and watching news programmes on television; the independent variable is the readership the *Guardian* newspaper and the dependent variable is the total amount of time spent watching news programmes.

Example 2

In a study into the effects of maternal deprivation, infants separated from their mothers are either cared for in a large institution or in a small foster home. Six months later they are all assessed on their social adjustment.

The independent variable is the type of care (institution or foster home) and the dependent variable is their score on the social adjustment scale.

Now try some examples for yourself.

The Control of Variables

There are many variables which should be held constant in an experiment. These include *subject variables* such as differences in age, sex, intelligence, social class and so on.

In the experimental situation there is an **experimental group** and a **control group**. All conditions and variables are the same for these two groups **except** for the **independent variable**. If we then observe the performance of these two groups under the dependent variable and there is a significant difference between the groups' performance, it's fair to assume that this difference must have been caused by the independent variable.

This will be clearer if we look at an example:

Experimental hypothesis:

Reading the *Guardian* newspaper leads to a big increase in watching news programmes on television.

Subjects:

Ten *Guardian* readers and ten readers of other newspapers are chosen at random from the adult population.

Independent variable:

Readership of the *Guardian*.

Dependent variable:

Amount of news programmes watched.

Experiment:

The subjects are asked to keep a record of the exact amounts of time spent watching television news programmes in a specified period (e.g. a month).

Results:

Guardian readers watched an average of 12.4 hours of news programmes during the month. Readers of other newspapers watched an average of 12.2 hours of news programmes during the month.

Conclusion

The hypothesis must be rejected for two connected reasons: (1) there was only a 2% difference in the amount of news programmes watched, and (2) the sample sizes were rather too small to provide definite proof anyway.

It is only by using such an experimental method that we can make such a conclusion about cause and effect. In non-experimental methods such as surveys and case studies, all variables are free to vary, thus we can never be sure that changes in one variable are as a result of changes in another variable.

Standardised Instructions and Procedures

Another essential feature of an experiment is that all subjects are given identical instructions. This means that if instructions are to be given to the subjects these are often either read from a printed sheet or played to them from a tape.

Although this may increase the formality of the situation it avoids an additional variable being introduced when one group could be given clear, precise instructions and another group given rushed and garbled instructions.

As always the ultimate aim when using the experimental method is to ensure that *in all respects except one* the experimental group and the control group are identical.

Naturalistic Observational Studies

In naturalistic observation, the sociologist takes careful and detailed observations of behaviour in the natural setting. This may be, for example, a child's play behaviour in the nursery school setting or conversation within the home.

A sociologist may choose this method rather than the more highly controlled experimental method because he feels that only in a free non-controlled situation will behaviour occur in its true form. This may be particularly so when studying children.

However, although such studies are less formal and rigorous than experiments, they still involve a great deal of careful preparation. This includes making decisions as to which types of behaviour should be observed and how it should be recorded; at what time intervals observations will be made and whether or not groups will be aware that they are being observed.

Drawbacks of Naturalistic Observation

1. Causality

As with correlational studies we can never confirm any cause and effect relationships concerning the behaviour we are observing. For example, we might carefully observe the behaviour of an 8 year old boy, note his extreme aggression towards other children and the fact that his conversation is constantly littered with references to various violent television programmes that he watches but we could never say that the latter is **causing** the former.

2. Observer Bias

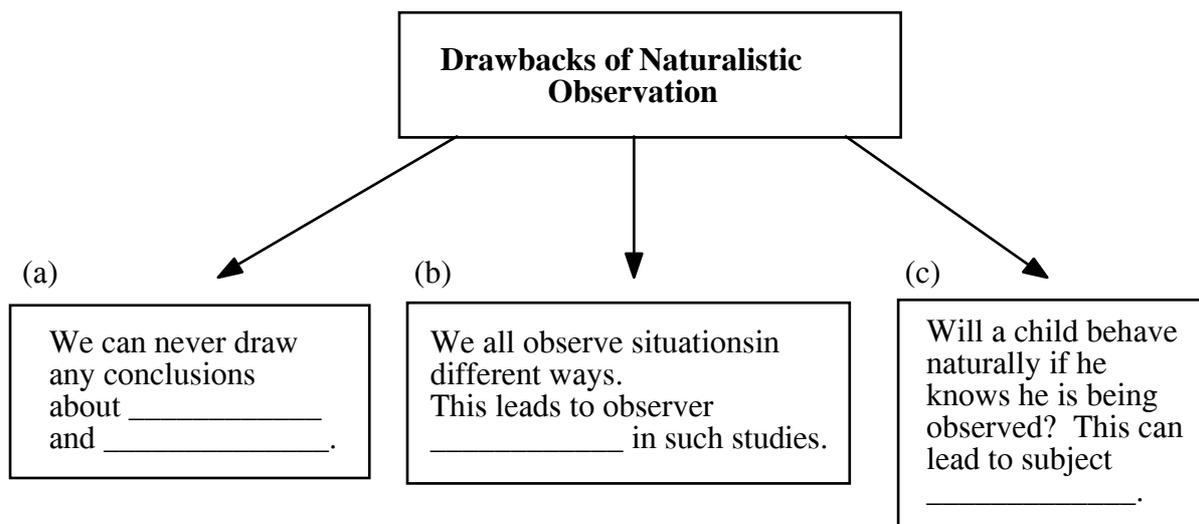
We all observe situations in different ways, largely as a result of our past experience. This makes such observational techniques highly subjective and open to the differing points of view of individual observers.

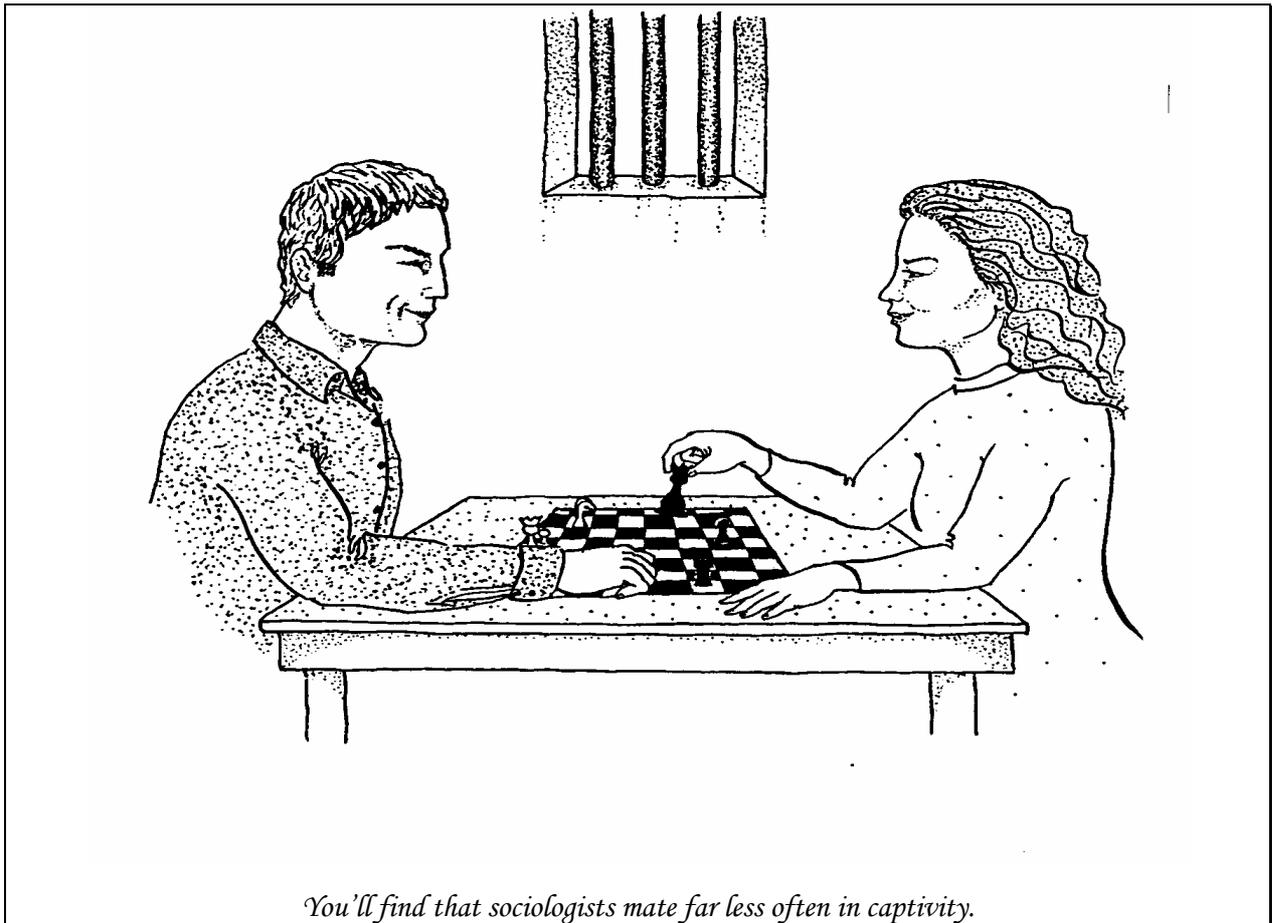
3. Subject bias

If subjects know they are being observed, will they behave naturally? Knowledge that he is being observed could cause people to behave either self-consciously or to make an exhibition of themselves. However, most experienced observers are able to observe unobtrusively and state that they are very quickly absorbed into the child's environment and are soon ignored.

Activity 6

Complete the following diagram.





Surveys

The survey technique can be defined as gathering information by questioning a large sample of people. Surveys usually consist of a carefully-constructed set of questions, which are presented either as a questionnaire or in an interview given to a large, usually random, sample of people. Great care needs to be taken in the way in which the questions are worded since this can influence a subject's reply.

One classic example of the survey technique was carried out by **Sears** and his associates in 1957 in an American investigation of child-rearing techniques. Amongst many findings they demonstrated social class differences in toilet-training techniques. Working class mothers used punishment more often than middle class mothers. Also the timing of toilet training was found to vary according to social class with working class mothers training their children more rapidly than middle class mothers.

Drawbacks of the Survey Technique

The main drawback with surveys is that they usually concentrate solely on verbal or written reports and not actual behaviour. Although the subject may be attempting to be completely honest, what we say we do is often **not** what we actually do! Also, subjects are often required to report some aspect of their past behaviour, thus we are relying on their memories which may not be accurate.

So if you do opt for a survey to explore the effects of television on behaviour, make sure you note down the limitations of your research and when drawing conclusions settle for the fact that they can only be tentative.

Case Studies

This is often referred to as the 'clinical method' because it is frequently used in the clinical setting when treating patients. A case study involves an intense study of just *one subject*, including their past history and current behaviour.

This is an extremely subjective method which involves no scientific proof but it can sometimes be useful in helping us understand social behaviour. It is also difficult to generalise any findings from a case study because they are based on the study of just one subject. Case studies are often more appropriate for psychological research than sociological research.

The Choice of Project Methods: a Summary

It is up to the sociologist, such as yourself, to decide which method(s) would be right for your particular investigation.

Remember that you will be marked on the appropriateness of your choice. There should be a separate section in a project which discusses the pros and cons of various methods, as they apply to the problem you have chosen, and a justification of the actual methods you have used.

By now you should have made a clear start on your project and have concrete plans for carrying it through. By the end of Lesson Sixteen, it will be assumed that you have collected together some data and some assistance will be given on the analysis of that data.

Key Terms

Pressure Groups
Interest Groups
Sectional/Protective Groups
Promotional Groups
Petitioning and Lobbying
Civil Disobedience
Democracy



Although this topic is not directly covered, you might now read:

- *GCSE Sociology for AQA*, pp. 74-77.

Suggested Answers to Activities**One**

Organisation, candidates, election.

Two

- 1) A political party seeks power, while a pressure group seeks only to influence those in power.
- 2) A pressure group has specific interests, while a political party has a wide spectrum of interests.

Three

- 1) Sectional/Protective; 2) Promotional

Four

- 1) Demonstration; 2) Mobilize public opinion through mass meetings etc.

Five

Christopher Hewitt

Six

- (a) cause effect
- (b) bias
- (c) bias