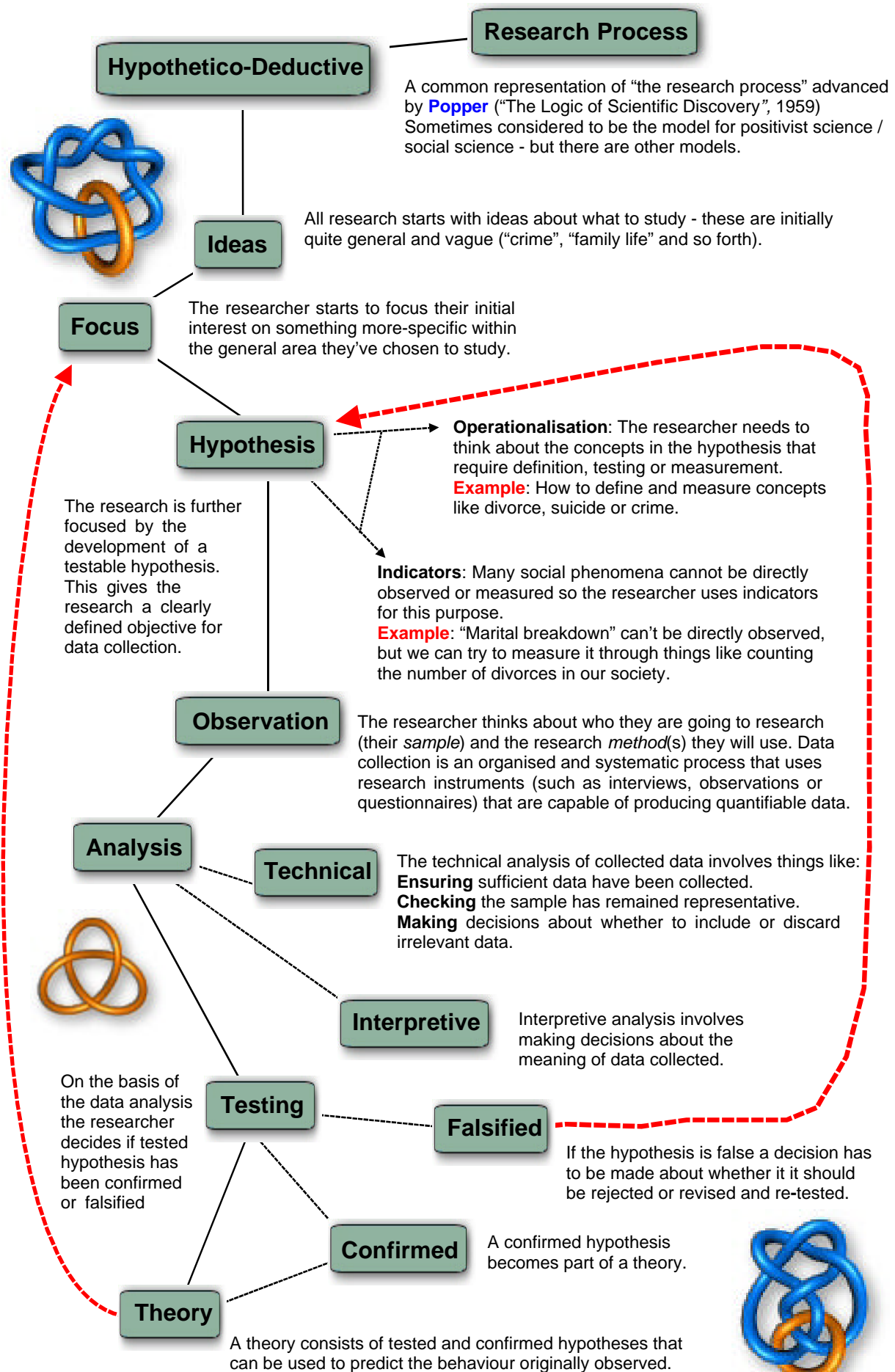


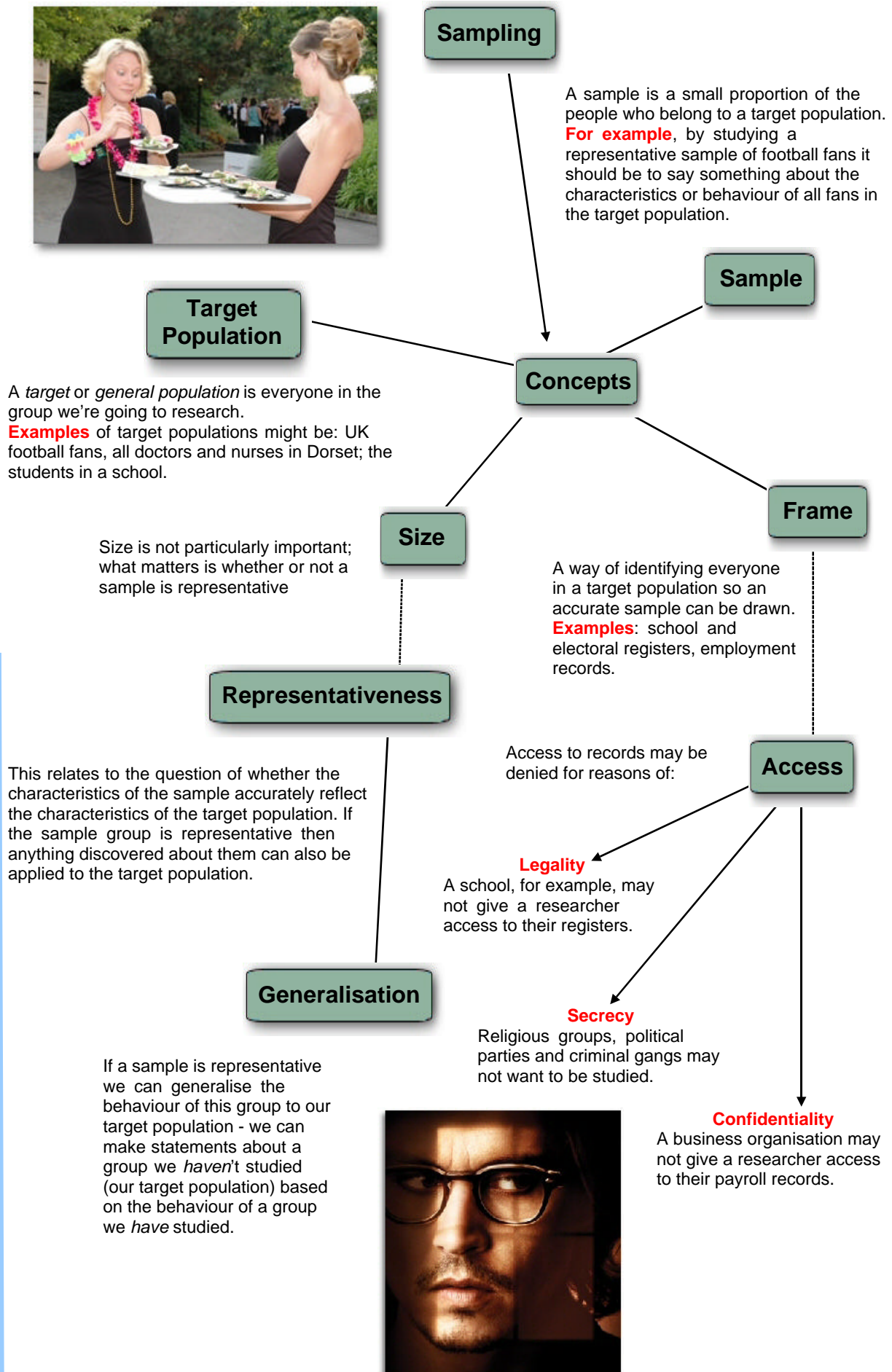
AS Sociology

Revision

**Sociological
Methods**

The Research Process





Time: Both are relatively quick and easy ways of selecting samples.

Random: They produce random or near-random samples, based on chance.

Expense: Both are reasonably inexpensive to create.

Information: Other than some way of identifying people in the target population (a name for example), the researcher doesn't require any other knowledge about this population.

Sampling Frame: These techniques *always* need a sampling frame - and one may not be available.

Unrepresentative: Sampling based on chance may not produce a representative sample.

Based on the *probability* the random selection of names from a *sampling frame* will produce a sample representative of a target population. For it to be truly random, *everyone* in the target population must have an equal chance of being chosen. A simple random sample, therefore, is similar to a *lottery*.



The general aim is to ensure that the characteristics of the people we study (our sample) are an exact match of the people in our target or general population. In this way, by studying a relatively small group we can generalise our findings to the the target population.

Example: Although there are around 35 million people eligible to vote in UK general elections (the target population) polling organisations (such as Gallup or MORI), can accurately predict the broad trends in UK voting behaviour on the basis of a carefully-constructed representative sample of around 1,000 people.

This technique divides (or *stratifies*) a target population into groups who's characteristics are *known* to the researcher (such as males and females) and treat *each* group as a random sample in its own right.

Known differences in the target population are accurately reflected in the sample and it will be broadly representative.

Focus: The sample is focused on relevant distinctions in the target population (age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc).

Size: Stratified samples can be relatively small, since it's possible to make certain we have accurately reflected our target population.

Resources: *Quota* samples are usually relatively cheap and quick to construct accurately.

Advantages

Disadvantages

Simple Random

Systematic

Representative

Types

Random

Stratified

Quota

Advantages

Disadvantages

The main difference is that the selection of the sample is not truly random. In other words, each in the sample (for example men as one and women as the other) is chosen in a non-random way - everyone in the target population *does not* have an equal chance of being selected for the sample.

Accurate information about the target population isn't always available.

Out-Dated: Information about the target population may be outdated by the time the research is actually done

Unrepresentative: *Stratified quota* sample selection is not truly random; it may be unrepresentative of a target population.

For some types of research the sociologist might *not* want to make generalisations about a very large group based only on a sample of that group. They might, for example, simply be interested in the behaviour of the group itself, rather than what they may or may not represent.

Case Studies

The objective is to study, in great detail, the characteristics of a particular group (or "case"). Although technically an example of a *research method*, case studies offer a useful illustration of a non-representative sample because the researcher isn't concerned about whether the people or groups being studied are representative of all other, similar, groups. The "sample" in this respect *is* the target population - an acceptable form of research as long as the researcher doesn't try to generalise their findings.

Non-Representative

Opportunity

Best Opportunity

This involves deliberately choosing a sample to provide the *best possible opportunity* to show the hypothesis you're testing is *true*. If your research shows the hypothesis is *false* for this group, there's a *high probability* it will be false for any other related groups.

Example: Goldthorpe, Lockwood et al "The Affluent Worker In The Class Structure" (1965).

Snowball



So-called because, just as a snowball rolling downhill gets bigger as it picks-up more snow, a *snowball sample* picks up more and more people to be in the sample over time. This type of sampling may be used in situations where a researcher can't get hold of a *sampling frame* for a target population or they know nothing about the characteristics of their target population (which rules out stratified sampling).

Example: Charlton and Panting ("Mobile Phone Usage and Abuse", 2001) used an *opportunity sample* of schoolchildren in the absence of any available sampling frame.

Advantages

Availability

It allows a researcher to construct a sample in situations that would be impossible using any other sampling technique.

Resources

It can be a relatively cheap and quick method of sampling.



Disadvantages

Unrepresentative

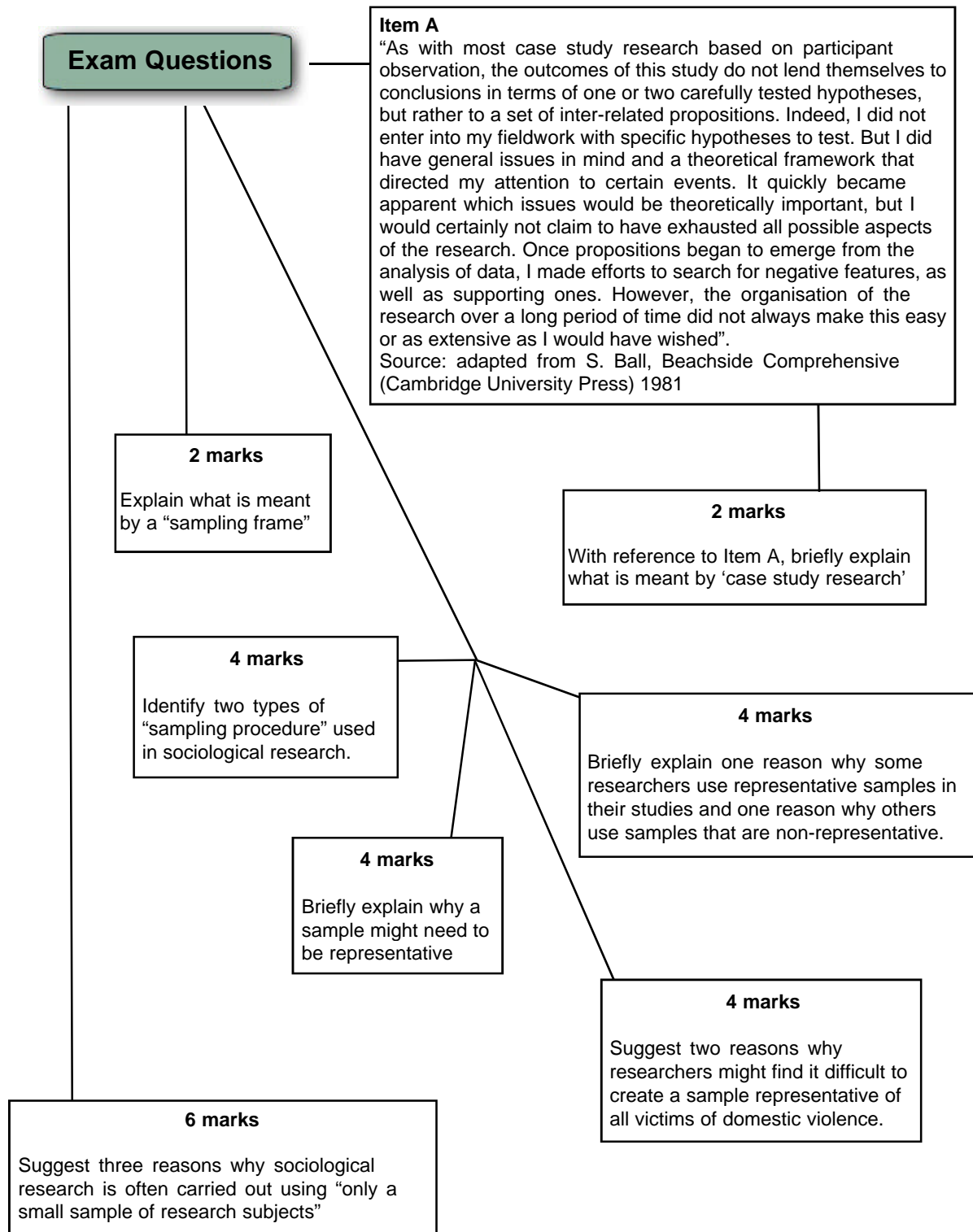
The sample is unlikely to be truly representative.

Reliability

There is no way of checking whether your sample is representative.

Self-Selection

Because the members of the sample effectively "choose themselves" representativeness is invariably very low. There is also the related problem of one-sidedness - the people attracted to your research are those with very strong (positive or negative) feelings about whatever it is you are researching.



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