Name of Method

Content Analysis

Brief Outline of Method

As the name suggests, Content Analysis is used by sociologists (and other social scientists) to investigate the content of the Mass Media (, although it has applications across a wider range of spheres - the analysis of **historical documents**, for example). In other words, it's used to explore the content of various media (books, magazines, TV, film etc.,) in order to discover how particular issues are presented. At its most basic, content analysis is a **statistical exercise** that involves **categorising** some aspect or quality of people's behaviour and **counting** the number of times such behaviour appears (a **simple content analysis** might involve **counting** the number of minutes men and women appear on screen in a programme such as "EastEnders"). In this way, content analysis helps us to build-up a picture of the **patterns of behaviour** that **underlie** (and are usually hidden from view) the social interaction portrayed in the media.

Strengths / Uses of Method	Weaknesses / Limitations of Method
 It is relatively easy to gain access to the broadcast or publication you want to study. It is relatively easy and inexpensive to build a representative sample. It produces highly reliable (usually quantitative) data. Content Analyses are usually easy to repeat ("replicate"). Complex forms of social interaction can be quantified using a standardised framework (the content analysis grid) that can be applied across a wide range of media. It can present an objective account of events, themes, issues and so forth that may not be immediately apparent to a reader, viewer or general consumer. It is an unobtrusive method - it doesn't involve the researcher interacting with the people / things being studied. The researcher cannot, therefore, influence the behaviour of the people being studied. 	 May not be as objective as it claims since the researcher must select and record data accurately. In some instances (such as a television programme) the researcher must make choices about how to interpret particular forms of behaviour (for example, when a character is acting aggressively). For example, the researcher decides things like: what categories will be used and whether or not everyone be put neatly into a particular category). By attempting to quantify behaviour (such as the relationship between people), this method may not tell us very much about the quality of people's relationships. May be time-consuming (for example, analysing a range of newspapers or TV programmes in detail). As with all statistical data, it provides us with a snapshot of people's behaviour at a single moment in their life. It describes, rather than explains, people's behaviour. It does not tell us watching.

Sociological Research Skills

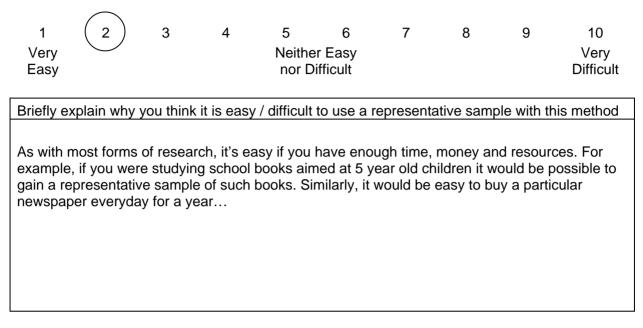
How **reliable** is this method? [Circle one option]

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				ns, try lookin the bero kil					rself waiting

Next time you watch one of these films, try looking-out for this theme. If you find yourself waiting enthusiastically for the point at which the hero kills the villain then there might just be something in this idea...

Sociological Research Skills

How easy is it to use a **representative** sample with this method? [Circle one option]



How easy is it to generalise your findings using this method? [Circle one option]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very			Neither Easy						Very
Easy				nor D	ifficult				Difficult

Briefly explain why you think it is easy / difficult to generalise your findings using this method

In one way it might be possible to make generalisations (for example, if you've studied a newspaper for a year it will be possible to identify general themes and patterns in the way content is presented to the consumer.

However, in other respects it may be more difficult to make generalisations (for example, about a comedy programme lasting six episodes - there are so many different types of comedy it may not be representative of all types).