

PET EVALUATION FOR DIFFERENT RESEARCH METHODS

FOR 10 AND 20 MARK QUESTIONS ON PAPER 1 AND 3
GROUP B

Laboratory Experiments

PET

Quantitative Data



Practical

Advantages

- Reliable- once experiment is conducted , other scientists can then replicate it.
- - the original experimenter can specify precisely what steps were followed I the original experiment and it is a detached method – the scientists personal feelings and opinions have no effect on the conduct or outcome of the experiment.
- once the experiment is set up, if it takes place in a lab, researchers can conduct research like any other day-job – there is no travelling to visit respondents for example, everyone comes to the researcher.

Disadvantages

- Society is very complex, therefore in practice it would be impossible to identify and control all the possible variables.
- Laboratory experiments cannot be used to study the past, since it is impossible to control variables that were acting in the past rather than the present.
- Usually only study small samples – making it difficult to investigate large-scale social phenomena (religions , voting patterns) – therefore reduces their representativeness.
- Time Consuming due to the amount of time used to manipulate and observe the variables.
- May also be costly due to the resources needed to conduct the experiment.

Ethical there are ethical objections to conducting experiments on human beings, at least under certain circumstances.

Advantages

- The participants know that they are involved in an experiment and this is more ethically advantaged compared to covert observation where the participant is unaware of the research.

Disadvantages

- Lack of informed consent- This may be difficult to obtain from groups such as children or people with learning difficulties who may be unable to understand the nature and purpose of the experiment.
- Deception – it is generally considered wrong to mislead people as to the nature of the experiment (Stanley Milgram- studies on obedience to authority. Milgram lied to his research participants about the purpose of the research)
- Harm the experiment may also harm the participants. In Milgram's experiments, many research participants were observed to 'sweat ,stutter , tremble, groan, bite their lips and dig their nails into their flesh. Full –blown , uncontrollable seizures were observed for three subjects'
- Researchers must ensure that is vulnerable groups are to be used (elderly, disables, mentally ill, etc.) that they must receive special care

Theoretical

Advantages

- Controlled conditions also allow the researchers to eliminate the effects of 'extraneous variables'. Extraneous variables are undesirable variables which are not of interest to the researcher but might interfere with the results of the experiment.

Disadvantages

- The Hawthorne effect – a laboratory is not a normal or natural environment- therefore it is likely that any behaviour in these conditions are unnatural or artificial . – if people do not behave in true- to – life ways – the experiment will not produce valid results.
- Elton Mayo into factors affecting workers productivity in western electric company's Hawthorne plant. – mayo concluded that the workers were not responding to the changes he was making to the experimental variables (such as the lighting) but to the fact that they were being studied and wished to please the researcher.
- Free Will- humans differ from plants, rocks and other phenomena studied by natural scientists – we have free will, conscience and choice. – therefore our behaviour cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect- instead can be understood by the choices we freely make.

Outline and explain two problems with using experiments in sociological research [10]

Evaluate the view that experiments are not a suitable method in sociological research [20]

Define the method	Example of studies that have used it
<p>A structured interview is where an interviewer and respondent engage in a conversation from a set of questions which have been pre-planned. Each respondent will be asked the same questions in the same way under a structured schedule with the questions following the same order each time.</p>	<p>-sex survey</p>
Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cover large numbers of people • Less time consuming compared to methods such as unstructured interviews. • Easy for gathering quantitative data. • Easy to replicate as a fixed set of questions are used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming compared to a self-completion questionnaire. Also In terms of data collection compared with online questionnaires. • Researcher has to be skilled enough to ask questions in the same way as they do to others. • Hard to do with vulnerable groups
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interviewer bias as all applicants are asked same questions • No issue with consent as its implicit from participants willing to take part in interview. • Participants can leave at any point • Data can be kept confidential • Suitable for sensitive issues e.g a sex survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May seem intrusive due of the structured questions and the participant having less of an ability to expand on their answers.
<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive to positivists as allow for hypothesis testing with ease. • Structured interviews are quick and easy to conduct whilst retaining the same method, improving reliability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity is an issue as the results gathered may not provide a true measurement which provides what is really happening. • Representativeness is an issue as structured interviews don't allow for a complete reflection of society as a whole.

Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain two advantages of structured interviews

[10]

Outline and explain two practical issues of structured interviews.

[10]

Applying material from item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using structured interviews to investigate student subcultures.

[20]

Applying material from item B and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using structured interviews in sociological research.

[20]

2ND YEAR A-LEVEL RESEARCH METHODS EVALUATION SHEET

<p style="text-align: center;">Define the method</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: blue; font-size: 1.2em;"><i>Questionnaires</i></p> <p>Printed or written questions either open or closed. Used to collect primary data from individuals about a study.</p> <p>Aim to gather quantitative data, however, they can also receive qualitative data. This method is preferred by Positivists.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Example of studies that have used it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census – sent every 10 years • Sex survey – 20,000 interviews with 50,000 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal • Face to face • Online
Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick as they can be filled in easily. • Gain detail from open questions. • Easy to analyse the closed questions. • Can use larger samples if they have enough funding. E.G. Sex Survey • No need for interviewer as they fill in the questionnaire themselves. • Easy to identify trends over a period of time due to previous data gathered. 	<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can change anything once it has been sent out. • Time consuming for analysis. • There is no clarity of the question therefore it can lead to a misinterpretation of the question.
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to withdraw as participants can just not take part. • The questionnaires are confidential – anonymous • Gained consent as the participant is filling it out themselves. 	<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's no proof that they are 100% accurate as we don't know whether the participant is telling the truth or not. • Have to be careful on the topic as they can't really be used for sensitive topics unless they are put together carefully. E.G. Sex survey – months of preparation.
<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positivists <i>prefer</i> love them as they gather quantitative data. • Representative as they can have large samples. • Reliable as they can be repeated over time. E.G. Census • Exclude external variables. 	<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is a low respondent rate the sample won't be representative. • If the questions aren't worded correctly it can reduce the reliability as participants may not understand or they might not feel that they can answer fully. • Interpretivists don't like them as they don't provide an in depth understanding of the individual. <p style="color: blue; font-size: 1.2em;">- Lack validity because they do not explore meaning.</p>

Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain.... *why positivists see detachment as an advantage of questionnaires* [10]

Outline and explain.... *why questionnaires are high in reliability* [10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view...

~~that closed~~ ^{or postal} questionnaires the advantages ~~and~~
~~disadvantages~~ of postal questionnaires - as
opposed to those filled out in person.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view...

That self-completion questionnaires are a good
method for investigating disorders from
school.

[20]

<p style="text-align: center;">Define the method</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STATISTICS</p> <p>Numerical data, which is often based on a large scale data set. Statistics can either be “hard” or “soft”, hard statistics are statistics that can’t be manipulated or changed such as birth and marriage statistics, whereas “soft” statistics, can be manipulated or changed, based on the way categories are created, including crime and poverty statistics. Statistics are often used in sociological research.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Example of studies that have used it</p> <p>OFFICIAL: government: births/deaths, census NON-OFFICIAL: data from surveys such as the sex survey</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Advantages</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Disadvantages</p>
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for comparison- show trends over time • Easy to interpret • Can be useful to display data e.g. graphs • Easy to access e.g. ONS website • Huge amounts of data can be accessed, in relatively little time • Not very time consuming 	<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be easily manipulated or changed • Expensive to collect- 2011 Census cost approx.. 480 million pounds • If collected by another source- could be hard to access or some details may be missing eg. Government statistics • Categories/ indicators used may not fit researcher’s • Analysis can be time consuming
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids ethical issues because many statistics are already in the public domain • Kept anonymous • Don’t need permission to use the statistics, if they are displayed in the public domain e.g. in the media or online 	<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants cannot stop data from being used in future if in public domain • Researcher may not know conditions under which data is collected or by who- could be collected unethically • Data can be manipulated
<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positivists, favour them as stats. Allow them to compare trends over time (quant) • Help researches build hypotheses by looking at trends in existing data • Large samples- representative • Reliable (hard stats.)- repeated and similar results are obtained • Shows trends over years, help with planning society 	<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretivists criticise statistics- does not show meanings behind data. Interpretivists prefer qualitative methods that give more detail • Some lack validity- not a ‘mirror image’. Eg. Crime statistics may lack validity as some crimes are under-reported • Can be manipulated by the state which also reduces validity • Interpretivists argue statistics are not objective and are just social constructions, the product of a process of interpretation and decision-making by those with authority. • ‘Dark figure’ reduces representativeness

<p>Positivists would favour stats. As they are claimed to be reliable and objective.</p>	<p>Interpretivist Cicourel rejected the claim that stats are real, objective and reliable, he believes they are just social constructs, and that statistics can be used to investigate how they are socially constructed.</p> <p>Marxists also reject the positivist claim, they see stats as serving the interests of capitalism. Therefore are “ideological”</p> <p>Feminists criticise stats. Oakley rejects them as quantitative methods are deemed as a “masculine” or patriarchal model of research - ideological</p>
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Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain two problems with statistics

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that statistics are the best method for positivist sociologists

[20]

<p>Define the method</p>	<p>Example of studies that have used it</p>
<p>Official statistics refers to numerical data collected and published by Governments.</p> <p>Non-official statistics refers to numerical data collected and published by a variety of public and private organisations.</p> <p>These statistics can cover a wide range of issues. Much of this data is collected using surveys e.g market research.</p> <p>Hard statistics can't be manipulated or changed such as statistics on birth, marriages and deaths.</p> <p>Soft statistics can be manipulated based on the way categories are created.</p>	<p>Crime or marriage statistics.</p> <p>The Rowntree Foundation, publishes statistics on poverty.</p> <p>Collected and published by the official National Statistics.</p> <p>Statistics on crime, poverty and unemployment.</p>

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Readily available and cheap to use, avoiding time and money for the researcher -primary research doesn't involve a massive amount of time. - Statistics are comprehensive in coverage, meaning that they increase in representativeness. allow us to make comparison between groups. For example, social groups or religions. -Can provide usefully background material when sociological researchers are deciding what issues to study -Official statistics they often over a long time-span and therefore allow examination trends over time, such as on levels of educational qualifications or crime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Official statistics are collected for administrative reasons rather than sociological research. Hence the definitions may be unsuitable for that research. For example, the French government doesn't collect data on race, religion or ethnicity of its citizens. Producing non-official statistics on issues such as religion, suicide or prisoners in its jails. -As official statistics are produced by the government, some statistics may be massaged to avoid political embarrassment in the public sphere. For instances the state may collect data on welfare claimants rather than tax evaders. -There may be mismatches between sets of statistics. We might find that two sets of data cover slightly different areas and therefore different populations. Making it impossible to establish the degree of correlation between ill health and unemployment, for example.
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Official statistics avoid many ethical issues as they are publicly available and unlikely to breach personal confidence or cause harm. -Official statistics can be produced without needing the permission from the people who were in an original survey or sample. -Official statistics are not linked to name individual, making some statics anonymous and confidential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For sociology researches, they may need permission from the people who create statistics to use them in further study. - Individuals can't opt out of the data that may be used in the future. - Statistics mean that we don't know if the data was collected ethically in the first place.

Theoretical	
<p>-Collected in regular intervals, which show trends and patterns over time. Meaning that they can be used for before and after studies to identify correlations between variables, suggesting possible cause and effect relationships.</p> <p>-Positivists regard official statistics as reliable source of data, as they are compiled in standardised categories and collection techniques can be easily replicated. For example, the Census or producing statistics from registration data such as births or deaths.</p> <p>-Statistics are comprehensive in coverage, meaning that they increase in representativeness. Allow us to make comparison between groups. For example, social groups or religions.</p>	<p>- Interpretivists argue that statistics are not objective facts but merely social constructions.</p> <p>- Interpretivists also argue that they are not valid as they only produce an overview or snapshot of an issues, rather than the meaning behind the statistics.</p> <p>-Statistics from official surveys may be somewhat less representative as they are only based of the relevant population.</p> <p>- Official statistics are created by the state, feminist regard the state maintaining patriarchal oppression, meaning that official statistics are a form of patriarchal ideology. From example, there are few statistics that mention women's unpaid domestic labour.</p>

Outline and explain two problems with official statistics [10]

Evaluate the view that official statistics provide the most accurate form of data for positivist researchers [20]

NON PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

- Used by positivists, they may use an 'observation schedule'
- Gaining qualitative information and Involves observing participants without actively participating
- Can be covert or overt.

PRACTICAL	ETHICAL	THEORETICAL
<p>Easy to record information and observations if you are not participating. Also, the researcher can make judgements and observe body language used</p> <p>Participant observation might be the only method for gaining access to particular groups – (a researcher using questionnaires to research street gangs is likely to be seen as an authority figure and unlikely to be accepted) Researches are limited by their own characteristics.</p> <p>This method tends to be time consuming and expensive – it will possibly take time to build rapport if covert observation.</p> <p>With overt participation, you can take on the role of the 'professional stranger' meaning respondents might tell you things because they know you're not one of them. Overt participation is less stressful and risky for the researcher too.</p> <p>In overt non-participation observation, the characteristics of the researcher don't really matter –</p> <p>It may be hard to gain accurate results if the researcher is overt and watching from a distance.</p>	<p>With Covert participant observation, the participants are deceived and cannot give informed consent to participate in the research.</p> <p>For both overt and covert non-participation observation, the researcher will have to consider confidentiality and anonymity/privacy.</p> <p>Consent is needed when studying vulnerable groups – (getting consent from Gate-Keepers) For example, the principal, teachers, parents, carers, etc.</p> <p>In covert non-participant observation, if the researcher was to be outed, they could be put in danger if studying particular groups such as gangs.</p>	<p>If the observation is overt it may cause the Hawthorne Effect; if the participants are aware they were being studied they could alter/change their behaviour – this making the data invalid.</p> <p>Non-participant observation is much more flexible than other methods, it allows the researcher to enter the situation with an open mind – adding validity.</p> <p>Could lack objectivity – it can be very difficult for the researcher to avoid subjectivity and forming biased views of the group being studied</p> <p>Could lack validity depending on how they operationalise concepts. E.g., if you were studying anti-school subcultures, the observer may see certain behaviour (such as interrupting the teacher) as disruptive where as they may be wanting to participate and therefore the subject is being measured invalidly.</p> <p>Can be reliable as the procedure is standardized therefore it can be easily replicated.</p> <p>As non-participant observation is less time consuming than other research methods, they're able to use a larger sample, increasing the representativeness of their data.</p>

Examples of studies using Non-participant observation

- Holden –studied ethnic integration between children in playgrounds

Outline and explain two advantages of using participant observation. (10 marks)

Outline and explain two issues with using non-participant observation when studying vulnerable groups (10 marks)

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that non-participant observation is useful when studying anti-school subcultures (20 marks)

Applying material from the item and your knowledge evaluate the view that non-participant observation is useful when studying teachers (20 marks)

CONTENT ANALYSIS

<p style="text-align: center;">Define the method</p> <p>Content analysis is a technique for systematically describing written, spoken or visual communication. It provides a quantitative description.</p> <p>Content analysis is a method for dealing with the contents of documents, especially those produced by mass media. Content analysis has been used to analyse news broadcasts, children's reading schemes, newspaper articles etc. There are two main types of content analysis; formal (creates quantitative data) and thematic (this type of analysis is qualitative).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Example of studies that have used it</p> <p>Formal content analysis – Lesly Best (1993) analysed gender roles in children's reading schemes, and she found that females were portrayed in a limited range of stereotyped roles.</p> <p>Thematic analysis – Keith Soothill and Sylvia Walby (1991) made a thematic analysis of the ways newspapers reported rape cases.</p>
<p>Advantages</p>	<p>Disadvantages</p>
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ As the data already exists this means saving time and money actually collecting data for research. ➤ It is easy to find sources to use for research. ➤ This is said to be a reliable method, meaning that it is easy for others to repeat and check the findings and by repeating studies this can also allow a researcher to find trends over time e.g. if media images of a group have changed. ➤ This method is favoured as it is a very cheap method. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Both formal content analysis and thematic analysis are very time consuming methods, it can take a researcher a lot of time to code or analyse data. ➤ Thematic analysis is criticised as it doesn't attempt to collect a representative sample and therefore cannot be generalised to wider range of documents.
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This method tends to avoid any major ethical issues, because it is using data that is already available. ➤ This method doesn't use any participation and communication with the individuals who are part of the research as it is secondary data, so the researcher doesn't need to worry about gaining consent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How the data is interpreted could be problematic for some people
<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This method of formal content analysis is very attractive to positivists. ➤ Formal content analysis – quantitative data ➤ This method produces objective and representative data. ➤ Generalisability ➤ Thematic analysis on the other hand is popular with interpretivists and feminists & uses qualitative analysis. They aim to reveal the underlying meanings in the data. ➤ Thematic analysis aims to uncover the author's ideological bias. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interpretivists criticise formal content analysis for its lack of validity, as they argue that simply counting how many times something occurs in a document tells nothing about meaning. ➤ Interpretivists also argue that the method is not as objective as positivists may claim. ➤ Often argued that there is a tendency to select evidence that supports a researcher's hypothesis as opposed to seeking valid evidence. ➤ The interpretation of the document may vary from researcher to researcher.

Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain....

Two practical advantages of using content analysis as a method in sociological research [10]

Outline and explain....

Two theoretical disadvantages to using content analysis as a choice of research method [10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view...

That content analysis has more advantages than disadvantages to using content analysis a research method
[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view...

Content analysis is a method with many theoretical issues, yet other practical and ethical strengths [20]

QUALITATIVE METHODS

DOCUMENTS

QUALITATIVE SECONDARY DOCUMENTS IS PRE-EXISTING DATA THAT IS IN A QUALITATIVE FORM, E.G. DIARIES, LETTERS, ACCOUNTS, PHOTOS ETC

Example of studies that have used it

ARCHER 'UNIVERSITY IS NOT FOR ME, I'M A NIKE PERSON' – PHOTO DIARIES.

ARIES- CHILDHOOD, LOOKED AT THE PAINTINGS TO SHOW THE WAY CHILDHOOD HAS BEEN PERCEIVED FROM THE 18TH CENTURY TO MODERN DAY.

Practical

ADVANTAGES

- **EASY ACCESS**
- **FAIRLY CHEAP TO CONDUCT**
- **RESEARCHER DOES NOT REQUIRE A HIGH SET OF SKILLS**
- **PROVIDES INFORMATION THAT YOU CANNOT GAIN OTHERWISE E.G DEATH OF PARTICIPANT.**

PROBLEMS

- **DATA CAN BE OUTDATED, AND PARTICIPANTS USED MAY NOT BE CONTACTABLE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION DUE TO THE EXTENSIVE TIME THAT HAS PASSED.**
- **DATA GATHERED BY FIRST RESEARCHER MAY HAVE MISINTERPRETED THE DATA WHEN ANALYSING IT.**
- **TIME CONSUMING.**
- **ANALYSING AND CODING INFORMATION CAN BE TIME CONSUMING.**
- **ACCESS COULD BE LIMITED; AS DOCUMENTS MAY NOT EXIST, DOCUMENTS DO NOT EXIST IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN, DOCUMENTS RESTRICTED E.G. GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS HAVE A 60 YEAR EMBARGO FROM SECRET ACTIONS.**

Ethical

ADVANTAGES

- **CONSENT IS NOT NEEDED.**
- **NO HAWTHORN EFFECT- AS THERE IS NO DIRECT INTERACTION OF REASERCHER AND PARTICIPANT.**

PROBLEMS

- if a researcher made an institutions confidential reports public, it could harm their reputation.
- where public documents have been 'leaked' to the researcher, informed consent would not have been given.
- if participants are dead, the researcher should consider the disclosure of identities that might harm living relatives.

Theoretical

ADVANTAGES

- **Validity-** documents can give a researcher a valid picture of meanings, they enable the researcher to get close to their reality.
- **No hawthorne effect-** due to the fact that the researcher is not using participants, it means that the data will not be effected and therefore will be more genuine.
- **using a range of documents allows for a check in creditability** because it will allow the researcher to get a range of data which will help them to identify any trends and patterns.

PROBLEMS

- **Creditability-** documents could have been adapted for external reasons, e.g. political, documents may lack credibility if it was written long after the events it describes.
- **Positivists view documents as being unreliable** because documents are not standardised in the same way as official statistics.
- **unrepresentative-** some groups may not be represented in documents.

Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain two problems with using documents in sociological research [10]

Outline and explain two reasons sociologists might use documents in their research [10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that documents are the best research method to use when investigating truancy in schools [20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of documents as a research method [20]

PET Evaluation of Semi Structured interviews

Definition- Interviews that have the same set of questions in common, but the interviewer can also probe for more information

Examples- Dobash and Dobash 'violence against wives' study and Louise Archer 'university's not for me I'm a Nike person'

Who favours this method? - Realists would favour this method as they believe we can study society scientifically (with the use of set questions) but also need to look at deeper meanings and values (probing further questions). The type of data that is produced is a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing us to compare and also delve into deeper meanings in detailed structure.

Practical advantages

- Training is straight forward and cheap
- It is reasonably cheap to interview a reasonably sized sample e.g. below 50 people
- Questions can be prepared ahead of time which allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview.
- Allows participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms
- Sensitive issues such as domestic violence are more likely to be discussed compared to structured interviews
- Interviewers are able to build up a rapport to gain for depth and information from the interviewees

Practical disadvantages

- Time consuming to conduct and analyse e.g. Dobash and Dobash 'Violence against wives' took 6 months to complete.
- Researcher needs to be skilled to be able to go beyond the set questions and probe further.
- Could be costly in terms of distance to travel
- Time consuming to analyse the transcripts (interviews that have been recorded that have been typed up)
- Need to meet sufficient people in order to make general comparisons

Ethical Advantages

- The person being interviewed will give consent to be interviewed before being asked any questions, and will be given a general summary of what the questions are about, so there is little deception involved.
- Any vulnerable groups are cared for by an interviewer so the safety of the participant is protected.
- Interviewees can remain anonymous if desired.

Ethical disadvantages: Could be difficult with sensitive issues

: Interviewer bias

Theoretical Advantages: Valid, people can researcher can encourage the individual to go into detail.

: Build rapport (trust and understanding)

: provides comparable data

Theoretical disadvantages: Not favoured by positivists

: Lacks reliability due to no standardised questions set

: Hard to gain large representative samples

: Interviewer bias

: Hard to quantify data

Outline and explain two practical advantages of using semi-structured interviews when researching education.

[10]

Outline and explain two disadvantages of using semi-structured interviews when researching domestic violence.

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that semi-structured interviews are more effective when studying gender differences in educational achievement.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that semi-structured interviews are useful for realists to use as a method [20]

<p style="text-align: center;">Define the method</p> <p style="text-align: center;">UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS</p> <p>An unstructured interview is an interview in which there is no specific set of predetermined questions, although the interviewer usually has certain topics in mind that they wish to cover during the interview.</p> <p>Unstructured interviews flow like an everyday conversation and tend to be more informal and open-ended.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Example of studies that have used it</p> <p>Ann Oakley has written numerous academic works focusing on the lives and roles of women in society. Oakley is a well-known pioneer in the unstructured interview research approach directed towards qualitative research.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Willis Venkatesh</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Advantages</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Disadvantages</p>
<p>Practical</p> <p>They can be cheap to conduct, you do not need to spend money spreading questionnaires as you just need one researcher.</p> <p>The interviewer can change the questions if, over the course of the study they think the hypothesis should change or they want to take the study in a new direction.</p>	<p>With unstructured interviews you need a trained interviewer who can only interview one participant at a time, this means this method is time-consuming and costly.</p> <p>Characteristics of the researcher are important to make the participant feel like they can open up. Could have issues with interviewer effect.</p>
<p>Ethical</p> <p>Because the interview is more open, participants can go into detail when talking about sensitive issues.</p> <p>Due to the interaction level between the researcher and the participant, the relationship that they create could potentially make the participant more open and honest with their answers.</p> <p>Consent is provided</p>	<p>The success of the interview depends on the trust that the interviewee has with the interviewer. Interviewers must be skilled.</p> <p>Need informed consent.</p> <p>Because the interview is open, the researcher will be getting more of an idea of the person they are researching and may learn information which could be harmful to the interviewee if in the wrong hands.</p>
<p>Theoretical</p> <p>Interpretivists tend to use unstructured interviews as they give qualitative data which the researcher can use to develop their opinion.</p> <p>Because the interviews are so open, this can increase validity of the results because the interviewer can ask follow up questions for clarity.</p> <p>Ambiguities in an answer can be probed to further understand the meaning of that answer.</p>	<p>The interviewer won't ask exactly the same question every time, so it could be said that this method is less reliable</p> <p>The changing questions also mean it is difficult to replicate the study.</p> <p>The data is qualitative which means it is hard to analyse and compare with other pieces of data.</p> <p>Interviewer may have their own personal opinions and their bias opinion may influence the result of the research.</p> <p>Because they are time consuming it is hard to get a large sample so there is little representativeness.</p>

Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain two advantages of unstructured interviews

[10]

Outline and explain two theoretical advantages of using unstructured interviews

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that unstructured interviews are the best way to investigate parental opinions about schools.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that unstructured interviews are an effective method for interpretivists to use.

[20]

<p align="center">Define the method</p> <p align="center">PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION</p> <p>Participant observation - the researcher takes part in an event or the everyday life of the group while observing it.</p> <p>Overt - the researcher makes their true identity and purpose known to those being studied.</p> <p>Covert - the study is carried out under cover, the researchers real identity and purpose are kept concealed from the group being studied</p>	<p align="center">Example of studies that have used it</p> <p>Sudhir Venkatesh - gang leader for a day</p> <p>Erving Goffman - stigma</p> <p>William Whyte - street corner society</p> <p>Paul Willis - learning to labour</p>
<p align="center">Advantages</p>	<p align="center">Disadvantages</p>
<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of the information is based on primary data. - Allows access to groups that others can't get. - Data is qualitative. - Due to being studied over a long period, the participants will be able to act themselves as you cannot put on an act for months on end etc. e.g Willis. - Note taking doesn't have to be long, not as disruptive. - Gives access to certain groups such as gangs and cults. - It takes the viewpoint of the participants rather than the researcher, so allows them to dig deep into social interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is time consuming e.g Whytes study took him 4 years to complete - The researcher needs to be trained to be able to recognize aspects of a situation that are sociologically significant and worth further attention - It can be personally stressful and demanding especially if covert. - It requires observational and interpersonal skills that not everyone possesses. - Personal characteristics such as age, gender, or ethnicity may restrict what kinds of groups can be studied. - Many groups may not wish to be studied this way and some have the power to make access difficult.
<p>Ethical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the observer is overt, they will need to gain consent - Being overt allows the aims of the research to be clearly explained to those involved. E.g. Willis' was very clearly explained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covert - deceiving people in order to obtain information about them - Covert - participating in illegal or immoral activities in the course of sociological research. - Could put the researcher at risk - Makes it hard to gain consent from everyone involved
<p>Theoretical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds validity due to first hand data - Allows fluidity, can pursue new pieces of information as they become available - The Hawthorne effect can be reduced by studying a group over a long period (if overt). E.g. Willis - Allows validity due to natural setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - So much depends on personal skills and characteristics of a lone researcher that it is unlikely any other investigator would be able to replicate the original study. - Often produces qualitative data that makes comparisons with other studies difficult so unlikely to produce reliable data.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No personal opinions influencing the researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The risk of becoming too involved and going native makes it difficult to remain objective and the sociologist may end up presenting a one sided or biased view of the group. - Sometimes loyalty to the group or fear leads the sociologist to conceal sensitive information denying the study a full and objective account of research. - Often attracts sociologists whose sympathies lie with the subject and may be biased in favour of their subjects viewpoint. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlikely to be representative because samples are so small
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Examples of potential exam questions:

Outline and explain two disadvantages of participant observation

[10]

Outline and explain practical issues with participant observation

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that participant observation can be the best way to understand the behaviour of students in the education system

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that participant observation is best done overtly

[20]

Other potential exam questions

Outline and explain two practical issues in sociological research [10]

Outline and explain two ethical issues that could impact on sociological research [10]

Outline and explain two ways that sociology can be viewed as a science [10]

Evaluate the view that sociology should be value free [20]

Evaluate the view that theoretical issues are the most significant influence on sociological methods and topics [20]