PET EVALUATION FOR DIFFERENT RESEARCH METHODS

FOR 10 AND 20 MARK QUESTIONS ON PAPER 1 AND 3

gROUP E

2016

**QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

**QUESTIONNAIRES**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **Questionnaires -**  **Ask people to provide written answers to pre-set, written questions**  **These could be closed-ended = respondents must choose from a limited range of possible answers**  **Open-ended = respondents are free to answer however without any pre-selected choices being offered by the researcher, which will be later coded by the researcher** | **Example of studies that have used it**   * **The Sex survey 1996** * **Michael Schofield’s 1965 research on sexual behaviour of teenagers** * **Census- carried out every 10 years, sent to all households.** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **They’re a quick and cheap means of gathering large amounts of data from large amounts of people** * **There is no need to recruit and train interviews and observers to collect the data because respondents complete and return the questionnaires themselves** * **The data is usually easy to quantify, particularly where pre coded, closed-ended questions are used, and can be processed quickly by computer to reveal the relationships between different variables** * **Postal questionnaires allow a geographically dispersed sample** | * **Response rate can be low as people can chose whether or not they want to complete and return the questionnaire this could then mean that the questionnaire is unrepresentative.** * **Respondents may not understand or read the questions properly.** * **Answers may be incomplete or illegible.** |
| **Ethical**   * **Questionnaires pose fewer ethical problems than most other research methods. Although questionnaires may ask intrusive or sensitive questions respondents are generally under no obligation to answer them** * **They have to gain respondents informed consent to guarantee their anonymity and make it clear they have the right to not answer any questions they wish not to** * **Guaranteeing confidentiality is generally straightforward since most questionnaires are completed anonymously** | * **Have to be careful not to cause offence with the questions.** * **The census can be problematic because every household has to do it – some people might see this as a breach of their ability to provide consent.** |
| **Theoretical**   * **When the research is repeated, a questionnaire identical the original one is used, so new respondents are asked exactly the same questions, in the same order, with the same choice answers as the original respondents – this will make the method reliable.** * **With postal or online questionnaires, unlike with interviews, there is no researcher present to influence the respondents’ answers, which aids reliability.** * **Positivists prefer questionnaires as they deliver reliable data as they are replicable due to using same set questions.** * **Can be used to access both quantitative and qualitative information (which can then be quantified using content analysis).** * **Often large scale and therefore more representative – particularly for online.** * **No interviewer bias with self-completion questionnaires .** | * **Interpretivists suggest that they lack validity – does not allow the researcher to get behind the meanings.** * **May not access enough qualitative information** * **Data may not even be valid or even truthful.** * **Questions cannot be clarified or misunderstandings cleared up.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

Two advantages of postal questionnaires as compared to those given out in person [10]

Outline and explain….

Two practical disadvantages of questionnaires

[10]

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

That questionnaires are useful for studying opinions on educational achievement within school

[20]

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

That questionnaires provide us with a lot of knowledge but don’t tell us about what people really think [20]

**OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **Official statistics are a form of quantitative data gathered by the government or other official bodies, typically involving large samples being studied.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Examples include general information such as births, deaths, marriages, crime, unemployment, etc.**  **Key studies conducted by the government itself include the Census survey,** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **Releasing statistics to the public – useable and large quantities of official statistics available** * **Only the state has the resources to conduct large scale surveys costing millions of pounds such as the ten-yearly census of every household in the UK** * **Only the state has the power to compel individuals to supply certain data – e.g. parents are required by law to register births** * **Covers a wide range of data** * **Easy to use and compare to other research** * **Show trends and patterns over time** | * **The government collects statistics for its own purpose and not for the benefit of sociologists – some research not available for certain topics – Durkheim encountered this during his study of suicide** * **The definitions the state uses when collecting data may be different from those that sociologists would use** * **Similarly, if definitions change over time, they may be difficult to use to make comparisons – e.g. the definition of unemployment changed over 30 times during the 1980’s** |
| **Ethical**   * **Anonymous – already published and the private information is withheld by the government** * **Statistics can provide crucial data that summaries more sensitive topics and/or include sensitive information that people will trust the government with more** | * **May have been manipulated by the government – no guarantee that the results have not been tampered/altered – Durkheim argues that statistics can manipulated and carried out to fit the government’s needs and standards** * **If you use official statistics on their own, they could be misleading to the public** * **Reasons for why the research was conducted can be unknown** |
| **Theoretical**   * **Reliable data – can be repeated by the government** * **Many studies being conducted again over time help to show trends/patterns/change** * **Representativeness – uses a wide range of data and participants typically which helps to show the overall findings as well as generalising them** * **A useful secondary source for sociologists to use within their research** * **By the government being able to essentially renew statistics, many statistics can be replaced and not become invalid over time** | * **Lacks validity – cannot explore feelings, meanings, deeper context, etc.** * **Questions on reliability – how it is collected, what methods are used, who was involved, etc.** * **People are less likely to lie when being a part of government research – is more professional and typically done formally** * **The statistics still give a generalisation – they do not reflect a reality, they impose one** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two disadvantages of using official statistics.

[10]

Outline and explain why using official statistics is an affective secondary source for sociological research.

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that official statistics are better than non-official statistics.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that official statistics are the most useful research method for positivists.

[20]

**Non-official Statistics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  Statistics that are gathered as a result of sociological research such as questionnaires or surveys etc. | **Example of studies that have used it**  Truancy statistics (people who skip school)  Sex Survey  Results from Dobash and Dobash as they changed data into statistics. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * Easy to create data * Easy to interpret the data as its quantitative * Easy to distribute * Not time consuming for researcher * Can cover topics not covered by the government unlike official statistics such as religion * Have practical application for others as they can be released to the public. * Can conduct on a large scale * Show trends and patterns over time * Easy to use and compare to other research * Covers a wide range of data * Official statistics create them for their own purposes, and not for the benefit of the sociologist; however, nonofficial statistics do therefore there will likely be data available on topics they are interested in. | * May not be able to access certain groups in order to carry out the statistics. For example, prison groups. * May not be able to keep information up to date. * People may not participate in the statistics. * In official statistics people are required to supply certain data eg registration of births. However non-official; statistics don’t, therefore people may not be compelled to complete the statistics |
| **Ethical**   * Could be argued they are non-invasive as they don’t go into detail. * Non-official statistics can look into sensitive topics that official statistics cannot. For example, sexual abuse. * Can provide crucial data that can help other organisations such as the police. For example, by using official statistics to identify patterns in mental illness, positivists can establish correlations. Statistics might reveal, say gender differences in depression. | * Protection of participants – may want to keep their data anonymous due to safety reasons. For example, victims of domestic violence. * Informed consent – participants may not have fully consented to their research being used by others. * Not all people may understand what they are consenting to.   l |
| **Theoretical**   * Can easily be used to prove a hypothesis. A testable hypothesis can be put forward to explain a plausible link between the variables * Quantitative data so can easily be repeated. Meaning they have high reliability. * Can be carried out on a range of people and therefore have high representativeness. * As they have high representativeness they can be generalised to the wider population. * Positivists take for granted that official statistics are reliable, objective, social facts. * Can be carried out over time so show patterns and trends. | * Statistics can become invalid over time, as their answers may vary over time. * Lack detail in the answers and therefore could be argued they lack validity. * Interpretivists would prefer a more in detailed set of data * They may not be filled in correctly as they may not complete the data accurately. * Interpretivists reject the positivist claim that official statistics are real, objective social facts that exist out there in the world. In their view, statistics are merely social constructs that represent the labels attached to people. * May be less representative than official statistics as they cannot be gathered on as large of a scale. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two ethical issues of non-official statistics

[10]

Outline and explain two theoretical reasons positivists would use non-official statistics

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that non official statistics have more advantages than official statistics

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that statistics are an essential method for Positivist sociologists.

[20]

**NON PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **NON PARTCICIPANT OBSERVATION: A research technique whereby the researcher observes their participants without actively getting involved.**  **Overt observation is where the group being studied are aware of the researcher**  **Covert observation is where the group being studied are not aware they are being observed.**   * **Positivists favour this method as it gives quantitative data as events can be counted rather than having to interpret meaning** | **Example of studies that have used it**   * **CCTV** * **Ofstead inspectors at a school** * **People observing in the street** * **Interactionists such as J. Maxwell Anderson used classroom observation** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **Cheap** * **Gives efficient quick results** * **Easy access to an extent because you’re not actively involved with the participants however, there may be ethical issues with this** * **Does not require specialised researchers** * **Researchers have more opportunities for using research aids such as behaviour schedules and notebooks.** | * **Access in the form of Parental consent because this method is primarily used on children in a classroom** * **You do not gain as much information as participant observation as you are not as involved with the participants you are studying; lack discovering meanings** * **Covert: the researcher must keep up an act. This can be stressful especially if it involves long periods of time** |
| **Ethical**   * **Overt observation have no ethical issues as consent can be easily gained** | * **Studying certain groups covertly such as pupils may not be appropriate** * **Certain groups have greater vulnerability and limited ability to give informed consent affecting covert observation.** * **Covert non participation observation care has to be taken to protect the researchers identity** |
| **Theoretical**   * **Less chance for the Hawthorne effect because the group members are completely unaware of his/ her presence: Covert** * **Objective research method meaning objectivity can be maintained because the observer gives unbiased view about the group because they are not involved: Covert** * **Covert non participant observation is reliable because you can easily replicate the same results when carrying out the same research.** * **Realists may use this method as a starting to observe people interactions before getting involved.** | * **If the observation is overt you are more at risk from the Hawthorne effect as people know they are being watched. This decreases validity of the research as it does not give a true reflection of the participant’s behaviour.** * **Subjectivity is present due to the researcher not being able to ask questions to their participants may lead to making assumptions and causing bias.** * **Lacks validity because you cannot ask questions therefore it is difficult to find out why behaviour is happening** * **Representativeness is hard to get as you cannot generalise the results, especially due to small sample size.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two practical advantages with non-participant observation carried out covertly

[10]

Outline and explain why overt non participant observation may be seen to have less ethical issues than covert non participant observation

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that positivists favor non participant observation over participant observation.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that non participant observation should be used in sociological research

[20]

**CONTENT ANALYSIS**

|  |  |
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| **Define the method**  **Content analysis – method for dealing with the contents of documents –especially those produced by the media.**  **One type is formal content analysis and the other is thematic analysis.**  **Formal content analysis allows us to produce quantitative data from documents which are qualitative. Researcher decides categories then code the text and put the people in the text into the different categories.**  **Thematic analysis – qualitative analysis of content of media texts used by interpretivists and feminists. Involves selecting a small number of cases for in depth analysis. The aim is to build the meanings from the documents.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Angela McRobbie –formal content analysis she used magazines and newspapers to see if girl’s aspirations had changed.**  **Lesly Best-analysed gender roles in children’s reading schemes. (formal content)**  **Glasgow University Media Group- thematic analysis and formal content analysis- analysed TV news broadcasts in the 70’s and 80’s. They made a strong case that there was a pro management, anti-union bias in reporting industrial disputes.**  **Slyvia Walby- made a thematic analysis of the ways newspapers reported rape cases.** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **It’s cheap and easy.**  **is an unobtrusive means of analysing interactions** | **Time consuming**  **tends too often to simply consist of word counts**  **can be difficult to quantify/categorise data** |
| **Ethical**  **Don’t need consent**  **Data can still remain confidential** | **There could be some issues with analysing certain documents as they may be about people/groups who are vulnerable and may be offended by the meanings inferred from their contributions in the document.**  **Also the people who wrote the document may not want their work to be further analysed.** |
| **Theoretical**  **High in reliability as it follows systematic procedures to be replicated**  **Formal content analysis attractive to positivists as it gives quantitative data.**  **Also objective and representative**  **Reliable – allows trends to be identified over time**  **Thematic analysis - Useful for feminists in analysing media representations of gender** | **Interpretivists criticise formal content analysis for lack of validity**  **Documents come from small samples which may not be representative.**  **Deciding categories can be seen as subjective because they involve value judgements**  **Thematic analysis – does not attempt to obtain a representative sample so findings can’t be generalised.**  **There is often a tendency to select evidence that supports the sociologists hypothesis.**  **Can be hard to find meanings just from word counts**  **No value freedom – postmodernists argue that there is no fixed or correct meaning to a text, the sociologist could read it and get completely different meanings than someone else.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain…. The practical advantages and disadvantages of content analysis

[10]

Outline and explain…. 2 disadvantages of content analysis.

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view… that quantitative methods such as content analysis are better for studying society.

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view… Why content analysis is useful for positivists and interpretivists [20]

**Need to also add in experiments as a PET**

**QUALITATIVE METHODS**

**UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **An interview in which questions are not prearranged. These non-directive interviews are considered to be the opposite of a structured interview which offers a set amount of standardised questions.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Paul Willis – ‘Learning to Labour’**  **Venkatesh – ‘Gang Leader for a Day’**  **Dobash and Dobash-researched domestic violence**  **Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992)- researched claimants experiences of unemployment**  **Labov-(1973)- studied the language of black American children** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Check understanding- able to ask questions as you go along.**  **Flexibility- no set questions means you can formulate new ideas and hypotheses.** | **Time and sample size- takes a long time and limits amount of people to be interviewed.**  **Training- the interviewer needs to be better trained than that of a structured, and they must have a background in sociology so they know when a sociological statement has been made.**  **Interpersonal skills- interviewers must be able to establish good rapport.**  **Issues of accessing closed or vulnerable groups e.g. gangs, school children.** |
| **Ethical**  **Rapport can be built- means the participant feels safer and can be more honest.**  **Consent- is easy to gain as the participant knows he/she can talk about what they wish to.**  **Anonymity- researcher can keep identity of participant easily hidden.** | **Topic choice- certain topics spoken about in an interview may be upsetting to participants.**  **Leading questions- participant’s answers may be affected by the interviewer’s opinions.** |
| **Theoretical**  **Validity- answers can be detailed, yet interviewer can still ask for more information than this. (no set questions). Can build rapport and verstehen.**  **Liberal feminists prefer this method as it allows for women to express their personal views.**  **Can be reflexive- take account of your values as a researcher.** | **Reliability- each interview is unique and non-standardised.**  **Representativeness- small samples sizes mean data can’t be generalised across a large group of people.** |
| **Interpretivists**  **Favoured by interpretivists because the data is valid and researchers can ask questions in the moment, and therefore answers will be developed on the spot; making them honest.**  **Qualitative- data is based on real experiences and personal information, so researchers can look for meanings behind information given.** | **Positivists**  **Not favoured by positivists because the data isn’t reliable and cannot be generalised. Not value free- relies on the researcher developing the questions.**  **Quantitative- answers can’t be pre-coded so it is difficult to count up and quantify the number of interviewees giving a certain answer. This makes it hard to test a hypothesis.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two practical advantages of using unstructured interviews [10]

Outline and explain two theoretical disadvantages of using unstructured interviews

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view unstructured interviews have more advantages than disadvantages

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view unstructured interviews are helpful when studying ethnic treatment in school

[20]

**SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **Semi- structured interviews**  An original set of questions but there is room for elaboration from the interviewer and interviewee. The same set of questions is used for every interview but follow up questions can be asked to gain more detail. | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Hauri and Hollingworth** – study of fatherhood  **Aaron Cicourel** and **John Kitsuse** **(1963)** study on education always followed up their questions with “what do you mean?” |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  Positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee.  Flexibility with questions. | Time-consuming to collect and analyse data.  Samples will likely be small  Training of interviewer can be time-consuming because they require a specific skill-set.  Can be challenging to access the group.  Issues of interview or interviewer bias. |
| **Ethical**  Complex issues can be discussed as both respondent researcher can elaborate, therefore gain an understanding of the other person. | In order for this procedure to be as non- invasive/non-bias as possible, the interviewer requires sensitivity and reflexivity, especially around a sensitive subject. This method also relies upon articulacy of the respondent. |
| **Theoretical**  An all-round balance of validity and reliability/standardisation because of some pre-set questions.  Gains Verstehen.  Able to be reflexive and reflect on your impact as a researcher | However, although gaining a balance of validity/reliability these aspects of data collected can be limited/weak. For example it is very difficult to replicate a semi-structured interview as the interviewer will elaborate /ask follow up questions based on the responses they are gaining from the individual they are interviewing. It will be subjective to their respondent/interviewers interpretation of these responses.  Not favoured by positivists as lacks reliability.  Samples will likely be small so not representative. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

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 structured interviews are more effective when researching sensitive topics such as child abuse. [20]

**DOCUMENTS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Lesly best (1993) gender roles In children’s reading schemes**  **Archer- Nike kids photo diaries**  **Sylvia Walby 1991, thematic analysis of ways new papers reported rape cases.** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Free/ cheap sources of large amounts of data as someone else has already gathered that information.**  **For the same reason using existing documents saves time.**  **May be the only available source of information, for example; historical data.** | **It is not always possible to gain access to them.**  **Individuals and organisations create documents for their own purposes and not for the sociologist. Therefore they may not contain answers to questions sociologists asked.** |
| **Ethical**  **There are few ethical issues due to the fact that they are secondary sources.**  **If information has been given to an archive the consent is already given so therefore saves them time as they don’t have to gain consent.** | **Use of un published information could raise ethical issues. When public documents have been ‘leaked’ the researchers consent has not been obtained.**  **Can question the origin of the data**  **Can be un aware of how ethical the data was produced in the first place such as government document.** |
| **Theoretical**  **Interpretivists prefer documents as documents can give the researcher a valid picture of people’s meanings. Eg. Diaries and letters**  **As documents are not written by sociologists they are more likely to be an authentic statement of the author’s views.**  **Value free – no values of researcher**  **May be the only open window for you to study that specific topic.** | **May lack validity if the data is not what it claims to be (authentic)**  **Issue with credibility if the document says that it is believable. Eg. Politician’s may write diaries on a personal promotion use.**  **Interpretivists value documents because access to the author’s meanings, there is a danger of miss interpreting what the author meant.**  **Positivists regard documents as un reliable as they are not standardised for example everyone’s diary is unique.**  **The uniqueness also undermines the representativeness and makes it difficult to draw generalisations from it.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

Two practical advantages of using documents in sociologist’s research. [10]

Outline and explain….

Two ethical issues when using secondary sources. [10]

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

That interpretivists find documents more useful than positivists

[20]

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **Participant observation is one type of data collection method typically used in qualitative research. It involves immersing yourself in the activities of a group. Could be done covertly (participants unaware) or overtly (participants are aware of presence).** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Sudhir Venkatesh – ‘Gang leader for a day’**  **Paul Willis – ‘Learning to Labour’**  **James Patrick – ‘A Glasgow gang observed’** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **Gives us an insight into other people’s lives by allowing us to put ourselves in their place-a process known as verstehen, a German word meaning empathy or subjective understanding, allows the observer to gain verstehen through first hand experience, by living as a member of the group, in their natural environment.** * **Access, Participant observation may be the only suitable method for accessing and studying certain groups for example :**   **Groups who engage in deviant activities may be suspicious of outsiders who came asking questions**   * **By comparison with survey methods (questionnaires and structured interviews), participant observation is very flexible** | * **The field work is very time consuming and may take years to complete, it also produces large amounts of qualitative data, which can be hard to analyse and categorise** * **The researchers needs to be sociologically trained so they can recognise the aspects of a situation that are significant and worth investigating** * **It can be personally stressful and demanding, and sometimes dangerous** * **Powerful groups may be able to prevent sociologists participating in them.** * **Covert- issues of getting in, staying in and getting out** |
| **Ethical**   * **By using overt observation it means that you are being open with the people you are researching- able to gain consent.** | * **It is unethical to deceive people in order to obtain information by pretending to be their friend or ‘in the same boat’ as them** * **Covert observers may have to lie about why they are leaving the group at the end of their research, others simply abandon the group without explanation** * **May have to participate in immoral or illegal activities as part of their ‘cover’ role e.g. Patrick** |
| **Theoretical**   * **Extremely valid, Sudhir Venkatesh and his study on gangs.** * **Gives a first-hand image of people’s lives** | **Positivist criticise participant observation as unsystematic and lacking in reliability. Unlike structured methods.**  **Positivist also argue that the researchers close involvement with the group results in the lack of objectivity**  **Hawthorne effect can also means that when people are being observed their behaviour changes, overall it undermines validity,**  **Tends to be unrepresentative- very small samples.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….two advantages of using participant observation

[10]

Outline and explain….two disadvantages of covert participant observation

[10]

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

[20]

Apply material from the item and your knowledge evaluate the view that participant observation is the best method for interpretivists

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

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that practical issues are the most influential factor when conducting participant observations.

DOCUMENTS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  **a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Lesly best (1993) gender roles In children’s reading schemes**  **Archer- Nike kids photo diaries**  **Sylvia Walby 1991, thematic analysis of ways new papers reported rape cases.** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Free/ cheap sources of large amounts of data as someone else has already gathered that information.**  **For the same reason using existing documents saves time.**  **May be the only available source of information, for example; historical data.** | **It is not always possible to gain access to them.**  **Individuals and organisations create documents for their own purposes and not for the sociologist. Therefore they may not contain answers to questions sociologists asked.** |
| **Ethical**  **There are few ethical issues due to the fact that they are secondary sources.**  **If information has been given to an archive the consent is already given so therefore saves them time as they don’t have to gain consent.** | **Use of un published information could raise ethical issues. When public documents have been ‘leaked’ the researchers consent has not been obtained.**  **Can question the origin of the data**  **Can be un aware of how ethical the data was produced in the first place such as government document.** |
| **Theoretical**  **Interpretivists prefer documents as documents can give the researcher a valid picture of people’s meanings. Eg. Diaries and letters**  **As documents are not written by sociologists they are more likely to be an authentic statement of the author’s views.**  **Value free – no values of researcher**  **May be the only open window for you to study that specific topic.** | **May lack validity if the data is not what it claims to be (authentic)**  **Issue with credibility if the document says that it is believable. Eg. Politian’s may write diaries on a personal promotion use.**  **Interpretivists value documents because access to the author’s meanings, there is a danger of miss interpreting what the author meant.**  **Positivist regard documents as un reliable as they are not standardised for example everyone’s diary is unique.**  **The uniqueness also undermines the representativeness and makes it difficult to draw generalisations from it.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

Two practical advantages of using documents in sociological research. [10]

Outline and explain….

Two ethical issues when using secondary sources. [10]

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

That interpretivists find documents more useful than positivists

[20]

**2ND YEAR A-LEVEL RESEARCH METHODS EVALUATION SHEET**

**Group Interviews / Focus Groups**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the method**  A group interview involves an interviewer and a group of 8-10 respondents. The respondents are then asked question in turn however in focus groups the respondents are encouraged to talk to each other and discuss their feedback.  These interviews are more guided r  ather than structured e.g. They are prompted to discuss a particular topic. | **Example of studies that have used it**  Paul Willis ‘The Lads’ – He studied a small group of working class boys in their last year and a half at school.  Louise Archer ‘University’s is not for me, I’m a Nike person’ |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  Group interviews mean that you can gather a large amount of data from multiple people so its saves time however…  Discussions can be recorded. | Due to having multiple respondents it can be easy for them to get distracted; also 1 or 2 of the respondents could dominate the interview if they have strong view on the topic.  … If there is problem communicating then it can be time consuming.  For group interview the researcher must have specific skills and characterises as some groups of people such as rape victims may find it uncomfortable to sit in a room with a man. |
| **Ethical**  British Sociological Association have set guidelines so no one will get offended while the researchers are taking notes and asking for information.  Due to the fact that discussions can be recorder the findings can be reported accurately and honestly as there is hard evidence of what everyone has said. | Informed consent can be difficult to obtain from people especially in a school environment.  Confidentiality is harder because other people will be aware of what others in the groups have said.  Specific opinions may clash and could possibly offend other respondents. |
| **Theoretical**  Interpretivists like using group interviews and focus groups as they can show true depth and meaning into people’s lives.  Feminist methodologist also like using focus groups as it allows groups of women to discuss their experiences.  Realists like group interviews as it produces high validity however…  The data is rich in validity as its produces a mirror image of reality due to its qualitative data. | Positivists do not like using group interviews because it is not reliable due to the fact that it is based on individual opinions and they cannot produce any scientific data. Cannot repeat easily.  … they believe that triangulation should be used as it give accuracy to the data e.g. after completing a group interview a questionnaire could be used to back up the data that the research has collected.  Due to being in an interview situation interview effect may take place as the participants may be nervous or uncomfortable in this situation. Interview effect could impact the validity.  As the sample size is generally quite small it would not be reprehensive of the target population which would in turn also make the data hard to generalise. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain two theoretical advantages for group interviews.

[10]

Outline and explain two practical disadvantages for group interviews.

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that group interviews are an effective method for studying male underachievement in schools.

[20]