PET EVALUATION FOR DIFFERENT RESEARCH METHODS

FOR 10 AND 20 MARK QUESTIONS ON PAPER 1 AND 3

gROUP F

2016

**QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

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| **Define the method**  **Field Experiment**  **Applies the scientific method to experimentally examine an intervention in the real world (or as many experimentalists like to say, naturally occurring environments) rather than in the laboratory.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) ‘Pygmallion in the classroom’**  **Rosenhan (1973)** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Larger Scale Settings – Practically it is possible to do field experiments in large institutions – in schools or workplaces in which thousands of people interact for example, which isn’t possible in laboratory experiments.**  **Cheaper than a lab experiment.**  **Takes less time in general than a lab experiment** | **It is not possible to control variables as closely as with laboratory experiments – With the Rosenthal and Jacobson experiment, for example we simply don’t know what else might have influenced the ‘spurting group’ besides ‘higher teacher expectations’.**  **Practical Problems – Access is likely to be more of a problem with lab experiments. Schools and workplaces might be reluctant to allow researchers in.** |
| **Ethical**  **Less likely to harm participants than lab experiments.** | **Just as with lab experiments – it is often possible to not inform people that an experiment is taking place in order for them to act naturally, so the issues of deception and lack of informed consent apply here too, as does the issue of harm.**  **Unethical, since they involve carrying out an experiment on their subjects without their knowledge or consent.** |
| **Theoretical**  **Better external validity – The big advantage which field experiments obviously have better external validity than lab experiments, because they take place in normally occurring social settings.**  **Rosenthal and Jacobson research design was relatively simple and therefore easy to repeat. Within five years of the original study it had been repeated no less than 242 times.**  **Possess reliability- often have closely controlled conditions that make repetition possible.** | **However given all the many differences between school classes for example in terms of age of the pupils, teaching styles and so on, it is unlikely that the original could be replicated exactly.**  **The Hawthorne Effect (or Experimental Effect) may reduce the validity of results. The Hawthorne effect is where respondents may act differently just because they know they are part of an experiment.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain…. Two advantages of field experiments [10]

Outline and explain…. Two disadvantages of field experiments [10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view… That field experiments are more useful than any other method in sociological research. [20]

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| **Define the method**  **Lab Experiments**  **Is an experiment conducted under highly controlled conditions. The variable which is being manipulated by the researcher is called the independent variable and the dependent variable is the change in behaviour measured by the researcher** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **Stanley Milgram(1974)**  **Zimbardo**  **Banduro** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**  **Can be cheap once set up as you can just rise and repeat, as is the nature of lab experiments.** | **Society is very complex. Therefore it is impossible to identify, let alone control, all the possible variables that might exert an influence on, say a child’s educational achievement or a worker’s attitude to work.**  **Lab experiments cannot be used to study the past, since by definition it is impossible to control variables that were acting in the past rather than the present.**  **Lab experiments only use small scale samples. This makes it very difficult to investigate large scale social phenomena such as religious or voting patterns for example. This reduces its representativeness.**  **Needs time to train the experimenter.** |
| **Ethical**  **Less deception than field experiments, in general.** | **Lack of informed consent, as a general principle, the researcher needs the informed consent of the research participants. However this is difficult to achieve with vulnerable groups.**  **Deception: it is also generally considered wrong to mislead people as to the nature of the experiment, as Stanley Milgram did in his famous studies of obedience to authority. Milgram lied to his research participants about the purpose of the research, telling them that they were assisting in an experiment on learning, in which they were ordered by the researcher to administer socks when the learner failed to answer correctly. In reality the purpose of the research was to test people’s willingness to obey orders to inflict pain.**  **Harm: The experiment may also harm the participants. In Milgram’s experiments, many research participants were observed to seat, stutter, tremble, groan and bit their lips.** |
| **Theoretical**  **High reliability – Once an experiment has been conducted, other scientists can then replicate it. The lab experiment is therefore highly reliable, producing the same results each time.**  **It allows the researcher to identify and measure behaviour patterns quantitatively and to manipulate variables to establish cause-and-effect relationships.**   * **They enable scientists to test their hypotheses in controlled conditions.** * **They make it easy to isolate and manipulate variables to determine the causes of events.** | **The Hawthorne Effect: A laboratory is not a natural environment. Thus behaviour is likely to be unnatural and so become invalid results. Also if people know they are being studied, they may produce demand characteristics and or try and figure out the aim of the experiment by doing behaviours which correspond to the aim they believe is being measured.**  **Free Will: Interprivists argue that humans are fundamentally different from anything else studied by natural scientists. This means our behaviour cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect and so the lab experiment is irrelevant to them for sociological evidence.** |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain…. Two reasons why experiments are often associated with the positivist approach in sociology

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that lab experiments are not an appropriate sociological method [20

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| **Define the method**  **Questionnaires**  **A questionnaire is usually a list of pre-set questions to which the respondent answers to by filling in. A questionnaire can use open or closed ended questions.**  **An open ended question is when the respondent answers in their own words and there is no pre-set choice of answers.**  **A closed ended question is when the range of responses is fixed by the researcher (pre-coded). The respondent has to select the answer(s) from two or more given alternatives.**  **It is a means of collecting primary data from large groups of people.**  **There are different types of questionnaires including postal/mail/online self-completion or a face-to-face although that would lead to the format of a structured interview where researcher reads out the questions to respondent.** | **Example of studies that have used a questionnaire:**   1. **Census**   **This is a postal questionnaire that is distributed every 10 years to every registered household in the UK. It is a legal requirement for respondent to complete, otherwise it can consequent in a fine. Data provides statistics that can show trends and patterns over time. Questions are mainly based on health, marital status, religion, education and language.**   1. **Sex Survey**   **This is a self-completion question which participants reaching over 50,000 people complete. The aim of the Sex Survey is to find out people’s attitudes towards sex and find out more about their sexual lifestyles. It is funded by the Welcome Trust and the Government. This questionnaire is anonymous and the answers are coded.** |
| **Advantages of Questionnaires** | **Disadvantages of Questionnaires** |
| **Practical:**   * **If it is a self-completion questionnaire it doesn’t mean that the interviewers have to be trained as respondent completes it themselves so will save time and money on training an interviewer.** * **Closed and multiple choice questions are easy to analyse and quantify making findings more easy to be made.** * **If funding is gained, a larger sample can be achieved. For example the Sex Survey that was partly funded by the Government reached around 50,000 participants.** * **Open questions can provide good detail as it allows the respondents to answer using their own words.** * **If the questionnaire is online it is often a cheap way to produce a piece of research.** | **Practical:**   * **Response rate could be low if people don’t respond. (researcher’s might have to provide an incentive to get people to respond otherwise they might not feel it is worth doing or it is no importance to them, for example they might give them a gift voucher as a way of making them complete the questionnaire).** * **It is inflexible, this means once the questionnaires have been confirmed and distributed out to respondent you are unable to make any changes as it will be too late.** * **Analysis of results could be very time consuming for researcher.** * **Lack of interviewer means people are not able to ask for clarification therefore it could cause a misunderstanding in the question so not providing an accurate answer affecting the validity.** * **If it is a postal questionnaire it can be expensive to print questions, send out to respondents and send back, if it is a face to face questionnaire it could also be expensive as you have to pay for interviewer’s time.** * **Data is often limited and superficial, this is because questionnaires need to be fairly brief- most people are unlikely to complete a long time consuming questionnaire.** |
| **Ethical:**   * **Participants can remain anonymous** * **Data can be kept confidential** * **Participants can easily withdraw if they decide to not participate as it is easy for them to not return the questionnaire.** * **Consent is and should be implied by respondent** | **Ethical:**   * **Questions shouldn’t and can’t be sensitive or intrusive to respondent otherwise they may feel offended and not answer truthfully or even continue with questionnaire.** * **People may lie about their answers or if it requires memory they may not answer truthfully as they may not remember. You are also not able to check the truth of the respondents answer because once researcher receives answers and it is anonymous you are not able to go back and check as this would be difficult and time consuming.** |
| **Theoretical:**   * **Questionnaires can often reach very large samples so it can lead to representativeness.** * **Accurate generalisations can be made from it being representative.** * **It can be in some cases reliable as it can be repeated over again over time, for example the census is repeated every 10 years (whilst it is the same method you can’t always guarantee similar results).** * **It is favoured by Positivists as the answers can easily be quantified making it easier to observe trends and patterns across the respondents answers.** * **The researchers can be objective as it doesn’t require their input.** * **It allows them to study society scientifically as they don’t look into the meanings like Interpretivists prefer.** * **It is a detached method for producing quantitative data.** * **It enables them to test hypotheses and identify possible cause-and-effect relationships between different factors and variables.** | **Theoretical:**  **It can sometimes lack validity as you can’t check the truthfulness from a self-completed survey.**  **It won’t be representative if the response rate is low. People may not be able to elaborate in closed questions as they have to answer from the pre-set choice of answers.**  **They are not favoured by Interpretivists as it doesn’t provide enough depth or understanding behind why things are the way that they are.** |

**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]

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| **Define the method**  **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.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **-sex survey**  **- British Crime survey** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **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.** | * **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** |
| **Ethical**   * **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** | * **May seem intrusive due of the structured questions and the participant having less of an ability to expand on their answers.** |
| **Theoretical**   * **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**   **.** | * **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.** |

Outline and explain two advantages of a structured interview [10]

Evaluate the view that structured interviews have the fewest practical issues of other types of interview [20]

Evaluate the view that structured interviews are the best way to uncover parental decisions about education choices [20]

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| **Define the method**  **STATISTICS**  **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.** | **Example of studies that have used it**  **OFFICIAL: government: births/deaths, census**  **NON-OFFICIAL:** |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * **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** | **Practical**   * **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** |
| **Ethical**   * **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** | **Ethical**   * **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** |
| **Theoretical**   * **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** | **Theoretical**   * **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** |
| **Positivists would favour stats. As they are claimed to be reliable and objective.** | **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.**  **Marxists also reject the positivist claim, they see stats as serving the interests of capitalism. Therefore are “ideological”**  **Feminists criticise stats. Oakley rejects them as quantitative methods are deemed as a “masculine” or patriarchal model of research - ideological** |

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]

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| **Define the method**  **NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS** are when a researcher observes a group but does not interact with them. These observations can be either covert or overt. Covert is when the researcher does not tell the group that they are being observed. Whereas overt observations mean respondents know they are being investigated and are aware of the researcher’s presence. | **Example of studies that have used it**   * ‘WHY KIDS KILL’ Dispatches – Glasgow * Classroom observations e.g. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| * Not as time consuming as participant observations. * It is cheap as the location is already provided. * Overt; allows honesty from the researcher when discussing the research and the aims. * Covert; there is an expansion of knowledge on ‘lesser-established’ social groups. | * Time – covert; the researcher would have to spend a lot of time to gather worthwhile data as observing requires a substantial amount of time spent on it to prove accurate. * Access – certain groups may prove more difficult to access than others e.g. prisoners and young/old people. **(It took Willis 6 months to gain access to the school where he studied ‘The Lads’ but this was PARTICIPANT)** * Personal skills – overt; sociologist need to collect data without intervening with their respondents. Covert; be able to collect data imminently and correctly. |
| * There is no likelihood of danger for researcher or others involved e.g. when observing gang members. * Overt; deception is avoided and loss of trust is dismissed as occurring. * Covert; this is good for dangerous groups as again the researcher’s safety isn’t compromised. | * Vulnerable groups will respond differently to research being collected – overt; respondents may feel worried or threatened by the presence of a researcher. * Deception within covert observations which enhances the likelihood of false reports. * Safety of participants/researcher may be compromised – more likely overt e.g. prisoners may pose intimidating behaviour to others. * No consent is gained in covert non-participant observations. |
| * Representative due to large groups being able to be investigated. * Overt; increases validity as questions can be asked to delve deeper into respondents behaviour and answers given. * Comparisons can be made with social classes, genders, age etc. | * Validity – covert; people will be unaware of the presence of the researcher so their behaviour will not alter and invalidate the data collected (no Hawthorne effect nor social desirability) however this may mean the amount of research to collect will increase. Overt; people will be aware of the researcher conducting an investigation and will alter their actions and behaviour accordingly (social desirability) * Representation – researcher can only record what happens in front of them; they only see selective occurrences. * Reliability – this method lacks this because people cannot act similarly after the observer’s first account * Interviewer effect – overt; the interviewer must be aware of the impact their presence has on the behaviour of participants. * Subjectivity – researcher interpreting respondent actions; answers may make findings biased by he/she personal preference. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain **two disadvantages of conducting research using a non-participant observation**

[10]

Outline and explain **the effects an interviewer using overt non-participant observation has on participants**

[10]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view **that** **covert/overt non-participant observation is the best method to apply when collecting research on vulnerable groups**

[20]

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view **that non-participant observations are the most important method in collecting reliable data**

[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]

**QUALITATIVE METHODS**

**Unstructured interviews**

Example of a study: Oakley ‘Housewife’, Willis ‘Learning to Labour’, Venkatesh ‘Gang Leader for a Day’

Definition: unstructured interviews are often called ‘conversations with a purpose’. They may not use an interview schedule and allow respondents to expand on topics or go in a new direction.

**Advantages**

Practical:

* Gives respondent more time to answer and go into detail compared to structured interviews.
* Allows free flow of conversation
* Gives qualitative data which can then be analysed
* 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
* Flexible and can be adapted

Ethical:

* Allows interviewer to develop a rapport
* The interview is very much on the respondents terms so they feel more in control
* Respondent more relaxed in an informal environment

Theoretical:

* Much easier for the interviewer and participant to share an understanding
* Creates valid data
* Ask for clarification

**Disadvantages**

Practical:

* Time consuming
* Limits numbers that can be carried out
* Takes more training to conduct this kind of interview compared to structured interviews resulting in higher competition costs
* Interpersonal skills- interviewers need good interpersonal skills in order to establish rapport/ trust that is essential for honesty from interviewee

Ethical:

* Relationships between interviewer and participant can distort the respondents answers
* Data confidentiality- unable to ensure data is kept confidential as new data may arise e.g. unexpected answer given by interviewee which doesn’t relate to question such as illegal activities

Theoretical:

* Smaller numbers of people involved means that the sample won’t be representative
* Not standardised which makes them unreliable
* Validity- interviewer bias is common in unstructured interviews due to the influence of the interviewer’s presence on the interviewee, distorting the information given and decreasing the rate of validity.

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]

**P.E.T Evaluation- Semi Structured Interviews**

**Definition:** Interviews with some structure but allows for some alteration where necessary the respondent are given the time and opportunity to discuss their opinions in relation to the interviews subject

**Form of Data:** Qualitative Data (with the potential for some quantitative)

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|  | Examples of studies that have used it: | Dobash and Dobash ‘Violence against wives’ |
|  | Positives | Negatives |
| Practical | * Inexpensive to complete an interview * The interviewer is able to explain the purpose and process of the interview ensuring they are fully informed * If they researcher required training courses can be found relatively easily and at little cost | * If the interviewer lacks skills they may be unable to produce a successful interview * Completing, writing up and analysing the interviews can take a large amount of time * A researcher may be unable to access the respondents * Time Consuming to conduct and analyse eg. Dobash & Dobash violence against wives |
| Ethical | * As the researcher has time to personally speak with the respondents they can ensure consent is gained * Answers to sensitive issues or responses in general can be discussed in further detail eg. Dobash & Dobash violence against wives * Respondents can become aware of the researchers aims and objectives because they have time to interact personally | * The respondents may become stressed when talking about sensitive issues as the process can be probing * The interview may avoid the horthorn effect where they influence the responses of the respondent |
| Theoretical | * The researcher can build up a rapport with the respondents which may cause them to provide truthful answers * The results have high levels of Validity because they answers can be verified through further questioning * Verstehen can be achieved * Able to build rapport between the researcher and the participants. * Provides comparable data from the use of standardised questions – this can allow for more comparison with unstructured interviews | * As the questions are not identical for each subject reliability cannot be verified * The data is unlikely to representative * As it produces qualitative data it is not a method suitable for positivists * Interviewer bias – if the researcher has the wrong nature and makes the participants feel uncomfortable, it could impact on the validity of the results. |

Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that semi-structured interviews are the best way to explore the experiences of teachers in the education system.

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| **Define the method**  PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION - the researcher takes part in an event or the everyday life of the group while observing it.  Overt - the researcher makes their true identity and purpose known to those being studied.  Covert - the study is carried out under cover, the researchers real identity and purpose are kept concealed from the group being studied. | **Example of studies that have used it**  Sudhir Venkatesh - gang leader for a day  Erving Goffman - stigma  William Whyte - street corner society  Paul Willis - learning to labour |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * 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 | * 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. |
| **Ethical**   * 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. | * 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 |
| **Theoretical**   * 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 * No personal opinions influencing the researcher | * 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. * 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. |

**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.

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| **Define the method**  **DOCUMENTS**  Primary or secondary/ pre-existing data that is in a qualitative form e.g. diaries, letters, Facebook accounts, photos etc. | **Example of studies that have used it**  Photo diaries were used in Archers ‘University’s not for me, I’m a Nike person’ study.  Willis used diaries in his research. |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Practical**   * Cheap – don’t have to conduct any research to get results. * Could also save time for the researcher as it is secondary data. * Easy to compare with other data. | * Can be time consuming - large number of documents need to be read in depth and analysed to get the results needed for specific investigation. * Access can be difficult – some documents are confidential such as government documents, which cannot be accessed unless permission is given. |
| **Ethical**   * For public documents – consent is not needed as it has already been given for the document to be able to be seen by the public. * Unobtrusive method – There is no direct contact with other people to gain the information. | * Consent – will be needed if researcher wants to view private documents, such as a pupil’s school documents. |
| **Theoretical**   * Researcher isn’t able to influence the behaviour as the document already exists – rules out interviewer effect. * Able to compare with similar documents and analyse in depth. * Public documents are more likely to be valid and more representative as you can compare with many different documents to get more data. * Favoured by interpretivists as the data is qualitative. | * Reliability - how accurate are the documents? To what extent have they been influenced by personal biases? * Generalisation is difficult since we cannot know how representative the documents are. * Validity - how truthful are the accounts. Are the documents authentic? * Not favoured by positivists as the findings are not analysed using numbers and quantitative data. |

**Examples of potential exam questions:**

Outline and explain….

2 advantages of using documents for sociological research. [10]

Outline and explain….

2 disadvantages of using documents for sociological research [10]

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

Documents are an effective way of studying sociological research for interpretivists. [20]

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

Documents are not used by positivists for sociological research. [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] 