

Activity answers

Unit 1: Types of data

Activity 1 (page 121)

1 What types of data are Items A, B and C, quantitative or qualitative? Give reasons for your answer.

Items A and B are qualitative because the data is not numerical (it involves words and pictures in Item A and a picture in Item B). Item C is quantitative because it involves numerical data. It attempts to quantify the relationship between social class and leisure.

2 How might a sociologist studying images of gender use Item A?

A sociologist might point to how macho images have been used for propaganda purposes – to recruit young men into the navy. This illustrates the ideological nature of gender images – associating war with men, for example. The absence of women suggests that they play a different (non-combat) role in wartime, something that reflects traditional ideas about gender roles.

3 How might a sociologist use the data in Item C?

The data can be used to demonstrate how different leisure choices can be quantitatively related to social class. It also shows that the higher their class, the more likely someone is to enjoy 'high cultural' forms of leisure, such as opera. Levels of leisure participation rise as you go up the class structure – unskilled manual workers have lower levels of participation than the managerial/professional class.

4 Ask 10 people what the rings round the neck of the woman in Item B indicate. Are their observations:

a) valid?

Data is valid if it presents a true and accurate description or measurement of something. To decide if the respondents' observations are valid we need to consider the accuracy of their answers – do they actually know what the rings signify? If they don't then their observations lack validity, whereas if they do then their observations will be valid.

b) reliable?

Data is reliable when different researchers using the same methods obtain the same results. If most or all respondents give the same answer to the same question, the data is reliable.

Unit 2 The research process

Activity 2 (page 123)

1 Choose one of these topics for research.

2 Explain why you have chosen this topic.

If this was an actual piece of research the choice would reflect:

- personal values
- values of society
- funding
- availability of data
- theoretical position

Activity 3 (page 124)

Why do you think Humphreys and Kulick chose observation as their main research method?

Humphreys and Kulick are likely to have chosen observation for a number of practical and theoretical reasons. In terms of **validity**, the observer is a first-hand witness to the behaviour being studied and this personal experience means that they see how people really behave (as opposed to how they say they behave). Therefore, the observer gains a unique **insight** into people's behaviour because research participants are studied in their normal setting as they go about their everyday lives. The observer gains an 'insider view' of behaviour – either because they are participating in that behaviour (Humphreys) or they are given privileged access to study it (Kulick). This allows them to follow leads and develop research avenues that may not have occurred to them before becoming involved with a group. This also means they are more likely to be open-minded about the behaviour being researched – something they can use to 'discover the priorities, concerns, meanings and definitions' people use in their everyday lives. In terms of **practical issues**, some groups are closed to, or suspicious of, outsiders. Participant observation – either covert (Humphreys), or overt (Kulick) – may be the only method with a realistic chance of producing valid information, because it provides researchers with an opportunity to gain the trust of those they observe.

Activity 4 (page 126)

1 How do Items A and B illustrate positivism and interpretivism?

Item A illustrates **positivism** in a number of ways. Durkheim favoured **quantitative data** because he wanted to measure the strength of the relationship between social isolation and suicide; in other words, he was seeking to test a **cause-and-effect** relationship between levels of social isolation and suicide. Durkheim argued that suicide rates were **social facts** and that suicide could not be understood just by looking at its meaning for individuals. Rather, to explain why people commit suicide we need to explain one social fact (suicide rates) in terms of its social cause – another social fact (in this

instance, levels of social isolation).

Interpretivism, illustrated by Item B, takes a different approach by focusing on the discovery and interpretation of the **meanings** and **definitions** guiding people's actions.

Atkinson focused on how coroners **define** and **interpret** suicide and argued that the way to do this is through the use of **qualitative data** obtained from methods such as observation and interviews. For interpretivists such as Atkinson, the job of the sociologist is not to try to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Rather, it is to discover the meaning of particular situations, acts and events for people.

2 Explain Item C from a) Durkheim's and b) Atkinson's view.

a) From Durkheim's viewpoint, this behaviour would be explained in terms of **social facts**. It is the high level of **social isolation** ('Homeless, Friendless, Deserted, Destitute, and Gin Mad') that drives the woman to suicide (it is the **causal factor** here). This could be established through the analysis of **suicide rates** and the social situation of suicide victims. Durkheim believed that it was possible, through **quantitative** analysis of official statistics, to show that individuals who experience high levels of social isolation are more likely to commit suicide than those who do not.

b) From Atkinson's viewpoint, suicide is a meaning rather than a social fact. There is no cause-and-effect relationship between suicide rates and levels of social isolation. The job of the sociologist is to discover the meanings used to define certain types of death as suicide and certain types of people as likely suicide victims. The suicide attempt in the picture and the social situation of the woman fit coroners' definitions of a typical suicide death and a typical suicide victim. Qualitative research methods, such as observation and interviews, are seen as appropriate for discovering meanings.

Activity 5 (page 127)

1 Why do you think Fielding chose to study the National Front?

Fielding wanted to understand the meanings and motivations of those who were members of what he saw as 'a vicious, racist organisation concerned with White supremacy'. Clearly, Fielding saw it as important to make public the beliefs and actions of an organisation he despised and considered dangerous.

2 Discuss the ethical issues involved in his research methods.

Fielding's research methods raise ethical issues related to:

- 1 Informed consent:** Those involved gave no informed consent to the research.
- 2 Deception:** Fielding lied about his presence at branch meetings, where he presented himself as an 'ordinary member' rather than as a sociological researcher.
- 3 Privacy:** Because Fielding engaged in deception and wrote publically about the things he saw, it could be argued that the privacy of the group was invaded.
- 4 Confidentiality:** By writing about the group Fielding could be accused of breaking confidences – he presented

himself as someone 'sympathetic to the Front's aims' and it's possible he was told things that would not have been told to a sociologist.

5 Protection from harm: As one aim was to expose the 'true nature' of National Front politics, he may have placed Front members 'at risk' by writing about their activities and beliefs. However, those who condemn the National Front may regard Fielding's 'unethical' behaviour as justified since it exposed an evil organisation.

3 Do you think that Hey (Item B) was justified in helping the girls truant from lessons? Explain your answer.

It could be argued that Hey was **justified** for three reasons: **1** because she needed to observe girls' behaviour in 'non-routine' situations; **2** to get the girls to see themselves as 'specially privileged' in return for their cooperation; and **3** to encourage their continued cooperation through the use of an incentive (missing lessons). However, it could also be argued that her behaviour was **unjustified**; she infringed the rights of others (the teachers from whose classes the girls were absent) she disrupted the school day to serve her own purposes and she may have harmed the girls' education.

4 How would you have dealt with the problem faced by Parker in Item C? Give reasons for your decision.

There are three main ways the problem could have been dealt with ethically – by offering help and advice (the 'duty of care'); by maintaining participant confidentiality (something that includes protection of privacy); or by treating each case on its merits and gaining the 'informed consent' of the participants (the option Parker chose).

Unit 3 Experiments

Activity 6 (page 129)

1 What hypothesis is being tested in Item A?

The research was testing whether frustration is more likely to lead to aggression if those involved have previously observed aggressive behaviour.

2 Do you agree with the views outlined in Item B? Give reasons for your answer.

The Item suggests that the results of laboratory experiments cannot be applied to the real world. Such experiments involve **artificial situations**. If people are aware of the experiment, their behaviour may be very different to how they would behave in the real world. Even where people are unaware of the experiment (as with Bandura's study), the situation may be so far removed from 'real life' that its value is limited ('Unlike people, Bobo dolls are designed to be knocked around, they invite violent behaviour'). The differences between the laboratory and real life are too great to apply findings from laboratory experiments to the outside world. However, experiments may provide insights into behaviour outside the laboratory. For example, children in the Bobo doll experiment imitated the aggressive behaviour of adults. This may provide some support for the view

that media violence will affect behaviour, particularly the behaviour of 'vulnerable groups' such as children.

Activity 7 (page 131)

1 Suggest reasons for the different responses pictured above.

The passers-by appear to be responding to what they saw as the actor's social class. However, we can't take this for granted as there are other possible reasons, such as **experimenter bias**. The actor, for example, may have acted differently when playing each role; he may have (unconsciously) acted more aggressively when playing the labourer than when playing the businessman. Alternatively, he may have given different expectations to the respondents – as 'a businessman' he may expect more help in this role and unintentionally convey this to the people passing by. A further reason relates to the passers-by themselves; people act in terms of how they perceive both themselves and others. If the respondents were middle class, for example, they might respond more positively to 'someone like them' (the businessman).

2 Using this example, outline some of the problems with field experiments.

Problems with field experiments fall into four main categories: **1 Lack of control**: The researcher can't control all possible variables affecting people's behaviour, which means that they can never be certain if the behaviour is actually the outcome of one variable (the social class of the actor) or some other variable (such as the actor giving different impressions to the respondent). Lack of control affects both validity (did the experiment measure people reactions to social class or did it reflect experimenter bias?) and reliability (it would be difficult to replicate this experiment because no two passers-by are the same). **2 The Hawthorne effect**: with any experiment we can never be sure if people are aware of being observed and, if so, how this knowledge affects their behaviour. **3 Experimenter bias**: we don't know if, unconsciously, the actor gave the respondents different signals that affected their behaviour (if the businessman, for example, 'looked lost' and pathetic or if the labourer appeared more aggressive, and so on). **4 Ethics**: Do researchers have the right to experiment on people, who may be unwitting (and unwilling) participants? What, for example, might have been the ethical consequences of the women being fearful of attack when approached by a stranger in the street?

Unit 4 Social surveys

Activity 8 (page 134)

1 Why do you think the researchers in Item A decided to use a stratified random sample?

Compared to a simple random sample, a stratified random sample is more likely to ensure that the sample group

accurately reflected the qualities of the target population. Where the population is diverse (different departments and different years within each department), a stratified random sample is most likely to produce a representative sample.

2 According to one critic, Hite's 'findings' are rubbish (Kellner, 1994). Discuss this claim with reference to a) her sampling procedure and b) the response rate.

a) Hite's sample was drawn from the readership of three magazines. It was not representative of the populations of the three countries from which it was taken. For example, the American sample was drawn from the readers of *Penthouse*, a men's magazine. The British and French samples were drawn from magazines with a largely female, intellectual readership.

The samples were self-selected volunteer samples – the research participants selected themselves to answer the questionnaire placed in the magazines. This adds to the probability of the sample being unrepresentative. Only those with a particular reason for replying would have completed the questionnaire.

b) Only a very small proportion (3%) of the possible respondents completed the questionnaire. This group formed a tiny and, in all likelihood, unrepresentative minority of the already unrepresentative sample frame. As a result, Kellner's description of the findings as 'rubbish' is probably correct.

Unit 5 Questionnaires

Activity 9 (page 138)

1 Read Item A. Comment on the accuracy of the data that this questionnaire might produce.

The data may be inaccurate because: **1** If respondents fail to complete the questionnaire immediately after going to the toilet they will have to recall (or guess) the shape and texture of their faeces. **2** Accuracy may be compromised if respondents interpret the meaning of words like 'consistency and texture' differently. **3** Where closed questions are asked, a problem may occur when the options given don't match respondent perceptions – they may be forced to choose an option 'closest to' their observations. **4** The accuracy of the data depends on the respondent 'telling the truth'. While they may not consciously lie about their toilet habits, there is the possibility that they did not inspect their faeces (in terms of shape, size, texture and consistency) as carefully as the researcher would like.

2 What problems do Items B and C raise for interpreting answers to questionnaires?

Item B illustrates the problem of obtaining valid responses. A total of 68% of the children claimed to have seen a non-existent video. When presented with a list of fictitious videos, some of the children may well have thought they had seen one of them, while others may have said they had seen one or more because they assumed that was what the

researcher expected and/or wanted them to say.

Item C shows that what people say they will do does not necessarily correspond to what they actually do. It cannot be assumed that answers to questionnaire or interview questions will reflect respondents' behaviour in everyday life.

Unit 6 Interviews

Activity 10 (page 142)

1 You are being interviewed on a) your sexual behaviour and b) your views on race relations. Choose an interviewer for each interview from Item A. Explain your choices.

The likelihood is that we will choose an interviewer who we feel most closely resembles us in terms of culture, ethnicity, age and gender. We will probably feel most at ease with somebody who appears similar to ourselves.

2 Explain the idea of interviewer bias using your answers to Question 1.

'Interviewer bias' refers to the idea that the characteristics of the interviewer will affect responses given by the interviewee. We can see how this might occur in relation to:

a) Sexual behaviour: Young people are likely to feel embarrassed talking about sexual behaviour with adults (especially adults of the opposite sex). On the other hand, respondents may try to impress the interviewer with either their range of sexual experiences (boasting) or claimed lack of such experience. If this occurs, the validity of answers may suffer through unintentional interviewer bias.

b) Race relations: People are likely to feel less comfortable talking about race relations with someone of a different ethnicity to themselves. A couple of further areas of interviewer bias potentially arise. Firstly, people who are racist may feel intimidated about expressing their views to someone from the ethnic group they are prejudiced against (although the reverse may be true – people may exaggerate their views in order to show they are not intimidated). Secondly, the respondent may consciously or unconsciously 'tell the interviewer what they think they want to hear' because they want to present themselves in a favourable light ('social desirability').

3 Suggest reasons for the similarities and differences between the three interviews in Item B.

Interviews 1 and 2 are similar because a form of interviewer bias is occurring. In the first interview, the child is intimidated in three possible ways. He is being interviewed by an **adult** of a **different skin colour** in a **formal setting**. Some or all of these made the interviewee uncooperative. In the second interview, one possible source of bias (different skin colour) is removed, but the other two remain with much the same result. In the third interview a crucial source of bias is removed – the **setting** is made much **less formal** and the interviewee responds to this change by becoming enthusiastic and talkative.

Unit 7 Observation

Activity 11 (pages 146–147)

1 Item A points to one of the main problems of participant observation. What is this problem and how is it usually dealt with?

The problem is how to obtain valid data and in particular, to what extent should the participant observer intervene in the lives of the research participants in order to obtain data. For example, should they be directly questioned by the researcher? This problem is often dealt with in the following ways. **1 Look and listen:** As Item A suggests, people will often 'clam up' if the researcher asks intrusive questions. Participant observers tend to 'hang round' and gain acceptance. Once they have gained acceptance, people will usually behave normally in their presence. In this way, the researcher will find answers without directly questioning the research participants. **2 Sponsorship:** Whyte, for example, gained the cooperation of the gang leader (Doc) and this led to his automatic acceptance by the gang members. Both Hobbs (1988) and Okely (1983) developed a friendship with influential group members as a way of gaining entry to and acceptance from the groups they were studying. Hobbs used this friendship to develop contacts with group members and by drinking in the same pub he was able to join in with their conversations and observe their activities. **3 Accepted roles:** Humphreys (1970) gained acceptance by performing a useful and accepted role within the group he was studying. When Hobbs was initially trying to develop contacts with the group, he too began by playing an accepted role (soccer coach) that allowed him to develop a friendship with a helpful contact. **4 Becoming a member:** It may be possible, on occasions, to simply join a group. Festinger (1964), for example, was able to join and be accepted by a religious sect because he professed to be a believer.

2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of participant observation indicated by Items B, C and D?

The advantages of participant observation include **validity** (Items C and D) – it gives a unique, in-depth, highly detailed picture of life within a group. This, in turn, gives the researcher **insight** into behaviour they may not have gained using other methods. Hargreaves (Item B), for example, gained insight into how teachers are seen by their pupils while Rubenstein (Item D) collected first-hand information about violence and corruption that 'could only have been gained by a trained observer who was accepted by the policemen'. This provides an **insider's view** of their behaviour, as does Item C (where Hobbs was accepted into the lives of the detectives he studied). By obtaining the participant's viewpoint, the researcher may come to understand the reasons for the behaviour. A further (**practical**) advantage is that participant observation may be the only method with any chance of gaining information about groups like the police (Items C and D) that might be closed to other methods of research. In these examples, the

researchers were able to see and experience behaviour 'as it actually happened'. No other method offers this level of insight.

Participant observation does, however, have its disadvantages. There are, for example, practical considerations such as **time, money and personal cost**. Rubenstein not only had to train as police officer, he had to have the time and inclination to do this. Item C points to a significant problem, that of 'going native' and the consequent **loss of objectivity** this involves. In the case of Item B, the disadvantage is one of not always knowing how the researcher's presence **changes the behaviour** of those they are studying. If behaviour changes when people know they're being observed, the researcher may not get a valid picture of how people 'really behave'. The nature of these studies – small-scale, intensive and in-depth – points to two further disadvantages: **1** because they are impossible to exactly **replicate** (no-one could exactly repeat Hobbs's study, for example) their reliability is potentially low; **2** it would be difficult to **generalise** from the studies which are usually based on small groups and/or single organisations – Hargreaves' research, for example, may not be representative of all schools in Britain.

Unit 8 Secondary sources

Activity 12 (pages 149–150)

1 a) What are the statistics in Item A actually measuring?

This is difficult to say. To some extent they appear to reflect prejudice and discrimination within the White general public and the police.

b) Do they indicate a link between ethnicity and crime?

At first sight, the statistics do indicate a link between ethnicity and crime, because they appear to show that members of ethnic minority groups are disproportionately involved in criminal behaviour. However, the **validity** of the statistics is questionable for two reasons: **1** Those who report the most crime (the White majority) are more likely to report Black offending than offences by Whites. **2** They reflect the assumptions and activities of the 'powerful' (the police and courts) in terms of arresting, charging and punishing offenders.

2 Look at Item B.

a) Why does it suggest that crime statistics must be treated with caution?

An unknown number of crimes are excluded from the official statistics for a variety of reasons; they are not observed, reported, detected or taken seriously by the police. Of detected crimes, no one may be charged with the offence or those charged may be found not guilty. For these reasons, crime statistics lack validity and should be treated with caution.

b) Item B assumes that there are such things as 'criminal acts', which are either included in or excluded from official statistics. Criticise this view.

From an interpretivist perspective, official statistics are not 'facts' representing an objective reality that exists 'out there', separate from the behaviour of the people who create them. Crime statistics, therefore, are social constructions for two reasons: **1** because they are created by people producing and enforcing definitions of 'crime'; people make decisions about what a crime is, whether a crime has occurred, who to arrest, and so on; **2** as no form of behaviour is inherently or self-evidently 'criminal', there can be no such 'thing' as a 'criminal act', only acts that people label as criminal – and this involves subjective meanings and interpretations, not objective facts. In other words, 'crime' is simply a meaning that people give to an event.

Activity 13 (pages 152–153)

1a) What does Item A tell us?

Item A tells us, **1** that outside of news, documentary and magazine programming disability rarely features on television; **2** it suggests that 'disability' is something to be reported (news), documented (documentary) and discussed (magazine/informational programming). Images of disability rarely feature in popular shows (quizzes) or activities (sports). In this respect the disabled are portrayed as something to be observed and commented on rather than as people who take an active part in the day-to-day activities of a society.

b) What further information might be useful?

Formal content analysis is useful for measuring and representing relatively straightforward aspects of content (such as the number of television appearances made by disabled people). However, it can't tell us anything about the meaning of these appearances to either those involved (programme producers and disabled participants) or the audience. It would, therefore, be useful to know more about the content and context of these programmes – if disability, for example, is portrayed positively or negatively.

2 Analyse the headlines in Item B using thematic and textual analysis.

Thematic analysis aims to identify the **themes** in media texts (such as the newspaper headlines) and then use this as the basis for understanding the **ideologies** and **motives** that underpin the production of such texts. In this respect, we can identify two main **themes** in Item B – that some people are 'innocent victims' of AIDS (those who contracted it through blood transfusions) and that others are 'guilty victims'. The theme established in the headlines is a distinction between those who contracted AIDS through no fault of their own and those who were 'at fault' for contracting it.

The **ideological** nature of this theme – the distinction between 'innocence' and 'guilt' – is important because it suggests that the latter have brought AIDS upon themselves,

presumably (although this is unstated) because of their 'chosen lifestyle' (homosexuality). The 'innocent' deserve our help and sympathy; the 'guilty' apparently do not.

In terms of **motives** we can note two forms of appeal:

1 the explicit appeal is to help a specific section of those who have contracted AIDS (the 'innocent' and hence 'deserving' victims); 2 however, the implicit motive is to suggest that homosexuality is a deviant lifestyle and, as such, homosexuals are broadly deserving of whatever happens to them.

Textual analysis, on the other hand, looks at the headlines in terms of the way explicit **themes** (and their underlying **ideological assumptions**) point the reader towards a 'preferred interpretation' – the one favoured by newspaper editors. In this respect, although the headlines are about AIDS, the major theme is that of the 'innocence' of a particular group who have contracted AIDS. The 'preferred interpretation' here, therefore, is that we must distinguish between those who have AIDS through the fault of others (the government, hospitals, etc.) and those who have it because of their lifestyle choices (the unstated group here being homosexuals). The former deserve our compassion and help, the latter apparently do not.

3 What use might a sociologist studying gender make of the posters in Item C?

The sociologist could use the posters to make some general points in two areas: 1 They reflect traditional assumptions about gender and gender roles – women, for example, playing a caring role (the poster depicting a female nurse tending to a wounded man). Women also play a supporting role to men, evidenced by the 'munitions poster' where women are encouraged to 'do their bit' by making the ammunition required for the male fighting role. This is particularly significant given the time these posters were created (the early 20th century) when women were barred from heavy manual work. This demonstrates the ideological nature of cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity – in extreme situations these can be defined and redefined in various ways. 2 The posters could be used to demonstrate the significance of social change (such as war) in creating changing ideological assumptions about masculinity and femininity. The middle poster demonstrates how assumptions can be changed in time of necessity – in this instance the idea that women had an important combat-type role to play (fighting a war is traditionally associated with men). However, the woman is also portrayed in a traditional female role – as feminine and flirtatious. The fact women were urged to break out of traditional gender roles demonstrates that such roles are not 'fixed and natural' but 'fluid and cultural'. When the situation demands, women are just as capable as men of performing roles traditionally and ideologically associated with the latter.

4 a) What additional information would you need in order to understand what's going on in Item D?

An audience would need to know something about the general history of and background to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. For example, to understand why the child is slinging stones we would need to understand something about the historical relationship between the two countries (such as the dispute over Israeli occupation of Palestinian land – the 'occupied territories'). In addition, we would need to know something about the background to this action – that Israel, for example, is supported and funded by the USA and that the USA supplies military hardware that is used against the Palestinians.

b) Do you think that most young people in the UK have this information? Explain your answer.

Research by Philo and Miller (2002) suggests that most young people (aged 17–22) in the UK do not have this information. For example, in their sample they found:

91% did not know the Israelis were occupying Palestinian land.

71% had no idea what the term 'occupied territories' meant.

11% thought the Palestinians were occupying Israeli land.

In relation to why the Palestinians distrusted the USA:

66% had no idea.

24% thought that the USA 'supported' Israel.

10% mentioned the supply of money and arms to Israel.

Activity 14 (page 154)

1 With some reference to Item A, suggest why diaries might be preferable to autobiographies as a source of information.

Diaries might be preferable to autobiographies for a range of reasons: Firstly, they are likely to be more **authentic** documents in the sense of being contemporary accounts of something. While a diary is written 'at the time of events', an autobiography is often written a long time after the events it details. Events when writing a diary are therefore much fresher in the author's mind. In terms of **credibility**, the item notes that 'Memory is a terrible improver' which means that with autobiography there are a couple of problems. Firstly, they are a reconstruction of events that happened years, rather than hours, ago. Secondly, there can be a temptation to look at the past through 'rose-tinted spectacles' – consciously or unconsciously – to portray things as 'better than they actually were at the time'. In addition, the credibility of the source is likely to be different – diaries are likely to contain a lot of detail and are less likely to omit details of events. Autobiography, by its very nature, tends to take the broader view of events.

Although neither diaries nor autobiographies are necessarily representative of anyone other than their authors, the item notes that a diary can be 'a day-by-day account' of events that allows researchers to see how these developed 'in real time' rather than 'after the event'. In addition, 'everyday

details' of life are more likely to be included, as well as momentous events (in the case of Item A). 'Trivial details' (as far as the author is concerned) are more likely to be omitted from autobiography. Diaries may also document the lives of 'ordinary people' (both writers and those written about) while autobiography tends towards documenting a life of someone 'out of the ordinary'. For a researcher, information about how 'ordinary people' lived, worked and thought can be just as important as the lives of 'extraordinary people'. Finally, in terms of meaning, although some diaries (such as those in Item A) may be written with an eye to the future (to make the author money, establish a reputation or even 'settle old scores'), many are not. Autobiographies, on the other hand, are generally written to celebrate the life of 'extraordinary people' and there is always the temptation to sensationalise and embellish the reputation of the writer.

2 a) Provide a sociological interpretation of the documents in Item B.

The documents can be analysed in terms of their **themes**, ideological assumptions and the motives for their production. In terms of themes running through the documents, we can note that Black people are portrayed as goods/commodities to be bought and sold as slaves; Blacks are portrayed as 'uncivilised' and as less than human.

Underpinning these themes are **ideological** notions relating to the assumption that humanity consists of different races that can be separated on the basis of things like skin colour. These races are not just different, however. Some (Whites) are seen as superior, while others (Blacks) are seen as inferior. Cultural superiority is demonstrated literally – through selling Blacks as slaves – and by the idea that Whites have sophisticated cultural products ('Pears Soap'). The 'soap reference' is also disrespectful because it suggests that 'black skin' is dirty and can be cleaned using a decent soap.

In terms of the **motives** behind these themes and ideas, the desire is to demonstrate both racial inequalities and the superiority of the White race (through the idea of, for example, master-slave relationships), coupled with the idea that White racial and cultural superiority gives them the right (or indeed duty) to control the behaviour of Blacks and justifies selling Blacks as slaves.

b) Critically assess your interpretation.

Critical assessment of the interpretation covers two areas: **1** how valid the analysis is, in the sense of asking if interpretations produced by sociologists are any more or any less valid than those produced by non-sociologists; **2** even if we assume the interpretation is correct it still raises the question of how an audience interprets, understands and acts on the documents. Audiences in the past may well see the documents very differently than audiences today. And at one point in time, various groups may view the documents in different ways. Sociologists' interpretations assume that the audience is influenced by the themes and ideologies underpinning the documents, yet is not sophisticated

enough to recognise this process. However, the themes and ideologies identified by sociologists may have no effect on the audience.

Unit 9 Types of research

Activity 15 (page 156)

Using examples from this activity, suggest some advantages of the case study approach.

Case studies have a range of advantages: **1** They provide a rich and detailed picture of behaviour such as bullying. They can, for example give a deeper insight into the motivation of bullies. **2** This may result in the development of new insights and fresh ideas about why people bully and how it might be possible to prevent bullying. Such insights can be used for developing additional research methods, for example, questionnaires or interviews.

Case studies can form the basis of a much larger study. In terms of the item, for example, the bullies were included in the discussion of how to combat bullying and 'Once the bullies realised that they were being included, the bullying ceased'. This particular insight could also be used as the basis for theory-testing in a larger study – for example, to test the relationship between social exclusion and bullying.

Activity 16 (page 157)

How might the comparative method be useful for explaining behaviour at work?

There are two main ways the comparative method could be useful for explaining behaviour at work: **1 Causal relationships:** The sociologist might find common features that point to underlying cause-and-effect relationships in the workplace (such as whether the same kind of production technology leads to the same kind of behaviour). **2 Natural experiments:** It enables sociologists to set-up 'natural experiments' to study the effect of different workplace variables. Gallie, for example, wanted to know if the same kind of production technology would lead to the same kind of behaviour at work – and to test this he changed different variables (such as the country in which the work was situated) to see their effect on workplace behaviour.

Activity 17 (page 158)

According to this extract, what are the main advantages of methodological pluralism?

The extract identifies four basic advantages: **1 Research methods:** It involves both quantitative and qualitative methods (such as questionnaires and participant observation) – the strengths of one can be used to offset the weaknesses of another. **2 Social reality:** Different methods can be used to uncover different 'layers of reality' (such as actual behaviour and the meanings people give to behaviour).

3 Comparisons: Different methods, producing different types of data and different perspectives on an issue, allow researchers to look at that issue from a number of different angles – such as comparing and contrasting findings from one method with the findings from another method. **4**

Flexibility: Researchers can apply different methods in different situations to analyse different types of problem. A statistical analysis of crime, for example, can be complemented by an examination of the beliefs of those being caught and/or those doing the catching.