

Paper 2 Theory and Methods

Section A

Question 1

- 1 Sociologists carry out research in order to collect data in a systematic and organised way. In doing so, they will opt to collect data that is quantitative or qualitative. However, it is increasingly common for researchers to adopt an approach that involves combining different types of method and which produces both types of data. Whatever approach is taken, the data collected provides the sociologist with evidence to help describe or explain the social world.

However, some sociologists believe that research should also contribute to making society a better place. In other words, they think that sociological research should seek to solve some of society's social problems and to therefore influence *social policy*. On the other hand, there are many other sociologists who reject this approach, arguing that all sociological enquiries should be devoted to explaining the social world rather than seeking to change it.

- (a) What is meant by the term *social policy*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** reasons why a researcher might use more than one type of method. [4]
- (c) Explain the difference between a social problem and a sociological problem. [8]
- (d) Assess the view that the main role of sociological research should be to help create a better society. [11]

Mark scheme

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However, some sociologists believe that research should also contribute to making society a better place. In other words, they think that sociological research should seek to solve some of society's social problems and to therefore influence *social policy*. On the other hand, there are many other sociologists who reject this approach, arguing that all sociological enquiries should be devoted to explaining the social world rather than seeking to change it.

- (a) **What is meant by the term *social policy*?** [2]

Social policy refers to the actions taken by a government which are designed to maintain and improve the welfare of its citizens. Its purpose is to deal with and resolve potential and actual social problems. This includes areas such as housing, education, crime, health etc. Two marks for a clear, accurate definition. 1 mark for a partial definition, such as 'attempts to make society a better place'.

(b) Describe two reasons why a researcher might use more than one type of method. [4]

- The combined use of different research techniques [mixed methods] is used to complement and verify each method, in order to achieve robust research results.
- They are also used to generate a more vivid and complete picture of whatever is being studied.
- Those who adopt this approach – in practice, most researchers – may do so because they do not feel tied to the traditional distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- Their decisions may also be driven by practicalities, which is a further point of development. 1 mark for the reason plus 1 mark for development (2 × 2 marks).

(c) Explain the difference between a social problem and a sociological problem. [8]

Social problems are aspects of a society or social behaviour that have negative consequences for the individuals and groups concerned, as well as for the society as a whole. Negative consequences may include poverty, crime and unemployment, and are likely to be linked to social policy measures. While sociologists are invariably interested in social problems, and some may view their role as providing solutions to these problems, the primary sociological interest is in seeking to provide an explanation for them. They are interested in what is considered a problem, why this is the case, why some are considered to be problems and not others etc.

0–4 Answers at this level are likely to be based on a few mostly common sense observations that fail to distinguish between the two concepts, probably focusing on the social problem element and identifying some examples.

5–8 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the question, with links to relevant sociological material and ideas. In this band, the distinction will be clear. At the top end of the band the explanation will be detailed and well focussed on the importance of making such a distinction so as to clearly identify the proper domain of sociological enquiry.

NB This question asks candidates to 'explain', therefore there is no requirement for assessment.

(d) Assess the view that the main role of sociological research should be to help create a better society. [11]

0–4 Any relevant points at this level will be vague and poorly supported by references to evidence and arguments. A legitimate viewpoint may be asserted, but the answer will be weak in terms of its development and structure. Some awareness that there are different views about the purpose of sociological research may be apparent in a very basic way, towards the top end of the band.

5–8 Answers will demonstrate an awareness of the arguments and perspectives that support the idea that sociological research should aim to bring about a better society. Higher in the band this may be contrasted with relevant alternative views, particularly those that argue for a value-neutral sociology. However, the assessment will remain weak at this level.

9–11 The assessment will be more developed, perhaps through references to the practical and theoretical problems involved in using sociological research as a basis for social engineering. Higher in the band, the assessment will be characterised by some sophistication; for example, candidates may question whose interests sociological research serves and who may benefit from supposed improvements in society; and which values underpin the idea of social engineering and what type of society it may give rise to.

Example candidate response – grade A

1	(a)	<p>The term social policy refers to a policy that is adopted, possibly, by the government - it is a policy that, with research providing a backing for it, is intended for the betterment of individuals in society; social policies seek to solve social problems and are adopted mainly by the structuralists who see society as needing change.</p>
	(b)	<p>One reason a researcher might use more than one method, would be to eliminate the weaknesses and flaws of that single method. By using methodological pluralism, Eileen Barker (The Making of a Mother, 1978) was able to overcome the weakness of the lack of ^{substantial} reliability (by using interviews) alongside participant observation.</p>
		<p>Another reason why a researcher might do this, would be because the researcher wants to obtain a more complete analysis and assessment of what they are researching. For example, using questionnaires will provide simple, direct data, but complementing the use of questionnaires with in-depth interviews would add more validity to the research.</p>

1 (c) A social problem is a problem that is observable within society, and social problems could mean crime, single parenthood, or juvenile delinquency or an increase in the number of reported incidences of domestic violence. One thing social problems have in common is that they bear a very direct correlation to negative consequences for society. Thus, a social problem can be defined as an issue or matter which influences or affects society in a straightforward negative manner. ^{to an} Without sociological perspectives, social problems are direct in nature as they are observably (to the individual) negative.

A sociological problem, however, differs from a social problem in terms of its definition. A sociological problem to one perspective in sociology could not be a sociological problem to another. To some extent sociological problems differ from social problems in that they are more complex; to each perspective, they bear a different implication.

An example of this, would be single motherhood. To conservative, right wing sociologists such as Charles Murray, single motherhood is definitely negative - it is creating a social underclass and is part of the general decline in the institution of the family. To feminists such as McIntosh, however, single motherhood has a value of its own and is not necessarily negative as it gives the woman freedom from patriarchal control. To postmodernists like Janet Finch (1989), the ~~is~~ single parent family is part of the diversification in family structure. ~~The~~

1. (c) Thus, social problems are different from sociological problems. Social problems are observable and directly negative. Sociological problems, on the other hand, are either 'problems' or not at all; it varies according to the interpretation of each sociological perspective as it is the definition of a sociological problem that matters, instead of its direct nature or as a problem.

1 (d) The view that the main role of sociological research should be to help create a better society must be assessed according to perspective. To each perspective, the purpose of sociological research varies, as each perspective focuses on different aspects of society, seeing different facets of society which require the aid of sociological research in creating a better society.

To the Marxists, the main sociological research plays a vital role in supporting left-wing theories on capitalism as ~~was~~ the class division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; the bourgeoisie as the owners of the means of production exploit and coerce the proletarian masses into producing a healthy profit. For example, in their research, Bourdieu and Passeron (*Schooling in Capitalist America*, 1976) showed how the 'Middle Class Culture' in schools taught subservience and subordination, implanting hierarchical values in the school was a microcosm of the future proletarian workplace. Westergaard and Ressler showed the process of 'containment', where the welfare state actually served the ulterior motives of keeping the proletariat from oppressing the state with welfare, benefits and services. In Marxist sociological research, the true nature of capitalism as a coercive ideology is continuously exposed. The main role of research is to discover methods of ~~undoing~~ expose capitalism as it is and to theorize on approaching egalitarianism in creating a better society.

To the feminists, the main role of sociological research ~~would be to~~, would definitely be ~~the~~, ultimately, the creation of a better society - a society

1. (c.) away from the grasp of patriarchy where gender is no longer stigmatised and stereotyped. For example, Ann Oakley (1974) shows ~~that~~ in her research on domestic labour and ^{and socialisation} research through interviewing (1981) showed how women and young girls were socialised into the idea of domesticity and being submissive; patriarchal ideologies were seen as normal and natural. Spender and Stanworth, through research also managed to show how girls were stereotypically treated in schools. As a result of their research, improvements in the provision of education for girls came about, with programmes in the UK such as GIST, or WISE. Thus, feminist research also see the creation of a better society as a very significant role of sociological research.

To the interactionists, the main role of sociological research would definitely be for the betterment of society. Howard ~~Becker~~ ^{Becker} 'C Outsiders' (1963) argued that the function of sociology itself should be to be subjective - to take the sides of the weak, the poor, the deviant and the underrepresented, in order to ~~better~~ ^{benefit} society by redressing the power imbalance caused by the power held by 'moral entrepreneurs' who had the power of definition. To Goffman (1961) the purpose of sociological research was not to merely explain or to find generalising causes - it was to 'verstehen'. Thus, interactionists through their research seek to create a better society by uncovering inequality and understanding individual behaviour.

The Functionalist, however, believe that modern society as it is should be preserved. As a conservative, political perspective, Functionalists wish to preserve the status quo.

(1957)

1. (a) To functionalists like Parsons, ~~for~~ society has evolved into the perfect, ideal, all-functioning model with the emergence of the nuclear family. Thus, to functionalists like Durkheim the role of sociological research would be to discover social laws or 'social facts' that governed human behaviours - 'ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him'. Functionalists do not focus ^{essentially} on the ~~role~~ role of research in the creation of a better society, but ~~instead~~ ^{instead} focus on the abilities of research in uncovering general explanations for human behaviour.

In conclusion, it can be said that the view that the main role of sociological research should be to ^{help} create a better society cannot be applied as a blanket concept across all perspectives. Each perspective has its specific focus and thus interprets the role of sociological research uniquely. It is ~~valued as a method~~ ^{valued as a method} of research whether ~~primarily~~ in accompanying ~~strictly~~ ^{strictly} ~~quantitative and qualitative~~ ^{quantitative and qualitative}.

Examiner comment – grade A

- (a)** This response does more than enough to gain full marks. It clearly states an accurate definition of the term and then goes on to develop the point in a valid way i.e. indicating that social policy is designed to resolve social problems and improve society. The key to achieving full marks in this type of question is to adopt such an approach i.e. a clear definition followed by a concise development point. Two marks were awarded for this part of the question.
- (b)** Here the candidate adopts the right strategy for this type of question – concisely reported reasons with excellent development points. There is no need here for detailed descriptions, rather the focus should be on concise identification supported by accurate use of sociological concepts. In this response, the concept of methodological pluralism is introduced and then clearly defined. The use of a study is not an embellishment, rather it is used to develop the point and show understanding. Note, however, that empirical evidence of this sort is not a requirement in this type of question. Four marks were awarded for this part of the question.
- (c)** The key to a good response here is to fully focus on distinguishing between the two ideas. Responses that devote more time to one idea than the other are unlikely to make it into the second level of the mark scheme. The first paragraph provides a very good overview of what is meant by a social problem and sound examples are used to support and develop this. The second paragraph addresses the difference between this term and that of a ‘sociological problem’, indicating that the distinction turns on how diverse sociological perspectives may hold differing positions on the nature of what a social problem is. The remaining part of the answer draws out the distinction further, taking a so-called social problem [single parents] and showing how this ‘problem’ is understood differently from diverse perspectives in that they seek to provide an explanation for problems rather than provide solutions. The response could be a little more explicit on this point – especially in the second paragraph – but it still merits seven marks.
- (d)** Good practice in this ‘mini-essay’ style question would be to make three developed points as well as present some evaluative content. This response satisfies these criteria easily. Firstly, the response indicates that diverse perspectives hold different views about the nature of society and the desirability of sociology being responsible for improving it; these views are then outlined in some detail, but always in relation to the question, e.g. ‘the main role of Marxist research is to expose capitalism’. Likewise, feminist and interactionist views are subjected to similar treatment. However, whilst this approach is productive, the candidate’s attempt at assessment just falls short of top marks because it is mainly achieved via juxtaposing perspectives rather than teasing out the discretely alternative view that sociology should be, in some way, ‘value-free’. For this reason the response is awarded nine marks for this part of the question.

Total mark awarded = 22 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade C

1	a	Social policy is published to deal with social problems in the society by usually by governments
	b	Quantitative research method is more reliable while qualitative method provides insights. Research may want to combine the merits of the two methods. Also triangulation can assess the validity of the research by ^{using} the complementary methods, so that the combined strengths can overcome the weaknesses.
	c	Social problem refers to the deviant behaviours as that have harmful influence on the society or miserable for individuals. It's concerned by the governments and as it affect the social solidarity. Governments will publish social ^{set} specific social policy to deal with the social problem or provide supports. For example, unemployment is a major social problem that harms the economy and individuals and family. Government may therefore provide unemployed benefits ^{to} to the individuals or subsidies to firms. Sociological problem, however, is not concerned by sociologists. Social problem is a kind of sociological problem. Although it's possible for sociologists to do research for dealing with social problem, but it involved more in academic study.

and sociologists are required to be objective and detached. The research of sociological problems may also influence the publishing of social policy which deal with social problems. For example, sociologists may study the marriage pattern and family diversity in modern industrial society, and the research may influence the government to publish laws like Divorce Law Reform Act or Family Support Act.

(d) Interactionists argue that sociological research certainly brings about improvements in society. Becker for instance on his work 'Whose Side Are We On?' explains that sociologists should take sides of the 'outsider' such as the homeless, single parent families, the elderly, children and those considered to be weak in order to bring about change in society. Becker argues that by taking sides sociologists would be able to show the social meaning of the ~~world~~ behaviour of the outsider and see things from their view.

Other works such as on mental illness by Goffman (Asylums) have directed a certain degree of change towards the treatment given to patients with mental illness. His study has encouraged more communal care as opposed to the institutional care.

Marxists also argue that research will help identify and show the inequality found in ^{capitalist} societies. ^{also} ~~But~~ Left wing sociologists argue that ~~this with~~ sociological research will allow people to see the unequal relationships that is still evergrowing. Dianne Ray for instance states that the gap between the rich and the poor is not getting smaller, but is in fact widening. Similarly, John Scott found that in Britain, people, especially the ruling class use their economic and political power to dominate many aspects and institutions in society.

Feminists also argue that by conducting research, improvements can

	be brought about. Research by Stanworth and Spender for example
	that looked into the educational system has helped create an
	awareness into the hidden Curriculum; stereotyping and inequality
	between the genders. Their findings have resulted in changes such
	as educational reforms which allows both genders to be treated
	more equally compared to the old educational systems.
	New Right sociologists also argue that investigating into the society
	allows for changes to be made. New Right sociologists for instance
	argue that providing welfare does not bring about change in society,
	it creates dependency by the people who requires them and places
	a burden on the state and its welfare services, and therefore the
	solution would be to reduce welfare services

Examiner comment – grade C

- (a) This brief response falls neatly into the category of a ‘partial definition’. There is something on offer here which just about merits a mark, although the answer relies rather heavily on the source material as a prompt. The reference to ‘governments’ enables one mark to be given.
- (b) This question demands some precision on the part of candidates. The answers need not be lengthy, as in this case, but they must identify a discrete point and then develop its meaning such that there is complete clarity. Here the candidate just fails to fully meet these criteria even though they identify two sound points [combining the merits of methods, and overcoming strengths and weaknesses of each] but the developments are not quite clear enough for full marks. The response received three marks.
- (c) In a question of this type, where candidates are required to distinguish between two concepts, it is clear that responses should attempt to show the meaning of each and devote roughly similar time to both. By doing so the differences should arise. However, in this answer the meaning of one [social problem] is outlined clearly and supported by examples, whilst the meaning of a sociological problem is left quite obscure. In such a case, it is not possible to enter the second level of the mark scheme, which is where this response is located. It received four marks.
- (d) This response begins in an authoritative and confident way. The question is directly addressed and an accurate source [Becker] is cited as one of those sociologists that are in favour of the proposition outlined in the question. Indeed, the first two paragraphs are comprised of material that supports the view, and a link is made to a theoretical perspective. The candidate then goes on to further make the case in respect of three more perspectives each time providing evidence and support for the idea that sociological research and enquiry should endeavour to improve society. The answer is well-written and sourced, and it retains full focus on the question. The knowledge and understanding on display is good. However, the answer finishes at this point and in so doing fails to offer a challenge to the contention in the question i.e. there is no discussion of the alternative view that sociological enquiry should be value-free. In other words, the answer is a one-sided which, however good it might be, could not reach the upper parts of the mark scheme. Hence, this response was awarded seven marks for this part of the question.

Total mark awarded = 15 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade E

1		
	a)	Social policy is the control of the state and individuals carried out in an orderly manner which does not provoke conflict in the society.
	b)	One reason was to make their data collected more valid because there is at all the research methods have their own flaws. Therefore, use of more than one research method helps to cover up. Another reason was to obtain a more reliable data as one method might show a similar result with another method ^{to confirm their theory.} before only then they can start making generalizations.
	c)	Social problems were problems that individuals suffer in society. For the functionalists, the individuals were being controlled by external social forces, beyond their ability to control them. Durkheim suggested that suicide is a growing social problem due to the individuals being in the state of normlessness and experienced 'anomie' as they felt alienated to among per other people. Durkheim's suicide theory made ^{compared} to suicide rates among other European countries and found there was correlations in the in class, ethnic ethnicity and other variables which led to a person committing suicide. Durkheim's theory still is is relevant until today to explain suicide in modern industrial societies.

A sociological problem would be the imposition problem. Sociologists who created questionnaires meant that they set the ~~questions~~ questions and they were the one who determines the answer. Researchers inevitably impose their world on the respondents and the respondents doesn't have much freedom to answer the question. Because their answers can't be found in the ~~the~~ answers provided. This was a clear picture that the researcher's values had an influence the research as they judged what is important or not and thus may lead to the the data collected invalid and inconsequential.

d) For ~~the~~ functionalists,

For the marxists, ~~sociologists~~ Sociological research could be used to help create a better society, to eradicate poverty. Marxists argued that in order to gain an egalitarian society, the inequality such as poverty should be removed to create an equal society. Even so, the poverty supplied the capitalist system with proletariat workers who were willing to work for long hours and minimum wage as such Kincaid concluded that poverty is necessary and should not be changed because a change could ~~mean~~ ^{mean} the entire capitalist system may be overthrown. By the time the proletariat realised they were being exploited they will start to develop class consciousness and resist the middle class.

For the ~~female~~ feminist, they ~~agreed~~ ~~that~~ disliked the 'male stream' sociology ~~and~~ ~~by~~ ~~it~~ presented by the likes of Parsons and Willmott and Young as it represents patriarchy. ~~Female~~ ^{Feminists} ~~Ortley~~ instead tried to help the women

	<p>that was domestically abused in their own household as they act like 'sponges' soaking up the frustrations of their husbands (Fran Ansley). O'Connell pressed that men do have always used violence to oppress and suppress women of their rights to speak speak. Spender and Stanworth found that in school male education is prioritised more more than female. Thus, feminists wanted change in a supposedly part patriarchal society to make a the society a better place place for women.</p>
	<p>However, interactionists would argue that the structuralist method are too rigid and value laden. Becker argued that sociologists should not be and could not be objective instead they should pick pick the weaker sides - the outsiders - the weak - women, ^{mentally challenged} and children for example. The inter- interpretivists would argue that in order to understand help to create a better society we must look at the world, with their eyes to understand them or (Goffman or to verstehen them (Goffman).</p>
	<p>In conclusion, the post-modernists ^{functionalists} wanted does not really want changes in the society as they believed that the it was already good and that the equality of opportunity encourages and motivates people to climb the social ladder and gain success (R. Merton: Strain theory).</p>

Examiner comment – grade E

- (a) The candidate is not aware of the meaning of this term. This question requires a degree of precision and marks will only be awarded for explicit and accurate accounts that show unambiguous understanding. On this occasion no marks could be awarded for this part of the question.
- (b) The two reasons provided by this candidate both contain merit. Each one revolves around the idea that all research methods have 'flaws' and that the use of multiple methods might help to overcome this. In both of the presented reasons, the candidate frames their response by making use of the concepts of validity and reliability. The candidate receives one mark for each identification [reason] but the developments are not sufficiently clear or distinct from one another to obtain the remaining two marks. The answer is not very well written and the candidate receives some benefit of the doubt. Two marks were awarded.
- (c) In the first paragraph of this response the candidate discusses a particular social problem – suicide – and provides a sociologically based account of Durkheim's view. However, the candidate does not take the opportunity they have created to develop their answer in relation to the concept of a

sociological problem. Instead, they show a misunderstanding of this term and provide an account of a methodological problem which is not relevant to this question. Hence, their response falls into level one of the mark scheme in that the sole focus of the question is only on one of the concepts in the question. However, the answer rises above common sense observation and has a sociological tone which means it is awarded three out of the eight marks available.

- (d)** This candidate adopts an approach that is likely to have only limited success. The first two paragraphs are, effectively, summary accounts of the view of inequality held by two major sociological perspectives - Marxism and feminism. As such, the candidates highlight the prescription each makes for eradicating poverty and patriarchy. Although these points are tangential to the question they do receive some credit for addressing the notion of a 'better society', albeit indirectly. Neither point is applied to 'sociological research'. The third paragraph outlines the interactionist position and this is more successful, especially the reference to Becker and the idea that research cannot be objective. Whilst the point made here needs to be made more explicitly, at least the response is moving closer to an exploration of how values impact on sociological thinking. Three developed points are made in this response but they do not directly address the question and there is also no real evaluative content. As a result, five marks were awarded.

Total mark awarded = 10 out of 25

Section B

Question 2

- 2 'Only the Postmodernist perspective can explain the factors influencing social identity today.' Explain and assess this claim. [25]

Mark scheme

- 2 'Only the post-modernist perspective can explain the factors influencing social identity today.' Explain and assess this claim. [25]

0–6 A few vague reflections on the nature of culture and social identity might be worth 3 or 4 marks. Some simple points about post-modernist theory, perhaps contrasting post-modernism with modernism in a basic way, but poorly linked to the question, would be placed in the top of the band.

7–12 Answers that merit being placed in the lower end of the band may lack a reference to post-modernist theory and may focus on discussing the strengths or limitations of other perspectives on culture and identity. Higher in the band, some knowledge of post-modernist theory must be demonstrated and applied to the question appropriately. For example, the notion that social actors are now able to exercise a high degree of choice about their identity and of the social groups they belong to; in addition, responses may refer to the instability and changeability attached to post-modern identity. However, the coverage of relevant post-modernist ideas is likely to be partial and may include some inaccuracies in the points made. There may be little or no assessment of the effectiveness of post-modernist theories at this level.

13–18 Lower in the band, the account of post-modernist theories may still lack breadth of coverage, though the material used will be described with greater accuracy. Higher in the band, a wider range of post-modernist concepts and themes will be explored and there will also be some analysis of how effective post-modernism is to the understanding of culture and identity formation. However, the analysis may lack depth at this level [e.g. post-modernism is a more 'up to date' theory than other ones] and is likely to rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with other sociological perspectives. There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

19–25 Answers at this level must achieve **three** things:

First, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.

Second, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.

Third, there must also be some evidence of assessment.

A good account of the post-modernist understanding of culture and identity will be offered at this level. This may include references to different strands of post-modernist thought and to different thinkers within that perspective. Concepts such as consumer culture and hyper-reality may feature in good responses. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the extent to which post-modernist ideas help provide a valid understanding of contemporary culture and identity. Lower in the band, the assessment may still rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with contributions from other sociological perspectives. Higher in the band, the assessment must include some explicit evaluation of the strengths and/or limitations of post-modernism which is directly related to the question.

Example candidate response – grade A

2	01	<p>Postmodernist social identity is what we perceive people think of us and what we think we are. Postmodernists see society as moving from a modern to a postmodern society. Scientific ^{Objective} truth is replaced by obj ^{sub} relative truth. The society is chaotic, etc fluid and constantly changing. People ^{People} are ^{are} thinking. The view that the view that 'only the postmodernist perspective can explain the factors influencing social identity today is still highly cont debated. I would like to assess this view throughout this essay by looking ^{looking} into account few sociologists' views.</p>
		<p>Postmodernist ^{like Lyotard} explains social identity as being fluid. There is ^{no} fixed identity among members of society. A person can move from a ^{social} identity to another all the time. ^{This is supported} Muggleton did a research on youth subculture and found that youths nowadays moves from a subculture to another has a social identity of a certain subculture during the time ^{time} specific time such as at night and moves to a normal working person the next morning. This shows that identity is fluid and changing all the time.</p>
		<p>However ^{like Kate Millet} the ^{these} feminist would argue that gender is the main ^{social} identity of a person and it is fixed. Women is always seen as being lower ^{lower} status in the ^{the} family and thus given a lower position in family and also at the work place. Father is always seen as the head of the family and women always ^{always} tend to be given a low status job where ^{where} in the public sphere as women are perceived ^{perceived} to be expected to be pregnant, to ^{to} give birth and take care of the child. Women is often not given promotion compared to men.</p>

due to these reasons. It is shown by feminists that gender is a fixed social identity opposing the post modernist view.

Post-modernist ~~was~~ argues that social identity today is based ^{influenced by} ~~on the~~ pick ~~and~~ choice of the individual. Individuals are free to pick and mix social identities. For ~~example, a person can be a woman, but also a successful businessman~~ Technologies nowadays enables people to alter their identities: as they wish. They can undergo surgeries to change genders. They can also pick up a healthy lifestyle and through the advancement ~~of~~ in the health industries, ~~age~~ people can now choose to be young even though they are old biologically. It is up to individual's choice whether to take up a ^{social identity} role at a time ~~or~~ at the same time. For example, ~~the~~ people can be a mother, a ~~working businesswoman~~ and a ~~and~~ single at the same time due to technologies such as in vitro fertilization. Postmodernist argues that social identities is based on choice.

However, Marx would disagree. He argues that ~~that~~ being a working class is definitely going to reduce your life chances. ~~or~~ Being exploited as a working class detour you from releasing that you are ~~not~~ making products and ~~not~~ getting paid the full amount. Thus, your financial ability is greatly reduce compared to those of ruling class. ~~the~~ Being a working class means that you don't have the ~~means to the~~ ownership of the means of production, thus, you are being ruled and given instructions to do things. ~~Being financially~~ Being a working class and earn not as much as the ruling class.

detours you from gaining equal opportunities to education as ~~ed~~ higher education nowadays are expensive. Besides, the difference in class and having a lower class status as social identity means that you have no choice but to mix with people of the same class with you in a same working area or school. Nowadays, connections are very important to be successful, thus being in a lower class is definitely a disadvantage. ~~So~~ thus, Marx would agree that the difference in class is ^{a social identity} ~~is a social identity~~ is not a choice and is ~~identity~~ definitely and necessarily.

Postmodernist would also agree that ~~social identity is~~ ~~consumption is~~ the main factor influencing ~~social~~ identity. Bourdieu said that you are what you buy. The world provide a hypermarket where you are able to buy anything you want and create your own social identity based on the lifestyle as portrayed by the media. The ~~advance~~ Globalization and the advancement in Internet and technology today enables us to buy stuff from overseas through the Internet and also products like Coca Cola and McDonald's are available all around the globe. By consuming, people are able to adopt any lifestyle they want and create ~~their own~~ ^{their own} identity. The media saturated society today gives the images of being a upper class for example as wearing a ~~branded~~ Burton ~~clothes~~ ~~and~~ shirt. The People are able to adopt the similar lifestyle even though they are not from the upper class by buying the same shirt or even buying a fake one with a

		cheaper price. Thus, postmodernist argues that consumption is the main factor influencing social identity today.
		Functionalist we
		symbolize individualist - pick and choose social identities.
		In conclusion, I think that post modernist arguments regarding choice, fluidity and consumption shows it is very useful in explaining social identities as it shows how and explains how our society are advancing nowadays. However, I think that other factors such as class and gender should not be ignored as well as there are still people facing inequalities due to these factors as the main influencing their social identity.

Examiner comment – grade A

This response begins with the candidate directly addressing the question by making reference to the meaning of social identity and some key features of the postmodern perspective. In addition, the candidate uses a relevant study [Muggleton] that links postmodern thinking to the issue of social identity, although the outline of what is meant by social identity could have been developed more fully. The introduction of gender to the discussion in the third paragraph to make an evaluative point is less successful, and there is a brief loss of focus here. Comment is then made on the postmodernist view of the 'fluid' basis of social identity, although this could have been developed further or perhaps been used more wisely elsewhere. The candidate then introduces an orthodox Marxist contribution on the nature of inequality as a way of challenging the proposition that identity is no longer shaped by structural forces. This, of course, is valid though the wording could have been more carefully shaped toward the issue of identity formation. The candidate proceeds to develop the argument more fully by reference to the postmodern view on consumption and the role played by the media in supporting this process. Marxism is again used as an evaluative tool.

The conclusions drawn are valid but not fully developed. Positively, the candidate is fully focused on the question throughout and they do not fall into the trap of merely contrasting broad theoretical positions [a common fault] and instead retain a focus on both elements of the question. But the range of evaluation is limited – there is no reference to the functionalist or interpretivist positions – and the analysis is not sufficiently sharp or sustained enough to elevate the response into the top band. However, this is a good essay that was awarded a low grade A.

Mark awarded = 18 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade C

2	<p>Social identity is the the type of person that person is in society. Sociologists have had a constant debate regarding the factors that affect and mould a persons identity. Some argue that structure shapes a human being while other researchers beg to differ. Even the postmodernists have had their take on the factors that that influence a persons identity in society. Here, I would explain and assess both the views of postmodernists as well as other theorists in order to shed some light onto this topic.</p>
	<p>A postmodern time period is one which come after modernity. Modernity is seen as a time where science is at its peak. In postmodernism however, people start losing faith in science and facts. This is also reflected in the type of re- last leaders present. To Lyotard, we are affected by narratives and language games. Charisma and saleability outweigh facts and points and this in turn change our identity and the way we view society as we would tend to favour empty words those who sell their ideas better as opposed to those with scientific evidence.</p>

This view of the postmodernist is similar to that of the Marxist. In Marxism, the ruling class 'sell' their ideology to the working class in order to maintain their economic ~~superior~~ upper hand. The ~~false~~ ruling class ideology is similar to the language game explained by the postmodernist.

Apart from that, postmodernists also believe that our identities are fragmented. To them, there are different aspects that make up the identity of a human being. Unlike the patri-archal society as defined by the feminists where gender determines your identity, the postmodernists feel that it is we who actively shape our identities, ~~just like~~.

This perspective of the ~~post~~ postmodernists is similar to the views of the black feminists. To the black feminists, being a woman is not the only factor that affects a person's identity and ~~social~~ standing in society. Other aspects also affect women, such as race and status, just as how Sojourner Truth presented in her speech, "And I a woman?". To her, she could do all the jobs of a man, yet she was oppressed, proving that race too affects identity.

Another factor that affects social identity, to the postmodernists is the idea of objective truth. Baudrillard speaks of how there is no such thing as the objective truth. Everything, according to the postmodernists is subjective. Each human being has his or her version of the truth. This is due to the different factors that affect a person as well. ~~This view~~ Hence, sweeping truths cannot and should not be made.

This view goes directly against that of the functionalists. To the functionalists, a person's identity is shaped around primary socialization (Parsons) as well as the collective consciousness of the society (Durkheim). These are ~~sweeping~~ ~~statements~~ the types of sweeping statements that the postmodernists are against. For to them, individuals have their own versions of the story and their identity bears more weight as opposed to the generalizations of the functionalists.

As mentioned above, each individual has his or her own version of their story. On this statement is how the postmodernists choose their research method as well. To Lyotard, each

subject is 'story telling'. They each have their own versions and reasons; hence, ~~stories~~ due to the fact that they each have a unique identity, each distinct from the other and a celebration of diversity.

This take is also quite similar to the views of phenomenologists. ~~That~~ Phenomenology is the study of phenomena but researchers are more concerned with the reasons as to why we categorize certain things in a certain way. These reasons that differ from one individual to the next, is what shapes ~~us~~ and defines us and results in each of us having our own distinct 'story'.

Baudillard also believes that we live in a postmodernist society; ~~To him or both~~ simulacra. A simulacra is a reality that is false. To him, the reality that we believe in is one that is false and does not exist for it is a distortion of the truth. This also means ~~that~~ our idea affects our identity as the factors that shape us are false creating a false identity as well.

However, there are also problems with Baudillard's point of view. This is

because he overemphasizes this and makes perpostorous statements. To him, even the Gulf war was a mere series of pictures. This makes us question the extent of his theory on simulacra and its effect on us.

All in all, the postmodernists do explain the factors that shape and an individual's identity very well. Some of their views also are similar to other theorists such as ~~the marxists~~ and marx and the phenomenologists. However even their perspective has problems and is insufficient to thoroughly define and explain social identity. ~~As a~~ ~~conclusion,~~ To conclude my assessment, I believe that all theorists ~~do in fact~~ ~~have explain different~~ view should be taken into account when explaining social identity, and one single theory is insufficient to do so.

Examiner comment – grade C

The opening paragraph of this essay lacks clarity, although the candidate does attempt some introductory remarks that point in the direction of a debate. They then go on to make a distinction between modernist and postmodernist thinking which is pertinent and is rewarded, although the links made to the question are quite basic. The comparison made with Marxism, however, is somewhat confusing. The candidate continues to outline the postmodern approach to identity by way of a comparison with feminist views on identity. This is partially successful as a tactic and allows the candidate to analyse the concept of identity and to introduce relevant concepts like 'fragmentation' and 'objective truth' although neither of these ideas are really developed in relation to the question. As promised in the introduction, the candidate proceeds to outline the view of other perspectives on the issue of identity. The candidate avoids a stark juxtaposition by prefacing the discussion with the assertion that the postmodern view 'goes directly against those of functionalists' and briefly explains why. One or two postmodern authorities are introduced [Lyotard, Baudrillard] but their insights are only linked to the question in rather limited way. The concluding paragraph does nothing to add to the sum. This response retains relevance throughout, but both the range and depth are lacking and, in particular, the linkage between postmodernism and identity formation is rather loose.

Mark awarded = 14 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade E

2	<p>The post-modernist perspective is a more modern perspective. The post-modernist approaches to some extent has been suggested to be the only perspective that explain the factors influencing social identity today. Social identity is whereby or how an individual sees himself and his role allocated to his status in the society. This can include "teachers", "students" and "girls".</p>
	<p>Post modernist have suggested that in the modern societies, it has been more fragmented and therefore more types of variables are likely to affect the social identity of an individual. For example social class, gender, age and ethnicity.</p>
	<p>For example, the woman's place is believe^{no} longer in the home and their primary responsibility is no longer looking after the children is a condition which is often suggested by the post-modernist.</p>
	<p>The structuralist will reject this approaches as they include both the functionalist perspective and the conflict theorist (Marxism). The functionalist suggested that it is possible to explain human behaviour such as the ^{social} usage identity. It is possible to use a hypothethic deductive model and also use large amount of quantitative methods in order to get the results needed. Therefore it is possible to make generalisations. For example, there is a basic consensus in the home that the men's role is the breadwinner and therefore satisfied their instrumental needs while the women's role is the housework and to take care of the children.</p>
	<p>Marxist on the other hand will suggest that the social identity of a person is due to the capitalist values. For example, there is a presence of hidden curriculum in the school whereby the children of a proletariat is teach to be following the rules of the capitalist societies. This is because the capitalist society requires a constant</p>

		Supply of proletarian workers which to are obedient and subservient and does not question the system.
		Interactionist on the other hand suggested that there is no possibility of explaining human behavior such as social identity, but it is possible to understand them. Therefore qualitative method is carried out and it is not possible to make generalization.
		G.H Mead suggest that social identity is a process that occurs due to the process of interaction and negotiation of the roles. He discussed the two components 'I' and 'Me' in the self whereby the 'Me' is the socialized self while 'I' is the unsocialized self, whereby people have ^{his} the capacity of originality and is therefore being able to resist.
		Goffman suggested that people are like actors and has been constantly wearing mask. On the other hand, people ^{individual} have been interpreting their roles. For example a children may have different types of social identity in front of their teacher, peers and parents.
		Therefore, it is is important to recognize that actually all types of perspective recognized to an extent the importance of social construction in social identity. It is not possible to explain social identity briefly by one perspective.

Examiner comment – grade E

The opening to this response directly addresses both elements of the question, but neither [postmodernism or social identity] are introduced in an informative way and there is a lack of accuracy. Mention is made of a key postmodernist concept – fragmentation – but the supporting argument does not develop the idea very clearly or suggest how it might be linked to the question. Alternative perspectives are then introduced very quickly and their insights juxtaposed with the briefly outlined postmodernist position. The candidate then focuses their attention on the part of the question that demands an examination of the factors that influence social identity, but postmodernism itself is not subjected to any further analysis. The conclusion returns to the question but offers only a weak and unsubstantiated summation. The candidate has gained some credit for identifying a few basic features of the postmodern view but these are limited in range and are only poorly linked to the question. Some credit is given for the introduction of alternative views although these are not discussed as 'opposing' ones. The response is too short for a 25-mark question.

Mark awarded = 9 out of 25

Question 3

3 Explain and assess the value of semi-structured interviews in sociological research. [25]

Mark scheme

3 Explain and assess the value of using semi-structured interviews in sociological research.

0–6 Answers at this level may be characterised by a few elementary observations about interviews in general. The mention of a couple of distinguishing features of semi-structured interviews may justify a mark at the top of the band.

7–12 Lower in the band, some relevant features will be described, though the account may fail to clearly differentiate between semi-structured interviews and other types of interviews. At the top end of the band, reference will be made to the type of data produced by semi-structured interviews as well as some appreciation that this is related to key methodological concepts such as validity and reliability, and possibly to representativeness. Practical consideration may also feature, perhaps in relation to the sample and its make-up, and the type of information required by the researcher.

13–18 Answers will provide an accurate and balanced account of the use of semi-structured interviews, in all probability by contrasting them with other types of interviews. At the lower end of the band, this will be descriptive and will be mainly achieved by juxtaposition. Theoretical and practical points will be considered, though not necessarily with equal emphasis. Higher in the band, there will also be a basic attempt to assess the usefulness of semi-structured interviews and its 'middle' position will be explored. Good responses will recognise that whilst these interviews yield both quantitative and qualitative data, they are primarily classified as a qualitative method. Good responses should explore the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews, whilst linking this to the collection of different data sets. Reward references to relevant studies which illustrate this, though it would be possible to answer the question fully without referring to studies. The idea of 'fit for purpose' may be explored. There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

19–25 Answers at this level must achieve **three** things:

First, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.

Second, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.

Third, there must also be some evidence of assessment.

At this level answers will provide an accurate, detailed and balanced account of the theoretical and practical context of the use of this type of interview. Reference to studies may feature in good responses but are not essential to be placed in the highest band. The assessment will be explicit and, at the top of the band, will provide coherent and incisive conclusions about the relative merits of semi-structured interviews, perhaps showing that this reveals that the rather crude division that exists between qualitative and quantitative approaches is less apparent in actual research than it is 'in theory'. A distinguishing feature of answers at this level may also be the ability to identify appropriate links to the theoretical perspectives that endorse the use of different methodologies, namely, interpretivism and positivism.

Example candidate response – grade A

3.	<p>semi-structured interviews are interviews that combine both aspects of structured and unstructured interviews, resulting in one that is often seen to most often used in reality and seen to yield the most advantages. Semi-structured interviews usually consist of the researcher having a broad idea of the topics that he or she intends to cover in the research; and possibly a list of guiding questions or statements, however they lack both the rigidity of structured interviews and the uncertainty of unstructured interviews.</p>
	<p>The value of semi-structured interviews lies primarily in the fact that it is almost a triangulation of structured and unstructured interviews and so it often yields the value but not the limitations of either. Like Similarly to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are usually guided and researcher-led although the extent to which this is true is far less for the latter than the former. This prevents the interview from becoming defocused and going off topic, and so lessens the information overload that may be experienced. By having a set basic structure that is followed, the interview is more standardized than than completely unstructured interviews. As most respondents will thus still go over the same issues and answer the same questions, the interview will be more replicable and thus more reliable than unstructured interviews as ^{questions and} responses may still be wide (broader) categorizable and the interviews will follow the same general course. However, in all of the above aspects the semi-structured interview will still be less valuable than structured interviews, as there is a far greater degree of flexibility in the interview that may reduce the replicability and thus reliability of the data.</p>

However, where it lacks in quantitative advantages the semi-structured interview makes up for it qualitatively, where it is able to yield more in-depth, richer information than and so is more likely to be valid. This is as the research is not entirely directed by the interviewer and is not limited to short or closed questions as structured interviews often are (they are often just social surveys administered by an interviewer). The researcher is able to probe into areas of interest and deviate from the plan slightly if necessary, but has the facility to put the interview 'back on track' if it begins to go into irrelevant or off subject areas. Nonetheless, semi-structured interviews are also more casual than structured interviews and thus allows more capacity for a stronger rapport to be built between the researcher and respondent that can lead to more valid responses.

Semi-structured interviews are also arguably more practical than unstructured interviews, as they are easier to administer and often take less time. They also yield the same ^{of the} advantages as interviews in general — for example, the presence of ^{the} researcher allows greater control in the research process and the ability to elaborate or explain meanings to respondents ~~to~~ to ensure questions are interpreted in the same way. However, they are also subject to the same limitations as in all interviews. For example, as interviews in general are relatively costly and time consuming they are slightly less practical and often not a very big sample can be interviewed, thus rendering data likely to be unrepresentative. Furthermore, the ~~value of~~ ~~interviews to~~ ~~the~~ ~~positivist~~ sociologists validity of interviews can also be questioned as they rely on the respondent's speculations of the truth. This may not be the case, either unintentionally (for example, poor recall) or intentionally

(where the respondent deliberately attempts to mislead the researcher, such as in Laurie Taylor's study of criminals in which some deliberately made up tall tales in order to see how gullible the interviewer was). This means that although detailed data may be collected, it may still not be an accurate reflection of reality - and thus rendering the data invalid anyway. Furthermore, as there is face-to-face contact between the interviewer and respondent there is bound to be some ~~into~~ form of influence of the conduct of the interviewer on the responses of the subject. ~~For~~ The interviewer effect can manifest itself in a variety of ways - for example, the body language or facial expression of an interviewer may affect the responses ~~of~~ obtained; or, the respondent may feel compelled to provide an answer that will 'please' the interviewer rather than the truth. ~~In~~ Responses, particularly in research ^{pertaining to} ~~containing~~ sensitive topics, may also be tainted by aspects linked to social desirability and embarrassment on the part of the respondent.

As semi-structured interviews ~~are~~ still contain an element of structure and may have predetermined open questions, for example, this means that subjectivity inevitably enters the picture. as the researcher actively makes a choice (that will be inevitably value-laden) on what topics will be considered important or unimportant. Moreover, such questions may also be leading and push the interview in an unnatural direction. It can be argued that semi-structured interviews are not ~~comp~~ of much value to either positivist or anti-positivist theorists as it neither yields objectively measured, quantifiable, reliable and representative ~~stat~~ statistical data nor does it yield the rich, in depth, valid information required by interpretivists to understand the meanings ~~behind~~ social attached by social actors to social life and the

	<p>worlds around them. For the latter, for example, former, for example, the yielding of qualitative rather than quantitative data already undermines the entire dimension of replicability and testability that postmodernists so emphasise when carrying out social research. On the other hand, it can be argued that interpretivist sociologists would choose to use methods such as case studies or participant observation in order to achieve the depth of understanding or meaning that they truly require.</p>
	<p>Overall, it can however, it can still be argued that semi-structured interviews are of considerable value in sociological research. Although it does not conform exactly to the requirements of either postmodernist or interpretivist sociology, few sociologists are strict adherents to only either one themselves. Semi-structured interviews are often seen as a good compromise for between quantitative and qualitative data. However, postmodernists would question the value of sociological research as a whole in terms of its utility, while phenomenologists would be arguing that causal relationships are futile to attempt to study.</p>

Examiner comment – grade A

This essay begins with an excellent introduction. The method is set in a broad context followed by a brief outline of what this specific method consists of. They quickly use the phrase 'the value of semi-structured interviews...' to set the tone of their discussion; in other words they directly address the 'slant' of the question [how useful they are] rather than talking in general terms. The candidate then goes on to elaborate upon the issues raised in their introduction. They employ a comparative approach, drawing out the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews by contrasting them with other interview types whilst retaining focus on the set task. This approach skilfully allows the candidate to make evaluative points as they proceed, rather than simply juxtaposing methodological features and related points. In fact, the tone throughout is analytical and evaluative. There is some use of empirical research but this is not done just to 'show off' knowledge, but as a way of advancing the argument being put forward.

In the latter stages of the essay, the candidate begins to make appropriate links to sociological perspectives and thus achieves a good balance between practical and theoretical considerations, although the reference to postmodernism in the conclusion is not that successful and a little 'throw-away'. If we look at the mark scheme criteria for entry into Level 4 – in particular the three necessary conditions – we see that this response comfortably satisfies its requirements and, whilst it may not do all the things that are possible, it does more than enough to achieve full marks under the constraints of exam conditions.

Mark awarded = 25 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade C

3.	<p>Semi-structured interviews combines both the characteristics of structured and unstructured interviews, and is one of, if not the most common type of interview used today. However, despite its many advantages, there are still several drawbacks.</p>
	<p>Some advantages are that because of the combination, data produced are usually qualitative, and more giving valid in that a more in-depth understanding and result while not in areas where the interviewer wants to explore further without the risk of going too off topic as they still have a set of preset questions. This can lead to the production of rapport considering the conversation like aspect to it and can thereby lead to a more valid response.*</p> <p>However, the face to face interaction can still stimulate the possibility of the Hawthorne effect whereby respondents may act a certain way according to what they believe the interviewer is seeking for. It is also for that very reason that positivists disregard such method, preferring other methods such as observations and lab experiments where data can be easily repeated, compared and analysed.</p>
	<p>*The fact that ^{in a} the personal interaction, both the interviewer and interviewee can clarify answers/questions when they don't fully understand also increases validity as well as limits the the extent of subjectivity, although full objectivity is never possible.</p>
	<p>In addition, in terms of ethical issues, semi-structured interviews are usually ethical as</p>

the interviewee are fully aware they are being interviewed. However, they should also leave the interview in the same state as they entered, if not better and have the right to leave whenever they please and also be aware of the confidentiality and purpose of research.

On the other hand, disadvantages include ~~the fact~~ ^{and} ~~that~~ practical issues such as funding ^{and} time. It may be costly to train interviewers to a more skilled level so as to limit / prevent Hawthorne effect. Also, timing and location may be a hassle as both interviewer and interviewee need to ~~be~~ be available at a given date and time for a certain length of time. It is also due to that very fact that semi-structured interviews are not very representative as sample size tends to be very small, even structured interviews. Other methods such as questionnaires ~~may be~~ are a better option ~~in~~ of a ~~more~~ larger and therefore more representative sample size. ~~It~~ Also, all types of interviews are generally unreliable as it is quite hard to replicate process to produce same results as, for one, interviewees may have faulty memories or lie, thereby also affecting validity. Semi-structured interviews may be more reliable than unstructured interviews, but it's still hard to accurately replicate again. In this way, comparing ~~results~~ and analysing results would also be more ~~an~~ inconvenient than structured interviews, which is yet another reason ~~positivists~~ positivist disregard this method, claiming it to be unscientific.

While semi-structured interviews are ~~most~~ commonly the more popular choice in comparison to structured and unstructured interviews, adopting both the qualitative, detailed aspect of unstructured interviews as well as the more specific, focused questions and ideas of structured interviews which make it slightly easier to analyse, it really depends on what study a sociologist is researching. For example, Sharpe's study of prostitution makes sense to use methods where the interviewer is able to develop rapport and empathy with the interviewees like unstructured interviews. Also, sensitive issues as such would be wise to use a female researcher so the female respondent is able to identify and give a more better understanding than otherwise given if the researcher was male. Interpretivists may also highly favour participant observation so the researcher is able to understand others by putting themselves in their shoes and develop empathy in order to, for example gain a better understanding on human behaviour and the motives behind actions.

~~Triangulation~~ However, to produce a much more valid and accurate result, ~~the~~ combining methods through triangulation is evidently the most common research method many sociologists now employ, for example Weber's study on protestants. It is therefore clear that different factors need to be considered when choosing a method such as the practical, ethical and theoretical ~~issues~~ aspects. Semi-structured

		interviews would be helpful when explaining topics
		a wide range of topics, some in more detail
		than others but of course there are many other
		methods as well as the highly favoured method of
		triangulation.

Examiner comment – grade C

The introduction makes one reasonable comment about the nature of semi-structured interviews, but it does not point the essay in any particular direction. A more useful approach would have been to concisely outline what semi-structured interviews are and to set them in a methodological context. The second paragraph contains some good points but it is rather a scattergun approach with a number of relevant issues and concepts touched upon. There is an undeveloped reference to positivism here too, but not to interpretivism. It would have been useful here to highlight why a sociologist might opt to use this method rather than another, and to make direct links to elements of the interpretivist tradition. We gather from this that the candidate is aware of the features of this type of interview but has not sufficiently planned their response – this is not always easy under exam conditions but some forethought is likely to pay dividends.

The paragraph on ethical considerations has something of a random feel without a direct link made to the question. The discussion of the disadvantages of this type of interview is quite useful although it could be focused more directly on semi-structured interviews rather than qualitative interviews in general. The paragraph that suggests that semi-structured interviews are a 'popular choice' amongst sociologists begins promisingly but runs out of steam and resorts to making some generic points about the gender of researchers and some comparison with other types of methods. Little is really added here to our understanding of the overall 'value' of this method. This continues into a fairly irrelevant discussion of the merits of triangulation. The candidate makes no concluding statement. Overall, we are left with the impression that the candidate knows quite a bit about structured and unstructured interviews, but does not have mastery of precisely what semi-structured ones are.

Mark awarded = 14 out of 25

Example candidate response – grade E

3.	<p>Semi Semi-structured Interviews are a mixture of both positivist and Interpretivist research method respectively. Giddens coined the term structuration to fit this express the combination of both positivist and Interpretivist method. In this type of research method, the questions are predetermined by the researcher but the interviewer are not strictly tied to does not have to be fully objective as they may allow the interviewee to speak their minds and thoughts and opinions on the questions. Willis found out that when the interviewee felt they are not going to be judged by the interviewer they are most more likely to open up.</p>
	<p>As a result, the data obtained in semi-structured interviews are provides more valid data compared to questionnaires. Questionnaires' main flaw was that the validity of it ^{the data} can be a ^{se} sceptical as the respondent may not know ^{understand} the questions, they may not answer the questions honestly and they could have given the questionnaires to other people to do it. Questionnaires suffered apathy and low response rates however, semi-structured interview eliminated that problems. The fact that it was a one-on-one or grouped interviews means that the researcher will most certainly get a response from the interviewee.</p>
	<p>However, to assume that semi-structured interviews is the best method or would be a mistake as it too have its own weaknesses. One of the problem was the imposition problem. It is how when the interviewee reacting to the interviewer. Young people are less likely to open up to to or an old man (the interviewer) because there</p>

was no similarity between them to relate to. Women also are ~~not~~ reluctant often up to a male interviewer especially if it regards some ~~top~~ sensitive topics such as ~~a~~ sexuality. The Class are also important as some middle class people will only talk to ~~or~~ ^{another} middle class person (in this case the interviewer). Ethnicity is probably ~~the~~ the most controversial of all the weaknesses as there is that possibility that the interviewee did not like or despise ~~the~~ the interviewer for being a different ethnicity, therefore chances of them not giving full cooperation is very high. The situation could go vice versa.

Despite its usefulness, there are some ~~top~~ subjects that semi-structured interviews could not do. Observation always provided a more detailed and valid data and it requires the researchers to blend ~~in~~ in along ~~with~~ with the group that their studying. Covert is when the researcher conceal their identities from the group that they were observing while overt is the researcher actually told the group that they were doing a study on the group. James Patrick ~~sent~~ used pseudo name to observe and study the Glasgow Gang of which after he left it took him more than 10 years to publish his book. It provide great details in ~~the~~ a different side of the world William Fort Whyte spent 3½ years in 'Coonerville' to study the Italian gangs.

~~However~~ observation also ~~again~~ have their own limitations.

Semi-structured interviews also ~~may~~ have another weakness which was the how the interviewer or interviewee reacted to their social characteristics. The interviewee would be in a state of apathy if the interviewer was unkempt, messy hair, and ~~poor~~ ^{has} other poor social characteristics. How the interviewee respond is also depends upon ~~upon~~ Therefore interviewer need to be tidy and look and act professional. How the interviewee respond is also depends upon the tone of voice of the interviewer. A harsh and coarse voice may pressure the interviewee and could lead them to submit and answer the question to oblige him but the answers were not his/her ~~own~~ true opinions. To solve this softer voice (regardless male or female) is needed to make sure cooperation of the interviewee. Although Becker rejected the idea that softer soft approach would work. In his confrontational style interview, he was aggressive, sometimes sceptical and play dumb and interviewed the teachers of Chicago. His one-off interview was a massive success and as he managed to pry details with aggression.

Furthermore the semi-structured interview might be expensive to ~~finance~~ finance as it required to hire specially trained interviewer to conduct the interview. It could also be time consuming to collect and check and present the data.

In conclusion, there is no such thing as the best method of research as each one has its own flaws and drawbacks. However, in post modern society researchers tend to collect quantitative data as well as qualitative data to ~~make their~~ ^{by adopting}

		different methods of research to make their own research
		more valid. Triangulation or methodological pluralism
		is widely practised practised by researchers for one of
		which Barker (The Making of The Moonies) used in-depth
		interviews, covert and overt observations and questionnaires
		to study the Moonies.

Examiner comment – grade E

This essay begins fairly positively with the candidate identifying one or two features of semi-structured interviews but it also contains some undeveloped points; for example, the idea that ‘interviewers do not have to be fully objective’. The links made to theoretical traditions are also useful, but these too are not developed later in the essay. Good practice here would have been to define and clearly outline the characteristics of a semi-structured interview and to contextualise them in relation to other interview types. The remainder of the essay suffers from the failure to explicitly identify what sort of method a semi-structured interview is.

The candidate then makes a comparison with questionnaires, but this is not used to draw out the features of semi-structured interviews in an effective way. The passage addressing some elements of the ‘interviewer effect’ is relevant and credit is given for this. However, this material is partially repeated later in the essay adding little to the analysis. The candidate then goes on to introduce other methodologies into the discussion but this is of very limited value in terms of the essay’s development as these are not linked to the question. Overall, there is a lack of focus on the interview type in question and how it differs from other interview types. Good practice would have been to explore the relevance of key methodological concepts like validity and reliability and to have related these concepts to the use of semi-structured interviews.

Mark awarded = 10 out 25