

2 THEORY AND METHODS

Example answers

1 Outline and explain **two** advantages of using questionnaires in sociological research.

[10 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

One advantage of questionnaires is that they provide a range of detailed quantitative data which are regarded as objective social facts by positivists and are therefore useful in quantitative analysis. They provide basic information such as age, name, ethnicity etc. This will be vital in testing the significance of other variables across a longer study of social trends. Therefore, they are useful in establishing a correlation with other trends. For example, it may show a relationship between age and political party persuasion. These are valuable sources of information for putting in databases and establishing clear correlations.

Furthermore, questionnaires will be relatively cheap to carry out and require minimal effort. They would be a simple process of asking a few questions. This will carry little in the way of ethical concerns most of the time, as they are reliant upon participant agreement on undertaking the questions asked.

TEACHER COMMENTS

The first advantage is detailed and well-developed. The focus could be clearer but the first sentence does succeed in establishing that the basic point is about producing 'social facts' for qualitative or statistical analysis and the student then goes on to develop and explain this further. Technical language is used appropriately, there is sufficient depth given and a useful example is included.

The second part of the answer essentially make several points (they are simple, cheap and don't have many ethical issues attached to them). The simplicity and cheapness could be linked together as one point, with the ethical issue being a separate one. There is not sufficient depth on any of the points made. It is important to identify your key point in this type of question and then develop it without straying into making several different points which are then left relatively undeveloped. It would have been better to go on to explain why questionnaires are a relatively simple, cheap method of research, or to discuss the ethical advantages in more detail (for example, explaining that participants are bound to be aware that they are taking part in some sort of research simply by virtue of them answering the questionnaire, meaning that gaining informed consent is not as problematic as using some other methods of research).

2 Read **Item A** below and answer the question that follows.

ITEM A

Feminists see society as based upon conflict between men and women. In patriarchal societies, men are able to dominate and exploit women and ensure that society is run in the interests of men. However, different feminists have different views about the causes of male dominance and what should be done about it.

Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of feminist approaches in understanding society. [20 marks]

STUDENT RESPONSE

As stated in the item, feminists believe that societies are often dominated by men, supported through patriarchal institutions. Overall, this is a clear insight which has often been ignored by sociologists, for example those from the functionalist perspective who suggest society is akin to an organic structure with each part working together for the overall health of the system. This is the most important contribution of feminism, as a critique of patriarchy.

Firstly, feminist sociology is useful for determining gender bias in formal institutions, such as the state or business. Statistics often demonstrate a glass ceiling effect for women in employment, as they are prevented from gaining access to top jobs. This may be due to a culture of patriarchy in the top end of businesses. CEOs are far more likely to be men. This increases the gender pay gap, leaving women far less advantaged in society. In addition to corporations, the state often also exists as a patriarchal institution. Statistics show that 29% of MPs since the 2015 general election in Britain are female. Whilst this is up from the 2010 election, it still shows a disproportionately low amount of women in positions of power. These statistics and research are useful in establishing clear trends of male dominance.

In addition to challenging the underrepresentation of women in formal institutions, feminist sociology has provided vital insights into understanding patriarchy in everyday social environments. Many feminists have challenged the family as an institution primarily concerned with upholding male dominance. The process of heterosexual marriage is symbolic of the father giving away his daughter as property to another man, whose surname is given to the woman. Women are also frequently subjected to domestic abuse from partners, and have an uneven share of work. Anne Oakley researched housewives in Britain, finding they had the dual burden of housework and childcare, whilst men were seen as the breadwinners.

As the item suggests, feminists disagree over the causes of male dominance. For socialists, the cause is capitalism. The system of capitalism is based on class domination. Engels outlined that the nuclear family was the social unit of capitalism used to provide a surplus of labour. Women are the bearers of children who supply the workforce. Feminist Simone de Beauvoir has elaborated upon the Marxist position to address patriarchy. In her text 'the second sex' she outlined that male identity is often expressed through their labour. Marriage is seen as a necessary step in masculine dominance and identity. Overall, women are alienated in society, as their identity is viewed in relation to a man.

Alternatively, radical feminists such as Firestone argue that patriarchy is the overriding form of social control in society, rather than an amalgamation of class and gender inequalities. Firestone argues that women are biologically disadvantaged from men as they have reproductive organs. Men have capitalised upon this and been able to dominate women. A solution to this would be to create artificial wombs to free women from the burden of childbirth. Arguably, this approach is too biologically determinist in evaluating the cause of male domination.

Overall, feminism has provided, and continues to provide, an invaluable contribution to sociology. Primarily, it highlights flagrant abuse of women within the structures of society, whether in formal institutions or everyday life. Other perspectives have ignored or shied away from highlighting these inequalities. Theoretically, feminism offers important insights which can change the methodology of social research. For example, Ann Oakley's study was revolutionary in interviewing women in an informal environment in order to understand the dynamics of patriarchy.

TEACHER COMMENTS

This answer starts well by making a direct reference to the item, which ensures that the student doesn't forget to do this part of the task. There is also useful contrast with another sociological perspective, but there was room to unpack the question more in the first paragraph. In particular, the student could have explained that there are a variety of feminist approaches which have a certain amount in common but also have significant differences. This is developed to some extent later on in the assignment, but it would have been useful to refer to it early on to add analysis. Furthermore, the crucial concept of patriarchy is used but it isn't explained or defined.

The essay goes on quickly to issues of substance and begins to demonstrate some good knowledge and understanding of general issues surrounding gender inequality. There is useful detail on the political underrepresentation of women and several other areas of gender inequality are noted. The essay begins to develop a reasonable structure, looking first at institutions before going on to look at patriarchy in 'everyday social environments', but empirical detail is lacking. Some specific research is mentioned in relation to Ann Oakley, but this is very dated and underdeveloped.

The next two paragraphs do begin to develop material on different perspectives within feminism, particularly the Marxist and radical feminist perspectives, and this is valuable analysis. The application to the question is good, with the reference to the item, and the student continues to evaluate by pointing out the strengths and usefulness of feminism. Knowledge and understanding is demonstrated with reference to particular theorists, specifically de Beauvoir and Firestone. The first real criticism of feminism is introduced with the discussion of Firestone. Again though, there is no reference to contemporary feminist theorists and the range of feminist perspectives considered is limited.

The final paragraph is also evaluative and suggests some strengths of feminism in comparison to other perspectives. There is a very useful point about feminist methodology too, although it would have been better to have introduced this earlier and not to have mentioned it for the first time in the conclusion.

Overall, this is a reasonably competent answer and it shows evidence that the student has all the skills required by the paper. The knowledge and understanding, however, is rather underdeveloped and would have been improved by some knowledge of much more recent research and theory. The application to the question is generally strong but the analysis could have been extended with more comparison between feminist perspectives or between feminism and other approaches in sociology. The evaluation is quite strong on the strengths of feminism, but weaker on the weaknesses, with only one point of substance being made. There is room for more development and further detail throughout, but this is a well-written and fairly well-structured answer. However, it is never detailed and fluent enough to break into the highest mark bands.