

### 1. Outline and explain two reasons interpretivist methods are better suited to studying society today [10]

One reason interpretivist methods are better suited to studying society today is due to the increased diversity of contemporary society. Whilst positivists methods were adequate for studying society that is impacted by structural forces such as class, gender and ethnicity, contemporary society is less rigid in its definitions of these forces and therefore individuals will have many differing experiences, regardless of their class, gender and ethnicity. The micro nature of interpretivists research is better suited to investigating the multitude of individual narratives in contemporary society as they can use in-depth methods such as unstructured interviews to develop a rapport with individuals and get to understand the meanings and motivations behind their actions. This is more important in contemporary society, as structural forces intersect and provide a range of different experiences for individuals that cannot be explained through examining quantitative data.

A second reason interpretivist methods are better suited to studying society today is due to the inequality in society. High levels of poverty, particularly among lower social classes and marginalised groups are often misunderstood when examined through the use of positivist methodology. Interpretivists aim to give a voice to these marginalised groups – as Becker argued that sociology should be on the side of the underdog. Interpretivist methods allow researchers to develop a rapport with their subjects and develop *verstehen* or insight into their position and this can be used to highlight issues that are not uncovered with the use of large-scale positivist methods such as questionnaires. Interpretivist will more qualitative data, with higher validity, such as diaries and video logs and be able to use these to raise awareness of the issues faced by those who are disadvantaged in society.

### 2. Outline and explain two ways sociology can be seen to be scientific [10]

One way in which sociology can be seen as a science is put forward by positivists. They argue that sociology can be scientific as it is based upon direct observation of what Durkheim called 'social facts' or how social factors can shape individuals' behaviours. Durkheim argued that the impact of these social facts is measurable using quantitative data and studied suicide statistics across Europe in his research to determine how social factors such as the level of integration and regulation impacted on individuals' decision-making. Positivists further argue that human behaviour is like the behaviour of the natural sciences. Whilst we cannot see internal processes, we can observe patterns of behaviour and use these to formulate theories about how people will act in a given situation. However, critics suggest that human behaviour is less predictable than the natural sciences and should be viewed on the basis of an individual's motivations.

A second way in which sociology can be seen as a science is put forward by realists. Whilst they accept that it is difficult to observe internal processes that motivate individuals, it is possible to analyse patterns of behaviour and attribute a cause to that behaviour through scientific analysis. Realists argue that science, like sociology, is an open system of belief and that patterns of behaviour, whilst not predictable, can be understood once they have occurred. They argue that sciences such as meteorology and seismology do not look to predict what is going to happen, but rather they analyse what has happened and explain why it occurred through examining evidence, much in the same way a sociologist may conduct research by collecting evidence of what has occurred in an individual's life, the circumstance surrounding that act and drawing conclusions based upon the available data.