

Outline and explain two reasons why some sociologists choose unstructured interviews in their research. [10 marks]

Some sociologists choose unstructured interviews in their research because this method allows for a rapport to be built. Building a rapport with participants means that they feel more comfortable and relaxed within the research, thus decreasing the likelihood of the social desirability effect and increasing the validity of results. If studying a particularly sensitive topic, sociologists will be keen to use unstructured interviews knowing that the rapport they will build with participants will mean that participants become more open to discussing personal topics and divulging personal information. This was the case when Oakley carried out her research on women who have experienced childbirth and pregnancy. Through building a rapport, Oakley was able to get detailed insights from women into both their positive and negative experiences of having a child.

A clear first reason is identified- the opportunity to build a rapport. This reason is then appropriately analysed with development around the use of a rapport when studying sensitive topics. Oakley's study is clearly applied to the earlier part of the paragraph.

Some sociologists choose unstructured interviews in their research because this method allows for empathy to be gained, a key component of any research according to interpretivists. Weber first discussed gaining empathy in sociological research and referred to it as 'verstehen'. This means that the sociologist can fully understand the thoughts, feelings and emotions of participants, almost as if they are experiencing these first hand themselves. Gaining empathy increases the validity of the results. Gaining empathy is also particularly useful when studying social groups who are often 'unheard' in society. Becker argues that the job of a sociologist is to support the 'underdog' and methods like unstructured interviews allows a sociologist to fully understand the experiences of oppressed groups in society and report upon how they truly feel. This was the case in the research carried out by Dobash and Dobash where they were able to gain empathy and fully understand the experiences of those who had been victims of domestic violence.

A second reason is clearly identified- allowing for empathy to be gained. There is a theoretical discussion in which Interpretivism is appropriately cited alongside Weber. The discussion around why gaining empathy is useful shows strong analysis and this is supported with appropriate reference to Becker and Dobash and Dobash.