

**Observation** - refers to the act of physically watching events and recording what is seen.

General **THEORETICAL** advantages of all types of observation suggested by **INTERPRETIVISTS/ANTI-POSITIVISTS**.

- Observations produce data that is high in **validity**. This is because subjects are studied in their **natural environment**, giving a greater understanding of the participant's behaviour.
  - Observations produce **in depth qualitative data**. This provides the researcher with detailed **valid** data concerning the feelings, motives, emotions and meanings of the people being studied.
- A2 extra point
- Observational techniques allow for **flexibility** and therefore there is little or no premature closure. **Validity is again increased** as a consequence.

General **THEORETICAL** disadvantages of all types of observation suggested by **POSITIVISTS**.

- Observations **lack reliability**. The flexibility and skill needed in the approach means that it is **difficult to retest** and gain similar results.
  - Observations often have a **small sample size**. This means the sample is not representative and reduces the researcher's ability to generalise and establish causal relationships. **Reliability is lowered**.
- A2 extra point
- Observations are **not objective** and therefore **reliability is lowered**. The results of observations are subject to bias in the implementation and recording of the method.
  - Observations are **unscientific**. It is difficult if not **impossible to control variables** that occur in the 'field'. **Reliability is therefore lowered**.

**NB** - if you are asked a question a particular observational technique (e.g. CPO) be able to illustrate some of the above points with research studies. For example, McIntyre studied Chelsea headhunters in the bars, pubs, streets & matches they frequented (i.e. their natural environment).

	<b>Example studies</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Covert P.O.</b>	<p>McIntyre (1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study into the Chelsea headhunters (football hooligans).</li> <li>▪ Looked at police files to locate troublemakers.</li> <li>▪ Got a Chelsea tattoo.</li> <li>▪ Went abroad to matches.</li> <li>▪ Learnt Chelsea history.</li> <li>▪ Drove hooligans to matches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Rapport</b> is built up with the people being studied and therefore <b>validity is likely to increase</b>. In McIntyre's journalistic research he had a Chelsea tattoo and drove hooligans to matches to build up trust between himself and the other hooligans. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Verstehen</b> and consequently <b>validity can be achieved</b>. McIntyre saw through the eyes of the hooligans - understanding some of the complex reasons and emotions that drove football hooligan actions. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ CPO is excellent for gaining information on <b>sensitive areas</b> of study, e.g. crime. McIntyre gained insights from his investigation into football hooligans that would not have been possible without a covert operation, e.g. the hardened violence and racist beliefs of the hooligans <b>(Practical)</b></li> </ul> <p>A2 extra point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CPO eliminates the <b>Hawthorne effect</b>. In McIntyre's research the hooligans did not know McIntyre was a researcher and so they were unlikely to change their behaviour <b>protecting the validity</b> of the study. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are problems with <b>getting accepted</b> in to the group being studied. e.g. McIntyre had to hang around bars and have a large knowledge of the Chelsea football team history to be accepted by the headhunters. <b>(Practical)</b></li> <li>▪ Can be <b>expensive and time consuming</b>. McIntyre's research would have cost the BBC thousands of pounds and it took him 12 months to complete <b>(Practical)</b></li> <li>▪ There are major <b>ethical concerns</b>.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is no consent.</li> <li>2. Deception &amp; exploitation.</li> <li>3. For some areas of investigation (e.g. crime) the researcher runs the risk of being harmed if uncovered.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p>A2 extra point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is the danger of <b>'going native'</b>. <b>(Practical)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Overt P.O.</b>	<p>Barker (1984)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study of the religious sect the Moonies.</li> <li>▪ Barker combined methods but her main was overt participant observation.</li> <li>▪ The Moonies accepted Barker into their group knowing she was a researcher.</li> <li>▪ She observed the Moonies for 6 years both home and abroad.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The researcher does <b>not</b> have to worry about the consequences of <b>being discovered</b>. The Moonies were fully aware that Barker was a sociologist and studying their religious group. <b>(Practical)</b></li> <li>▪ The researcher can <b>avoid taking part</b> in the group's activities. Barker could pick and choose what she did and where she went. She did not have to become a Moonie. <b>(Practical)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Ethical</b> problems are greatly reduced, as there is <b>no deception</b>. Barker gained informed consent from the leaders of the Moonies. <b>(Ethical)</b></li> </ul> <p>A2 extra point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It is much <b>easier to record</b> OPO. Although Barker used retrospective recording it would have been possible for her to make notes during the observation. <b>(Practical)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Demand characteristics (Hawthorne effect)</b> may occur. Subjects know they are being observed and are likely to change their behaviour. In Barker's study the Moonies often discussed problems they had with the organization which would not of happened if she had not been a researcher. This can <b>lower validity</b>. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ The group <b>may not accept the researcher</b>. Barker went through three complex stages of observation so she would be accepted. <b>(Practical)</b></li> </ul>

Covert Non P.O.	<p>Humphreys (1970)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study carried out on 'cottaging' the practice of homosexual intercourse in public toilets with strangers.</li> <li>▪ Did not participate in the intercourse but acted in the 'voyeur' role (someone who enjoys watching sexual activity).</li> <li>▪ Covert as those being studied were unaware of the researcher.</li> <li>▪ Humphrey observed the social rules of cottaging then went away and wrote them down.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Demand characteristics (Hawthorn effect)</b> are unlikely to occur as the subjects don't know they are being studied. <b>Validity is therefore increased.</b> In Humphreys' study the subjects thought that he was part of the activity in his role of voyeur. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Easier to record than CPO.</b> The researcher can concentrate on recording data rather than trying to maintain an active role. <b>(Practical)</b></li> <li>▪ The <b>ease of recording</b> makes CNPO more <b>reliable.</b> <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are major <b>ethical</b> concerns with CNPO as <b>deception</b> is involved. There is also the risk of <b>danger</b> when studying deviance. Humphreys was clearly exposing himself to a dangerous situation when studying homosexual activity in public toilets with complete strangers. <b>(Ethical)</b></li> <li>▪ This research method relies very much on the <b>skill</b> of the researcher. Humphreys had to have knowledge of the situation and an understanding of the people involved. Only when this understanding was achieved could he fit in to the situation he chose to study. <b>(Practical)</b></li> </ul>
Overt Non P.O.	<p>Hargreaves (1967)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study conducted to investigate the hidden curriculum in secondary schools.</li> <li>▪ Sat at the front of the class as a known observer.</li> <li>▪ Watched and recorded the interactions between the staff (teachers) and students.</li> <li>▪ Wrote observations down on a standardised <b>observation schedule.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Conducted in the same way as the Lions den observations.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More <b>reliable</b> than other types of observation. E.g. Hargreaves' study was open and so the recording was more precise, making use of an <b>observation schedule.</b> <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ Can <b>avoid activities</b> that may change the behaviour of the subjects, reducing bias and <b>increasing validity.</b> E.g. Hargreaves did not interact with the class at all during the observation. In just observing them he did not change the dynamics of the class. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ More <b>ethically sound</b>, as the subjects are fully <b>aware</b> that they are being observed. E.g. Hargreaves sat at the front of the class and was introduced to both the teachers and the students as a researcher. <b>(Ethical)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The <b>validity</b> of the results is greatly <b>reduced</b> as pps are <b>aware</b> they are <b>being studied.</b> E.g. How realistically would the pupils Hargreaves was observing behave with a extra adult in the room. The teacher knowing they were being observed would certainly modify their behaviour. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>No rapport</b> is built up with the subjects and therefore <b>validity is lowered.</b> Being completely fractured from the group being studied meant that Hargreaves would not have had the trust of the students. <b>(Theoretical)</b></li> </ul>