

Types of data

Activity 1

Use printable sheet – **Secondary data** and the digital resource – **Secondary data continuum**.

Secondary data is data that has not been collected by the sociologists themselves. It has been produced by someone else and has been done for their purposes.

Students will list as many sources of secondary data that they can think of in the first column of the table below.

Sources of data

Types of data

Suggestions

Data from previously published research

Diaries

Letters

Life histories

Mass media

Official statistics

Photographs

Pictures

Unofficial statistics

Your students may have thought of others.

Activity 1a

Now use the digital resource to place the secondary sources on the continuum, using the theoretical approaches as a guideline.

Positivist	Interpretivist
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Positivists use methods of data collection that will produce statistical data. It will enable them to look for patterns and trends and to draw comparisons between one group and another.

Interpretivists also use secondary data, but they are more likely to use expressive documents.

Material from the mass media is likely to be somewhere between the two on the continuum.

Have the students go back to the table and in the second column, identify who is most likely to use the particular type of data – a positivist or an interpretivist.

In the third column, identify the extent to which the type of data might be said to be reliable, and in the fourth column, identify the extent to which the type of data might be said to be high in validity.

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Note that a major source of all secondary data in the 21st century is the internet. This could be access to statistics on official sites, or expressive documents, such as diaries, letters and paintings.

Activity 2

Use the digital resource – **Summarising data**

Look at the pie chart and summarise the data displayed. Look for the highest and the lowest, look for those that are similar and for those that differ the most.

http://www.ukcrimestats.com/Police_Force/South_Wales_Police

Activity 4

Use the digital resource – **Mass media**

Watch the YouTube clip.

<https://youtu.be/r61ks18Bd7I>

Stan Cohen said that he was interested in social reaction to juvenile delinquency.



He said that he thought the mods and rockers story in the 1960s would be a good case study.

Answer the following questions:

1. What is meant by a case study?

Suggestion

To study a single event, or group, in depth.

2. To what extent might the findings from a case study be able to be applied to other similar events or

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groups? Can generalisations be made?

Suggestion

It is not usually safe to apply the findings from one case study to other similar events or groups. However, in certain circumstances, it might be possible to do other case studies on a similar event or a similar group, and then make generalisations from them all.

3. What were the three roles that Cohen took and how did his dress and behaviour differ in each?
4. He said that the three groups that he observed/interviewed/read, gave him three different social realities. Three different images of the same world. What did he mean by that?
5. He said that the media coverage was out of all proportion to the events. What evidence did he have for saying that?
6. Consider the extent to which the key concepts could be applied to Cohen's work.

Suggestion

Hide the following until the student is ready to reveal

It would be difficult for another sociologist to repeat this study, thereby making it low in reliability. However, Cohen used a variety of methods and his study was detailed and in depth, thereby making it high in validity.

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Activity 5

Available as printable student notes

Diaries, letters and life stories



scisettialfio / Getty Images

Letters, diaries and life stories are useful, particularly when trying to understand how people lived in the past or to be able to identify changes that have taken place, when no other data exists. For example, 'The Mass Observation Study', is a study which records everyday life in Britain, and which was started in 1937. It is based on diaries and the personal writings of over 1000 people who are, from time to time, given topics to respond to. Such data is not representative and therefore it is not safe to make generalisations.

In most questions on secondary data, it would be essential to know and to understand the work of Scott. There is a brief summary below.

Scott argues that when considering documents, there are four criteria that should be used:

1. **Authenticity** – has the document been written or produced by the person it claims to have been.
2. **Credibility** – is the document free from error, biases and distortions. For example, the diaries of politicians will be based on their perceptions of events, and one politician may have a different view to another.
3. **Representativeness** – the extent to which the document is typical of similar documents. This may be difficult if there are not many documents that have survived, or if there are only a few of the type available.
4. **Meaning** – this is the ability of the researcher to interpret the document.

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Although secondary data is data that has not been collected by the researchers themselves, many sociologists would use secondary data as a starting point for their research. For example, basic statistics might be used by those researching in the area of crime or education. The research on the London riots by the team from the London School of Economics, in conjunction with the Guardian, collected secondary data from the courts, on those appearing before the magistrates.