

Marks

Question 3 (6 marks)

- (a) Distinguish between the research techniques of *observation* and *participant observation*. **2**

The methodologies of *observation* and *participant observation* are both qualitative in that they do not necessarily produce data which may then be subjected to, for example, statistical analysis. Observation involves passively watching and taking note of the doings of a particular group, whether it be a subculture, a political institution or whatever. Participant observation, by contrast, involves actively taking part in the practices of the particular group to be studied. For example, if one wished to observe the processes of a subculture one would actively take part in what that particular subculture did habitually. This contrasts to the methodology of pure observation in which observer has a more passive role. In both cases ethical questions may be asked about whether or not the observer or participant should indicate to those who are being studied his/her identity.

- (b) Assess the value of participant observation in a study of teenage gangs. **4**

As already suggested, being a qualitatively methodology would not really allow the researcher to acquire in any sort of data for statistical analysis or the like. However, participant observation would give a fairly accurate view of the life of people in teenage gangs, especially if the researcher did not reveal him/herself to the gang in question. The methodology would allow an inside view of the way in which teenage gangs thought and acted. What is so excellent about participation observation is that it reveals the true practices of the teenage gangs. It may be compared to, for example, an interview or a focus group - and either of these cases the members of the gang may present the image they *wish* to present, rather than presenting themselves precisely as they are. For this reason participant observation would be rather effective in determining the everyday practices of those who are involved teenage gangs' activities. However, as already suggested, as a qualitative methodology it does not allow the researcher to acquire any statistical evidence which might then be used in determining, for example, the extent to which teenage gangs operate in Australia. In other words, participant observation is of value in certain circumstances: namely, it is valuable if the desired results are to be qualitative regarding the teenage gang activity. However, if quantitative results were required for later statistical analysis, participant observation would be decisively deficient. For this reason it would probably be best to use participant observation in conjunction with a more quantitative methodology to divine precisely the extent to which teenage gangs operate.