8.8 Idiographic and Nomothetic Approaches to Psychological Investigation: Test Pack

AQA 7182 · about 15 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Define the idiographic approach to psychological investigation, naming one typical research method used and why it fits the idiographic aim, in the context of studying a single client's experience.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 A famous example often used to illustrate the idiographic method is Freud's case study of Little Hans. Briefly state one finding from that case study and explain how the idiographic method helped produce that finding.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Explain two evaluation points that criticise the idiographic approach for scientific psychology, making clear why each point matters when psychology aims to be a science, and suggest one way these criticisms could be mitigated.

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 8.8 Idiographic and Nomothetic Approaches to Psychological Investigation: Test Pack

Question 1

defines idiographic approach as focusing on the individual, understanding unique experience rather than general laws oe	**B1**
names a method such as a case study or unstructured interview and links it to in-depth study of that individual oe	**B1**

Answer: Idiographic: studying individuals in depth to understand their unique experience rather than seeking general laws; typical method is a case study or unstructured interview because these allow detailed, rich qualitative data about one person.

Question 2

states a finding, for example that Hans showed a phobia of horses linked to repressed fears and displacement related to family dynamics, as interpreted by Freud oe	**M1**
explains how idiographic method produced this, e.g. detailed observation and interviews with the child and father allowed insight into personal history and meanings oe	**A1**
adds that such depth allowed interpretive links to psychodynamic theory that would not emerge from large-scale averages oe	**M1**
ties back to idiographic strength: thick qualitative data allowed hypothesis generation about unconscious processes specific to Hans oe	**A1**

Answer: Finding: Freud interpreted Hans's horse phobia as linked to repressed anxiety about his father and displacement of feelings. The idiographic method helped because detailed interviews and observations provided rich personal history and meanings that allowed Freud to make interpretive links to psychodynamic concepts that large-scale studies would not reveal.

Question 3

point 1: lack of generalisability from single cases or small samples oe	**M1**
explains consequence for science, e.g. cannot form general laws or make reliable predictions, limiting nomothetic scientific aims oe	**A1**
point 2: subjective interpretation and low reliability, such as researcher bias or difficulty replicating findings oe	**M1**
explains consequence, e.g. reduces objectivity and makes findings hard to test or falsify, which matters for cumulative scientific knowledge oe	**A1**
adds possible mitigation such as using triangulation or systematic case study protocols oe	**M1**
explains how mitigation improves scientific credibility by increasing transparency and replicability oe	**A1**

Answer: Criticism 1: idiographic studies often lack generalisability because single cases or very small samples do not allow general laws, so they do not support psychology's nomothetic scientific aims like prediction. Criticism 2: findings are often based on subjective interpretation with low reliability and risk of researcher bias, making results hard to replicate and hard to falsify. This matters for psychology as a science because it reduces objectivity and cumulative knowledge. Mitigations such as triangulation and clear case-study protocols can improve credibility by increasing transparency and reproducibility.

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