

# Introduction

Tuesday, 5 March 2019 12:08 PM

## Assessment

In class test: tutorial 3 (20%)

Presentation: tutorial 9 (30%)

Final project: June 11th (50%)

## How do we know?

Personal experience and 'common sense'

- E.g. I try mushrooms once and don't like them - therefore I don't like mushrooms
- **Limitation: we tend to overgeneralise from our own experiences**
  - E.g. just because I don't like mushrooms doesn't mean others feel the same way

Experts and authorities

- E.g. reliance on the knowledge of others to give us a sense of the world
- **Limitation: we tend to overestimate expertise**
  - The halo effect: Trump University versus Oxford University

Popular and media messages

- **Limitation: we fail to understand that media outlets are run by corporations with particular socioeconomic agendas**
- **Limitation: gatekeeping in journalism**
  - E.g. media portrayal of certain countries

Ideological beliefs and values

- Religion, social values etc.
- **Limitation: based on our dogmatic views**

Science

- Systematic, robust ways of knowing the world
- **Limitation: researcher bias**
  - Can design research to tell us what we want to know/what we think is the real answer to the question
  - Need to be open to the fact that our hypotheses can be wrong

Scientific controls/processes in social sciences

- Validity
- Reliability
- Trustworthiness
- Replication/follow-ups/new studies
- Ethics and scientific attitude
- Discuss limitations/potential bias
- Peer review

## How do social scientists produce knowledge?

Social science - scientific study of human societies, social life, social relationships - for example beliefs, behaviours, institutions, interactions etc.

Social scientists produce knowledge via systemised methods that are transparent, so that they can be evaluated by the reader

## How can we know (epistemology)?

Epistemology: assumptions that we can make about the nature of knowledge and what is

possible to find out about the world

- **Theory of knowledge**
- A way of looking at the world and making sense of it
- Associated with different philosophical assumptions (positivism to interpretivism)

Positivism: the methods of the natural sciences can be applied to study the social sciences

- Branches
  - Phenomenalism: only what can be accessed by the senses is accepted as knowledge
  - Deductivism: use of deduction in research
  - Objectivism: science must be conducted in a way that is value-free
- Assumptions
  - The world is **independent of/external to/unaffected by** the researcher
  - Scientific knowledge is tangible, objective, value-free, and confirmed by the 'senses'
  - Social world is understood through the explanation of human behaviour

Post-positivism/critical realism: the social world is too complex to be understood through a concrete, positivist lens

- Still adhere to objectivism
- Popper: instead of testing theory to confirm whether it is the truth, we should try to test theory to see if they fail and when they hold
  - Problem situation 1 - testing theory - error elimination - problem situation 2

Interpretivism: the scientific methods of the natural sciences cannot be applied to the social world

- Respects the differences between people and the objects/subjects of the natural sciences
- Critical of positivism
- Examples
  - Weber's *Verstehen*
  - Hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition: the world is already full of meaning, the role of the researcher is to tentatively shed light on this meaning
  - Symbolic interactionism: there are symbols in our interactions that can only be understood when we explain the meanings ascribed to interactions
- Assumptions
  - The social and the researcher **impact each other**
  - Critical of notions of objective and value-free knowledge
  - Knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied

## What can we know (ontology)?

Ontology: **the theory of nature/being**

- Our view of reality
- Associated with different philosophical assumptions (objectivism to constructivism)

Objectivism: social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social agents

- The social world can be measured
- Reality can be observed directly and accurately

Constructivism: social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished and revised by social agents

- Reality has to be understood through socially constructed meaning

## How can we find out (methodology)?

Methodology: framework we use to make sense of research

- Defined by epistemology and ontology
  - E.g. a positivist/objectivist would use quantitative methods
    - Surveys
    - Experiments
    - Statistical analysis
  - E.g. an interpretivist/constructionist would use qualitative methods
    - Interviews
    - Participant observation
    - Thematic analysis
    - Discourse analysis

Methods: tools we use to conduct research

Social science research: scientific means of acquiring information on various aspects of society and social behaviour to understand what how and why

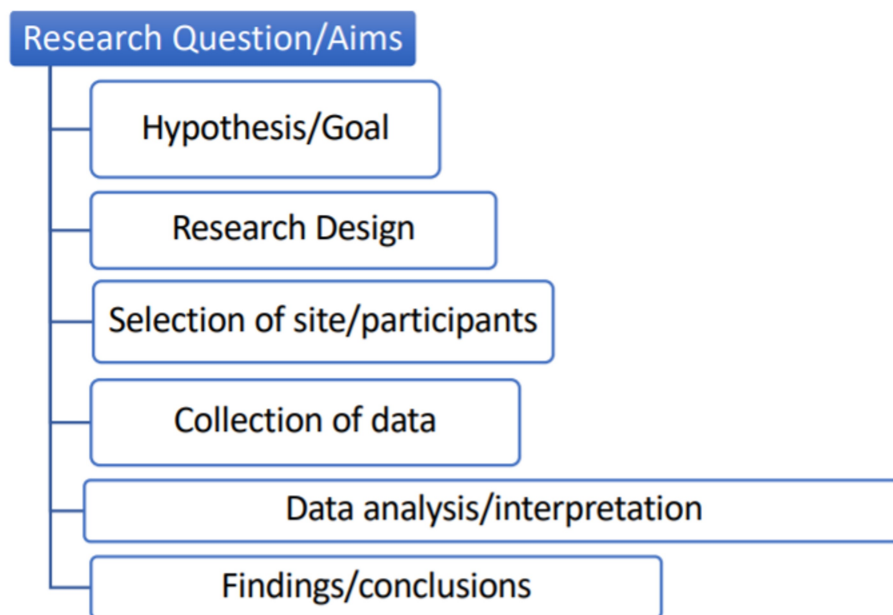
## What social science research methods can we use to find out?

Empirical research: collection of data

- Based upon observation and research
- Focus of this subject

Theoretical research: draws on existing literature to develop new ideas

## The Seven Steps of Social Research



# Qualitative Research Design

Wednesday, 13 March 2019

11:00 PM

## Questions

Why do we need theories?

What are deductive and inductive approaches?

how do we design appropriate research?

What is the nature of qualitative research?

Do ethics matter?

## Theories and research

Theory is a model that explains empirical situations

Why does research need theories?

- Background to conduct research
- Framework to help understand findings

Why do theories in research?

- They need empirical power in order to be tested and to hold water
- Grand theories
  - General
  - Operate on a macro level
  - E.g. functionalism: parts of society have specific functions
- Middle-range theories
  - Explain dimensions or specific parts of the social world

## Inductive and deductive reasoning

Inductive is no more subjective than deductive

There are always level of subjectivity in all research

The two are just different ways of approaching how we understand the world

## Designing research

Identify a topic

- Personal interest
- Policy relevance
- Already defined
- Pedagogy
  - Teaching and learning
- Is the topic a "good" topic?
  - Researchable
  - Personal interest
  - Of interest to others
  - Publishable/suit career purposes

Finding a problem

- Literature review of existing works on the topic
- Exploratory interviews
- Issues
  - Beginning a project without a clear idea as to what the problem is
  - Too broad/big
  - Not really a problem