

WEEK 2: DOING SOCIAL RESEARCH

1. Learning objectives This week you will be able to:

- a. Describe what is meant by positivistic and quantitative methods of social research.
- b. Compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative approaches to the sociological study of suicide.
- c. Describe what is meant by interpretive and qualitative methods of social research.
- d. Distinguish different approaches to the study of street corner society.

2. Reading:

Ch.14 'Methods of Social Research'

3. Define and take notes on these key concepts/terms

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| <p>Methodology Study of methods</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides a means of gathering and analysing information and data to produce knowledge - The practical methods through which data is collected - The theories of knowledge that collection and analysis is based on |
| <p>Epistemology</p> | <p>Theories of knowledge What counts as justification, doesn't this particular method produce valid/valuable knowledge etc.</p> |
| <p>Paradigm</p> | <p>Paradigms and Scientific revolution (Thomas Kuhn)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Argues that science changes via radical or revolutionary shifts of paradigm <p><u>Paradigm</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A set of beliefs shared by a group of scientists about what the natural world is composed of, what counts as true and valid knowledge, what sort of questions should be asked and what procedures should be followed to answer these questions - A complete theory and framework within which scientists operate - When scientists work in a paradigm, they tend to find evidence to support it and refine it - Scientists see the world in ways that are consistent with the paradigm - Kuhn believes that methods and procedures are specific to particular sciences at particular times - Scientists may ignore evidence that does not fit their paradigm (they have a vested interest in maintaining it for their careers and academic reputations) <p><u>Scientific Revolution</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beliefs are only changes by scientific revolutions which is a sudden shift which happens when a paradigm is faced with anomalies or things it cant explain and is replaced by a new one - Science then returns to a normal state where by the framework laid down by that paradigm is largely unquestioned - Sociology is therefore not a science in Kuhn's theory because there are different perspectives such as Functionalism, Marxism etc |
| <p>Positivism</p> | <p>Quantitative Methods (below) Natural science methodology, can form laws and principles of how it works</p> |
| <p>Quantitative methods (+ examples)</p> | <p>Positivism Comte and Durkheim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Durkheim (Social facts as things) |

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| | Natural science methodology, can form laws and principles of how it works |
| Quantitative methods (+ examples) Those who favour science methodology | Positivism Comte and Durkheim - Durkheim (Social facts as things) Wanted to distinguish sociology from psychology which studied emotions etc and believed that social facts could be studied empirically - Sociology should mimic the natural sciences in quantifying the social world through classification, counting and measurement - Statistics are useful for revealing causality between phenomena and correlations or connections between two or more things |
| Inductive vs. deductive approach (Quantitative laws about the natural world) Inductive is collecting the data and then forming a theory Deductive is making a hypothesis then collecting the data | Inductive - Direct collection and analysing of data to understand the laws of human nature and a law can be established based on the evidence Falsification and the hypothetico-deductive model (Karl Popper) - Hume claims that scientific reasoning is flawed – just because something happened in the past it does not mean it will continue to happen in the future - Deductive moves from the general to the specific - Science should progress in a piecemeal fashion, slowly generating theories that are capable of being tested and scrutinised against other evidence - Hypothetico-deductive <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Scientists make a hypothesis/prediction as to what is to be tested under what circumstances2. A consequence should be able to be deduced from the hypothesis3. Through observation and experiments, the scientists determine if the consequence occurs or not4. If it does not occur, the hypothesis must be false and a new one is required5. The hypothesis becomes verified once it is true but to further verify the hypothesis, further consequences should be deduced and subject to observations and experimentation to see if it occurs Attempts to falsify or prove them wrong Anti- Positivism and relativism – Peter Winch - Critic of positivism, scientists used their scientific language to make sense of the world around them – the language defines a certain reality which means that different languages constitute different realities - Wittgenstein’s linguistic philosophy - |
| Comparative methods | - Cross sectional and cross cultural analysis - Marx, Weber and Durkheim |
| Typology (or ‘ideal type’) Model that separates different types of scientific knowledge | Weber - There are concepts devised or constructed by sociologists which cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality - Researchers form mental constructs, pure or ideal, which they use to interpret motives and meaning behind actions - Links to symbolic interactionism where they ‘take the role of the other’ the idea that the self is socially constructed and formed in response to the interactions and perceptions of others |
| Ethnocentrism Garfinkel Looking at it from your own values/opposite to below | - Radical brand of sociology started in the US in 1960s - Concerned with understanding how social interactionism is achieved by ‘doing’ - The stability of social life is the outcome of some kind of conspiracy to create the impression of shared common sense knowledge |

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| Looking at it from your own values/opposite to below | <p>achieved by 'doing'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The stability of social life is the outcome of some kind of conspiracy to create the impression of shared common sense knowledge - People produce the appearance of stable order - Dependent on interpretivism as it relies on the ability to develop empathetic understanding |
| Cultural relativism | <p>Concept that an individual human's beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual's own culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opposite to ethnocentrism |
| Interpretivism | Qualitative Methods (below) |
| Qualitative methods (+ examples) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Thick description' attempts to paint a holistic picture using interviews and participant observation - Words and language are significant, interviews, transcripts, field notes - Subjectivity rather than objectivity is key - <i>Verstehen sociology</i> Weber (it means 'understand' in German) sociologists will always make value judgements when choosing research topics - Becker used an interactionist perspective to show how people learn to become drug users in a social context - 'Moral entrepreneurs' play a crucial role in determining who is deviant - Symbolic interactionists have been criticised for stressing consensus and focusing on micro level relations and failing to see how power and conflict operate in society but moral entrepreneurs answers this criticism - Whyte and 'Street Corner Society' – 'at-home ethnography' where a sociologist studies their own society and is an exemplar for the flexibility of research and unexpected observation <p>Feminist Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Gender as a dimension of social life</u> Focus attention on the gendered nature of sociological topics - <u>The critique of objectivity and reason highly critical of the goal of value-freedom or neutral objectivity, construction of an ideal objectivity actually privileges particular social groups and oppresses others</u> - <u>Politics of research, research as emancipation the goal of social research is treaded by feminists as emancipation or liberation from patriarchy/ the empowerment of women</u> - <u>Overcoming researcher/researched opposition</u> Harding and Hammersey to avoid this distinction between the researcher and the group they are studying, create more rapport and empathy |
| Grounded theory (Almost like inductive) | <p>Strauss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theory is largely generated from data, 'tell it like it is' approach - Be true to the data instead of trying to force it to a theory |
| Phenomenology Schutz Study of phenomena's (the idea of studying how people perceive things, their common sense knowledge, their ideas) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How we come to understand one another on a daily basis - 'intersubjectivity' - We are able to develop a reciprocity of perspectives - Believed that we interact based on characterising and classifying the social world on the basis of similar experiences - Stability of daily life depends on our ability to comprehend social situations |

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| perceive things, their common sense knowledge, their ideas) | experiences - Stability of daily life depends on our ability to comprehend social situations |
| Realism For realists, structures are key to understanding the operation of phenomena and events, there is very little difference between natural and social science - Both attempt to comprehend underlying structures, mechanisms and processes at work in the physical and social worlds | - Seeks to delve beneath the (orderly) surface of things to discover the underlying (disorderly) nature of social reality - Scientific research systems (Sayer) scientific studies which use laboratory measures and variables are controlled, are closed systems of scientific inquiry - Darwin ideas of natural selection – studies underlying causal mechanisms for human behaviour - Keat and Urry propose that a structure is a ‘system of relationships which underlie and account for the sets of observable social relationships and patterns of social consciousness’ - Structures are not capable of being directly observed but we are aware that they exist due to the consequences |
| Methodological pluralism (triangulation) The debate between quan/qual is insignificant – most sociologists get along with their research without being too concerned with the epistemological basis on their research | Bryman (1988) - Combining quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed methods approach) - Quantitative can produce a static view of the social world but depict the world in broad brushstrokes - Qualitative do not produce a big picture but provide rich detailed data - Durkheim in fact didn’t stick purely to quantitative measures as argued by Douglas – he attempted to understand individuals mental states too when studying suicide - Cicourel is a fierce opponent to quantitative approaches yet in his study of juvenile justice, he used stats to compare two Californian cities and their crime rates - Hammersley ethnographer regularly make quantitative claims in verbal form ‘regularly’, ‘sometimes’, ‘generally’ - The real issues are to do with practicalities of undertaking particular research, data available, questions to be asked etc |
| Ethnographic methods (+ examples) Studying (ology), methods (method) people, (ethno) | - page 405 the study of three housing estates in Norwich, England Rogaly and Taylor (2009) undertook like histories to determine how class is experienced subjectively - participant observations/interviews etc |

6. Reflection questions

a) How is sociology different from writing the script for TV programs like The Wire? How are they related? Why would you do one rather than the other?

- The unpredictable nature of society vs scripted TV- humans are autonomous and although you can predict how they will act, they tend to in fact be very unpredictable where as the script is set out in an ideal manner that would make sense to the audience as well as being interesting with cliff hangers, exaggeration and perhaps characterisation to make the audience feel a certain way about the protagonists in society. Sociology attempts to piece together social facts rather than create a story line for an audience to seek enjoyment from.

b) What is ‘positivism’ and what kind of approach might a sociologist adopt if subscribing to this view?

- The use of quantitative measures, social facts, statistics and attempting to obtain a large representative study/data

c) What is ‘interpretivism’ and what kind of approach might a sociologist adopt if subscribing to this view?

- Qualitative methods, attempting to ‘understand’ and get a rich, detailed view of society. Feminist research fits nicely into this category (see above)

d) In what ways does ‘realism’ represent a critique of both positivism and interpretivism? What implications does this have for the methodology of a realist sociology?

- For realists, structures are key to understanding the operation of phenomena and events, **there is very little difference between natural and social science/ Both attempt to comprehend underlying structures, mechanisms and processes at work in the physical and social worlds.** Therefore it combines both the positivist and interpretivist approaches. For realism, structures are not capable of being directly observed