



ECGE6003Q: Independent Project

Theme 3: Research in the Social Sciences



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Theme Outcomes

- To understand the purpose and process of research in the social sciences
- Understand the factors that influence Social Science research
- Access a range of texts, research articles and abstracts to become familiar with relevant terminology

Research in the Social Sciences

What do we mean by ‘the Social Sciences’?

*Take some time to consider the question and
share your thoughts with the group.*



Research in the Social Sciences

- The concept is a contested one but Scott (2014) defines it as;
- *'A general label applied to the study of society and human relationships'.*
- It is often taken to include:
 - Psychology
 - Social Psychology
 - Human Geography
 - Politics
 - Anthropology, and
 - **Sociology**



Research in the Social Sciences

- The disciplines can be seen to have one major factor in common.
- They all rely on research or **fieldwork** in order to support their hypotheses
- **Fieldwork** has been defined as ranging;
- ‘from large-scale survey interviewing by hundreds of professional interviewers, to the lone researcher recording information collected through participant observation in a small-scale case study’ (Scott, 2015)
- It is this emphasis on research that qualifies sociology as a social science



Research in the Social Sciences

- There are a number of textbooks that can help you as you explore the role that research plays in the social sciences
- Many of these are included in the online reading list for this Module.
- *Where can you find the online reading list for this Module?*



Why Research in the Social Context?

Why might we want to research 'society and human relationships'?

Discuss this question as a group.



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Why Research in the Social Context?

- The varied reasons for researching can be gathered into categories;
- Expanding our knowledge of social issues
- Advancing our understanding of social issues
- Finding solutions to problems
- To influence policy and legislation
- To inform and improve practice



Social Research in the Real World

- Robson (2002) defines the challenge of field work, or 'researching in the real world' as;
- 'Saying something sensible about a complex, relatively poorly controlled and generally 'messy' situation'
- *What do you think Robson is saying here?*



Social Research Strategies

- Bryman *cited in* Clark *et al* (2021. p4.) argues that;
- ‘the practice of social research does not exist in a bubble, hermetically sealed off from the social sciences and the various intellectual allegiances that their practitioners hold’.
- *In what way does this statement link back to our discussion in the sessions on Ethics and Ethical Approval?*



Social Research Strategies

Bryman makes two important points:

- Methods of social research are closely tied to different visions of how social reality should be studied
- Research data are collected in relation to something i.e. the wider social scientific enterprise
- *What is Bryman saying here?*



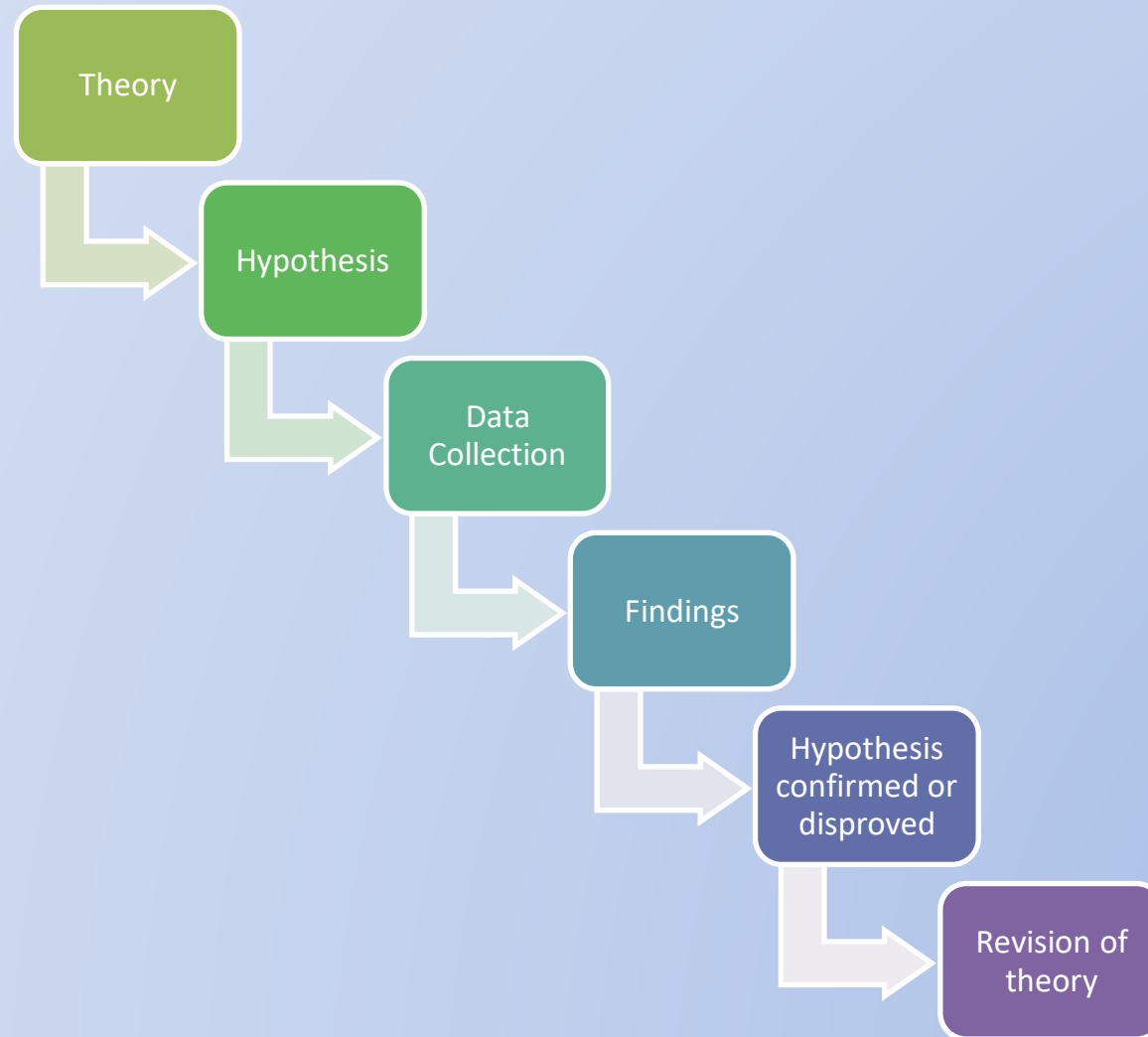
The Relationship between Theory and Research

- We have already discussed how our own values can affect the subjects we chose to research and the methods that we might use in that research
- In the same way our theoretical approaches can influence our research
- Indeed, in the case of Theory, it can have a very specific relationship with Field

The Relationship between Theory and Research

- The relationship between theory and research can be either deductive or inductive
- **Deductive** research begins from a theoretical position and seeks to confirm the theory
- **Inductive** research seeks to create new theory or practice based on the data collected

The Process of Deductive Research



Two approaches to social research

- Cohen *et al* (2018) argue that there are two, competing, approaches to research in the social sciences
- The first is a more traditional view that sees social science as essential the same as the natural sciences (e.g. physics, chemistry)
- This view seeks to discover universal laws which **determine** individual and social behaviour

Two approaches to social research

- The second approach is a more recent development
- It still focuses on rigorous empirical research to 'describe and explain human behaviour' (Cohen *et al*, 2018)
- However, the emphasis of this approach is that human beings are not like atoms or chemicals (which behave in predictable ways) but are agents who effect society by their actions
- The stance the researcher takes will depend on which of these competing views they adhere to



Two conceptions of social reality

- Burrell & Morgan (2016) have argued that the researches stance on social research is based on a set of explicit and implicit assumptions
- The first assumptions are **ontological** (Greek Onto = being)
- That is to say, the researcher's assumptions about reality
- 'is social reality external to individuals [...] or is it the product of individual consciousness' (Cohen *et al*, 2018)



Two conceptions of social reality

- The second assumptions are **epistemological** (Greek Episteme = knowledge)
- How do we acquire and communicate knowledge about the world?
- Can we acquire knowledge (e.g. from books etc.) or does one have to experience something to truly 'know' it

Burrell & Morgan (2016)

Two conceptions of social reality

- The third set of assumptions relate to the relationship between human beings and their environment/world around them
- Some social scientists see humans as objects, mechanistically responding their society (**objectivism**)
- Others perceive humans as subjects or agents who take an active role in shaping their society by their actions and reactions (**subjectivism**)

Burrell & Morgan (2016)

Research Approaches

- Cresswell and Poth (2018) have taken this discussion further and have identified five research approaches based on the researcher's assumptions and ideas about society
- We will now take a little time to explore these

Paradigm	Ontology <i>What is reality?</i>	Epistemology <i>How can I know reality?</i>	Theoretical Perspective <i>Which approach do you use to know something?</i>	Methodology <i>How do you go about finding out?</i>	Method <i>What techniques do you use to find out?</i>
Positivism	There is a single reality or truth (more realist).	Reality can be measured and hence the focus is on reliable and valid tools to obtain that.	Positivism Post-positivism	Experimental research Survey research	Usually quantitative, could include: Sampling Measurement and scaling Statistical analysis Questionnaire Focus group Interview
Constructivist / Interpretive	There is no single reality or truth. Reality is created by individuals in groups (less realist).	Therefore, reality needs to be interpreted. It is used to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities.	Interpretivism (reality needs to be interpreted) - Phenomenology - Symbolic interactionism - Hermeneutics Critical Inquiry Feminism	Ethnography Grounded Theory Phenomenological research Heuristic inquiry Action Research Discourse Analysis Feminist Standpoint research etc	Usually qualitative, could include: Qualitative interview Observation Participant Non participant Case study Life history Narrative Theme identification etc
Pragmatism	Reality is constantly renegotiated, debated, interpreted in light of its usefulness in new unpredictable situations.	The best method is one that solves problems. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim.	Deweyan pragmatism <i>Research through design</i>	Mixed methods Design-based research Action research	Combination of any of the above and more, such as data mining expert review, usability testing, physical prototype
Subjectivism	Reality is what we perceive to be real	All knowledge is purely a matter of perspective.	Postmodernism Structuralism Post-structuralism	Discourse theory Archaeology Genealogy Deconstruction etc.	Autoethnography Semiotics Literary analysis Pastiche Intertextuality etc.
Critical	Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence.	Reality and knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society	Marxism Queer theory feminism	critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography action research ideology critique	Ideological review Civil actions open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, and journals.

Research Strategy: Quantitative or Qualitative

Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches:

Principle orientation to the role of theory in relation to research

Deductive:
Using data to test an existing theory

Inductive:
Using data to create a new theory

Ontological Viewpoint

There is a single reality in which humans exist

Reality is the creation of human interactions

Epistemological Orientation

Reality can be measured (as with the physical sciences)

Reality has to be interpreted

View of human's place in society

Objectivist

Subjectivist

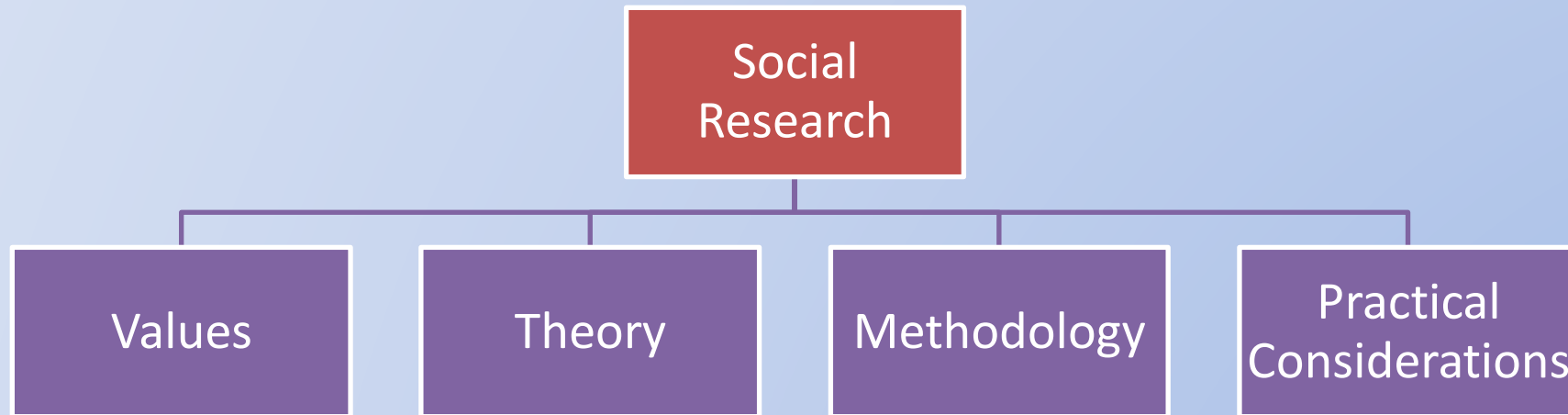
Quantitative Research methods

Qualitative research methods



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Summary: Influences on the conduct of Social Research



Student Task

Practical Considerations

- As a group, discuss the following practical considerations for research planning
- *What would you need to consider for each of the following?*
- Time
- Research Opportunities
- Access to Participants
- Money and Funding
- Personal Characteristics



Additional Reading

- Punch K, (2005) *Introduction to Social Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, London: Sage
- Oliver P, (2003) *The Students' Guide to Research Ethics*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Louis, Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge-Falmer.
- Robson C (2002) *Real World Research*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers



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- Clark, T. *et al.* (2021) *Bryman's social research methods*. 6th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) Research methods in education. Eighth edition. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://www.vlebooks-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/Product/Index/1010573?page=0&startBookmarkId=-1> [Accessed 09/10/2023]
- Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) Qualitative inquiry & research design : choosing among five approaches. Fourth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Grix, J. (2002) 'Introducing Students to the Generic Terminology of Social Research', *Politics* (Manchester, England), 22(3), pp. 175–186. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00173> [Accessed 09/10/2023]
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