

WEEK ONE
Mon Sept 14, 2009
Tues Sept 15, 2009

INTRODUCTION TO SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

LECTURE OUTLINE

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

- 1. What is Sociology**

PART TWO: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

- 1. Two Theoretical Approaches to Sociology: Determinism versus Interactionism**

PART THREE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- 1. Methodological Principles of Symbolic Interactionism**
- 2. Quantitative versus Qualitative Methodology**

Question of the Week

The sociologist's question is:

How can we best understand the relationship of the individual to society?

Questions of the Week

Which adjectives best describe the theoretical position known as determinism?

Which adjectives best describe the theoretical position known as interactionism?

Order, stability, determinism, universal, generic, positivistic
Versus

Fluid, emergent, variable, novel, situational, inductive

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DETAILED LECTURE NOTES:

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

1. Definition of Sociology

= the study of society, of how society works and how society is a cause of human action

Asks: how does society get inside of individuals to become part of each person and lead to certain organized patterns of behaviour

Examples of social patterns: culture, social structures, gender, class, race/ethnicity

Therefore, sociologists study the link between individuals and social structures (society, social organizations, social patterns) and ask two questions: how does society get inside of individuals AND how do individuals make up social patterns

PART TWO: DETERMINISM AND INTERACTIONISM: TWO APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SOCIOLOGY

**DETERMINISM: focuses on how society gets into individuals
le studies how individual behaviour is caused by, controlled by,
shaped by, molded by, structured by social structures**

- tends to see people as passive receptacles being filled up with whatever society, socialization throws into them
- most people in Canada emphasize this part of the individual/society relationship

eg: parents and teachers are especially prone to this view, thinking that kids will turn out as they plan simply because they fill them up with whatever adults think is good

NOTE: there is an equivalent view in psychology called the “Stable-Man” View of behaviour

Means: individuals are seen as having inborn tendencies, certain behavioural traits that they are either born with (inborn) or learn early in life that determine their entire future – assume individuals never change over the course of their lives but instead are doomed in a sense to live out these early traits they acquire

- one approach (the passive model) suggests that social science should be concerned with studying social forces that shape, cause, control, mold, structure individual behaviour because these “forces” can be measured, evaluated using the scientific method of study

Scientific Method = X-----Y

Hypothesis, Independent and Dependent Variables, Causal Connections suggested

INTERACTIONISM: focuses on individuals create social structure

It studies how the behaviour of individuals gets defined as a social pattern, leads to the establishment of institutions, which in turn shape how other people see and feel

- tends to see individuals as active agents, creating their own worlds, reacting against what adults tell them, making their own choices and decisions

- we call this perspective “interactionism” because it focuses on the social action that individuals take in social situations, their interpretations, their actions, their responses or initiatives and not what is being done to them

EG: Hip Hop music is a great example – African American teens protesting against their situation in American social life create a new form of music, that resonates with their peers, becomes a siren call for protest, social unrest etc, grows into a multi-billion dollar industry, that produces records and stars, like Dr. Dre and JZee, who go on to perform at the Grammys and increase their influence over all sorts of people who would never listen to hip hop or rap

NOTE: there is an equivalent view in psychology called the “Emergent Human” View of behaviour

This Means: individuals are understood as social, interactional, symbolic creatures who create new behaviour according to the social situations they find themselves in

- may draw on past behaviours but are not determined by their pasts

- emphasizes the uniqueness of individuals to symbolize, their capacity to see things not as they are but as they have been or might have been in the future, to create new worlds

PART 3: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

1. Methodological Principles of Symbolic Interactionism

- a) the world of reality is the empirical, the world of everyday experience therefore begin research with a study of the daily world of individuals**
- b) suspend common stereotypes, belief and images of that which we are studying – know your biases**
- c) a basic SI premise is that people act on the basis of the meaning of their objects – this suggests that if a scholar wishes to understand the action of people, it is necessary for her/him to see their objects as they see them**

How do you actually do this in a research project?

Place yourself in the shoes of those you are studying by participant observation (places the researcher in the middle of the participant's world)

OR through in-depth interviewing which provides a detailed description of how and why individuals act the way they do

- d) Purpose of SI research: to look for meanings that guide people's understanding of everyday life interactions**
: to focus on how individuals develop a sense of self and how they interact with others

Research Questions:

Provide examples of research questions that SI is well- suited to pursue.

What research questions are not well-suited to a SI perspective?

How does Barbara Ehrenreich use a qualitative method in her study entitled “Nickel-and-Dimed”?

2. QUALITATIVE versus QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative researchers:

- **reject the idea that social sciences can be studied with the same methods as the natural or physical sciences**
- **feel that human behaviour is always bound to the context in which it occurs; therefore, behaviour must be studied holistically, in context, rather than being manipulated**
- **employ an “insider’s” perspective; this makes qualitative research an intensely personal and subjective style of research**

Quantitative researchers:

- **argue that both the natural and social sciences strive for theories which can be tested and confirmed by explaining phenomena and showing how they are derived from theoretical assumptions**
- **reduce social reality to variables in the same manner as physical reality**
- **attempt to control the variable in question to see how other variables are influenced**

Activity

Identify the following as related to either qualitative or quantitative research:

1. **A study which the researcher carefully designs all aspects of the study before actually collecting any data.**
2. **You know in advance what you are looking for.**
3. **The design emerges as the study unfolds.**
4. **How do teachers in special education classes react to distance learning.**
5. **The researcher deals with data in the form of words.**
6. **The researcher deals with data in the forms of numbers and statistics.**
7. **The investigator is the data-gathering instrument.**
8. **Research methods involve the comparison of pre-test and post-test data.**
9. **Data collection and data analysis take place simultaneously.**
10. **Uses a variable of non-obtrusive methods to gather data.**

Fill In the Gap Exercise

1. Some major types of qualitative research: _____
2. When one is interested in understanding the response of the whole human being, and is interested in the meaning of an experience for an individual, _____ is one of the more appropriate qualitative methods to use.
3. A desire to understand the influence of culture on human behavior and health would lead a researcher to the use of an _____ method.
4. The qualitative method that emerged from the discipline of sociology and that is useful for discovering what problems exist in a social scene and the process persons use to handle these problems is _____.
5. A basic principle held in _____ is a valuing of women and their experiences, ideas, and needs.
6. _____ is the method used when a researcher obtains data about events from the remote or recent past from records, artifacts or verbal reports.
7. When the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system (a single individual or a single institution, for example), a _____ approach is often the most useful method for collecting specific information.
8. Attempting to uncover distortions and constraints that impede free, equal, and uncoerced participation in society is an emphasis in _____.
9. Qualitative research in action:

10. _____ is the lead methodological technique used to aid the rigorous reflection that is required in phenomenology.
11. Glaser and Stauss are 2 names commonly associated with _____.
12. A key data collection method for ethnography is _____.
13. The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory about a _____.
14. Arriving at _____ of a phenomenon is commonly associated with Phenomenology.
15. Habermas and Freire are 2 names commonly associated with _____.
16. In ethnographic research, insiders hold an _____ perspective on the answers to research questions.
17. What people share common symbols and hold common meanings about these symbols is an assumption of _____.
18. _____ is an important component of historical research.

HOMEWORK FOR TUTORIALS THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 8th and 9th

OBSERVATION EXERCISE

Spend five minutes observing in either a gym or in the student centre in York Lanes. Make a description of everything you see. Pay particular attention to the following:

Setting

Actors

Social objects

Language

Outside world

Time

NOTE: the “I” and the “Me” as well as the “play stage” and the “game stage” are not relevant to our observations

Research Question:

How can you use Mead’s theory of action in a research study of behaviour in public places?

Research Answer:

You would want to ask, “What are the objects?” Then you could discuss how one or more individuals deal with objects. Provide an example of a study following this guideline.