Postmodernism

This presentation material can be found at https://adrianholliday.com/handouts/

A way in

Theory serves a practical purpose to help make sense of the world

Researcher positionality

Rationale for paradigm, methodology, method

From an early age I was aware of two pictures of the world - which I then found represented in competing sociological theories

1. An organised system that rules and defines human behaviour as a matter of fact - Plato's Republic, everyone in their place, harmony (Emile Durkheim 1893/1964)

2. Conflicted, shifting, opposing forces in which the individual is in dialogue with structures (Max Weber 1922/1964), is ideological and in need of revolution (Karl Marx), and in danger from grand structures (Mills 1959/1970)

Picture 2 was confirmed by Thomas Kuhn's (1970) thesis that even science is influenced by political revolutions - new ideas (paradigms) overturning established orders, then growing old and being overturned again - **with no going back**

Postmodern, though perhaps not labelled as such.

Definitions

> I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. … Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. (Lyotard 1979: xxiv-xxv, his emphasis)

Wide-ranging with multiple applications and interpretations

A broad way of thinking - away from **Picture 1**

From positivism (engaged in finding the details of established truths)

From modernism (science and society as clearly organised and efficient)

From established structures (patriarchy, gender, race, hierarchy, coloniality) - post-structuralism

Narratives, discourses and construction

The workings of Picture 2

What we learn from Foucault (1972), Karl Mannheim (1936) and Berger & Luckmann (1966/1979)

       However, not always consistent (Berger et al 1974)

Discourses - régimes of apparent truth - perpetuated in everyday life by particular language and images (Fairclough 2013)

Grand or meta narratives - dominant stories generated or supported by discourses

Social construction - the process whereby we all construct truths - e.g. who is 'foreign' and who is not

Ideologies - combinations of discourses and grand narratives marshalled to support particular social and political forces - e.g. racism, sexism, patriarchy, native-speakerism

Critique of postmodernism

It is just another grand narrative that leaves us no objective base on which to stand

Ways in and out

      Constructionism - everything is constructed including postmodernism

      Relativism - everything is allowed because it is equally constructed

      Or **constructivism** - there *are* truths which are distorted by particular grand narratives, discourses and ideologies

Example from intercultural studies

Picture 1: Modernist, positivist	Picture 2: Postmodern
Separate bounded national or civilisational cultures with exclusive characteristics that run through all of their parts	Picture 1 is based on methodological nationalism (a nationalist ideology common since the 19th century) that unthinkingly assumes nation to be the default social unit
Western cultures are individualist (free-thinking, problem solving, critical, self-direction)	… based on colonialist, Orientalist stereotypes that define the Other as deficient and in need of Western education
Non-Western cultures are collectivist (group thinking)	… invalid because it doesn't consider the power of the Orientalist grand narrative that many people everywhere (including the researchers) buy into for complex reasons
Evidenced by many questionnaires and interviews with people 'in these cultures'	… doesn't get to the bottom of **why** people say things and **what is going on between the lines**
Acknowledges and protects diversity, but within boundaries - and exceptions to the rule	… imposes a Western, essentialist picture that doesn't recognise naturally **hybrid** identities

Relates to a similar politics of labelling in other disciplines and professional domains

An unrecognised, hidden world of decoloniality

> Old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of dominated … were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior … new social identities were produced … 'whites', 'Indians, 'Negroes', 'yellows', 'olives', using physiognomic traits of the peoples as external manifestations of their 'racial' nature. … New geocultural identities were produced: European, American, Asiatic, African, and much later, Oceania. (Quijano 2007: 171)

Also the denying the intersubjectivity in imagining the individualist, rational, external researchers vs. the collectivity of the researched - implicit in structural-functionalism (pp.172-5)

Requires a return to prior 'freedom to choose between various cultural orientations' (p.178]

The past, the distant or here and the present?

Pre-colonial hybrid interculturality

> 'Hybridity has always been there in non-Western communities' before 'colonial powers divided these communities arbitrarily into nation-states' and imposed the 'convenience of a uniform language' (Canagarajah 1999: 208-209)

> In a 13th century Anatolian town: Arabic, Romany, Venetian, Frankish, Saxon, Greek, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Hebrew could be heard, and that their speakers suggested an 'incompleteness, of the works in progress that they were, each an unfinished masterwork'. (Shafak 2010: 109)

People presenting different cultural realities to different people at different times in Southall (Baumann 1996)

> We all share the equal ability to construct and negotiate culture wherever we find it - small culture formation on the go (Amadasi & Holliday 2018)

Research methodology

Postmodern revolution in qualitative research and ethnography

> The researcher is implicated in the discourses, grand narratives and ideologies of the social settings being studied and therefore has to manage her or his intersubjectivity and co-construction with 'participants' (Clifford & Marcus 1986)

Paradigm revolution

Positivism	Postpositivist	Postmodern
Objective reality can be measured with the right instruments	Acknowledges the value of qualitative data and the subjectivity of the researcher	Reality and science are socially constructed
The researcher is separate to the object of study (rational coloniser)	So, to minimise subjectivity	… contain uncertain, intersubjective and multiple realities which researchers submit to and manage
Hard data **are** the transcripts of what people actually say or the statistics of what they choose	… qualitative methods need to be 'mixed' with quantitative	**Researchers are part of research settings and data** (in constructing and negotiating culture, dealing with grand and personal narratives)
Validity depends on representative samples, triangulation, member checking, objective coding, piloting, replication	… or methodically sequenced (e.g. IPA)	… in reflexive, creative dialogue
Get the sample, ask the questions, report the results		Development of focus, strategy and methods (including quantitative) responds to emerging exigencies of settings
		Rigour is in building pictures from rich instances through thick description and getting **between the lines**

What sort of research do we believe?

[Study 1] … % of participants reported that

    'In my culture we don't think independently'

    So we conclude that in … culture independent thinking is not the norm

[Study 2] An ethnographic exploration of what is going on when participants claim they do not think independently?

Reading the novel, *Madame Bovary*, can tell us more than a survey of 472 married women (Stenhouse 1985: 31)

    So perhaps more novelistic methods interspersed with a rigorous, reflexive account of

        how and why material was collected, analysed and reported

        how the intersubjective involvement of the researcher was used and managed

So what is data?

For Example

Interview transcripts are no longer hard data

> … are mediated by settings, researcher involvement, multiple and shifting circumstances

> … are fleeting instances of shifting positioning (influenced by personal and grand narratives)

… need to be contextualised with e.g. research diaries, descriptions of settings and behaviour, and creative interventions

> … and rigorously reflexive writing

My current research project

Beginning with the small - to bypass grand narratives about who we are (Stuart Hall 1991)

Looking around - trying to put aside positivist rumours

Phenomenological discipline (Baumann 1996: 1)

'Students' instead of 'Chinese students'

> I begin with an initial description of what I saw around me because it was in the struggle to work out what I could and could not describe that led me to the necessity of the concept of the varicultural. Indeed, I was not able to discern any separated cultures. I also increasingly began to understand that this was not 'a lack' of 'information' that I actually needed. It was instead a forced deCentring in pulling me away from this certainty. … This enabled me to see the varicultural diversity that such labels would have prevented me from seeing.

Third person descriptions that include private voice

The role of onlookers in constructing culture

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