

CHAPTER 2: The Importance of Theory

CHAPTER OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

INQUIRY PARADIGMS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES [LO1]

- Positivist Paradigm
- Interpretative Paradigm
- Critical Paradigm
- Pragmatic Paradigm

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEORIES [LO2]

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN RESEARCH

- Deductive Forms of Reasoning [LO3]
 - Testing Hypotheses Derived from Theories
- Inductive Forms of Reasoning
- The Role of Theory in Quantitative and Qualitative Research

FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS [LO4]

- Locating a Topic of Interest
- Framing an Interest into a Social Research Question

THE IMPORTANCE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW [LO5]

LOCATING RELEVANT LITERATURE [LO6]

- Searching for Books
- Searching for Periodicals

CHAPTER SUMMARY

RESEARCH REFLECTION

LEARNING THROUGH PRACTICE

RESEARCH RESOURCES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- LO1 Outline the main assumptions of positivist, interpretive, critical, and pragmatic paradigms.
- LO2 Define and differentiate between theoretical frameworks and theories.
- LO3 Distinguish between deductive and inductive reasoning and explain how the role of theory differs in qualitative and quantitative research.
- LO4 Formulate social research questions.
- LO5 Explain the importance of a literature review.
- LO6 Locate appropriate literature and evaluate sources of information found on the Internet.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paradigms shape our views of social science research. The positivist paradigm emphasizes objectivity and the importance of discovering truth through the use of empirical methods. The interpretive paradigm stresses the importance of subjective understanding and discovering meaning as it exists for the people experiencing it. The critical paradigm focuses on the role of power in the creation of knowledge. The pragmatic paradigm begins with a research problem

and determines a course of action for studying it based on what seems most appropriate given that particular research problem. Theoretical frameworks are perspectives based on core assumptions that provide a foundation for examining the social world at a particular level. For example, theoretical frameworks at the macro level tend to focus on broader social forces; whereas, those at the micro level stress individual experiences. Theories develop from theoretical perspectives and include propositions that are intended to explain a fact or phenomenon of interest. Deductive reasoning is a top-down theory-driven approach that concludes with generalizations based on research findings. Inductive reasoning is a bottom-up approach that begins with observations and characteristically ends with theory construction. Inductive approaches to reasoning guide qualitative research processes; whereas, deductive approaches guide the stages of quantitative research. Theory tends to be the initial point for quantitative research; whereas, it is interspersed throughout and emphasized more in the advanced stages of qualitative research. Based on a general area of interest and a vigilant literature review, a researcher ultimately shapes a research interest into a social research question, which is a question about the social world that is answered through the collection and analysis of data. For example, a researcher might begin with an interest in gender that develops into an examination of the effects of body size on income for male and female workers. A literature review is the starting point for formulating valuable social research questions. A literature review helps to identify what is previously known about and still needs to be done in an area of interest. A literature review also points out debates and issues in an area of interest along with the most relevant concepts and means for going about studying the issue in more depth. Appropriate literature sources include periodicals, books, and government documents, most of which can be accessed online via the library at the post-secondary institution. The quality of information gleaned from Internet websites should be evaluated prior to using that information as a primary source in a literature review. Evaluating information on the Internet usually takes the form of asking questions that center on the authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, coverage, and general ease of use of the website and information located at that website. For instance, in assessing objectivity, you can ask: “Is the information provided as a public service?”

LECTURE IDEAS/EXAMPLES

Literature Review

Use the question prompts located at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review> – which are listed below – to get students to practice asking questions like these about a book or article they will include in a paper (not necessarily for your course):

1. “Has the author formulated a problem/issue?”
2. “Is it clearly defined? Is its significance (scope, severity, relevance) clearly established?”
3. “Could the problem have been approached more effectively from another perspective?”
4. “What is the author’s research orientation (e.g., interpretive, critical science, combination)?”
5. “What is the author’s theoretical framework (e.g., psychological, developmental, feminist)?”
6. “What is the relationship between the theoretical and research perspectives?”
7. “Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue? Does the author include literature taking positions she or he does not agree with?”
8. “In a research study, how good are the basic components of the study design (e.g., population, intervention, outcome)? How accurate and valid are the measurements? Is the

analysis of the data accurate and relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions validly based upon the data and analysis?"

9. "In material written for a popular readership, does the author use appeals to emotion, one-sided examples, or rhetorically-charged language and tone? Is there an objective basis to the reasoning, or is the author merely 'proving' what he or she already believes?"
10. "How does the author structure the argument? Can you 'deconstruct' the flow of the argument to see whether or where it breaks down logically (e.g., in establishing cause-effect relationships)?"
11. "In what ways does this book or article contribute to our understanding of the problem under study, and in what ways is it useful for practice? What are the strengths and limitations?"
12. "How does this book or article relate to the specific thesis or question I am developing?"

This guide is the first of three looking at the purpose and process of conducting a literature review: http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/sta/A5_Literature_Reviews_1_Starting.pdf. It includes advice on writing a literature review; what is a literature review; how to get started; and searching for sources. It is in pdf format and is designed to be printed double-sided on A4 paper, then folded to make an A5 leaflet.

Students might find the following website –

<http://www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/writing/literaturereviews/index.cfm> – a useful contribution to the following topics:

1. What is a literature review?
2. Why write a literature review?
3. Key points to remember.
4. The structure of a literature review.
5. How to do a literature search.

Ask students to list questions a Literature review should answer. Then, have students visit <http://www.smu.ca/administration/library/litrev.html> for a list of such questions. Compare and contrast the website list with the students' list.

Paradigms

For an excellent discussion of various sociological paradigms and examples of each, go to <http://cnx.org/content/m33962/latest/>. The examples are user-friendly.

To get your students excited about the people behind the theories, you might draw on the following websites:

1. **Jane Addams:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/jane-addams-1860-1935>
2. **Auguste Comte:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/auguste-comte-1798-1857>
3. **Charles Horton Cooley:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/charles-horton-cooley-1864-1929>

See also <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/charles-horton-cooley-1864-1929/charles-horton-cooley-powerpoint-study-aids-and-video-clip> for PowerPoint, Study Aids, and Video Clip

4. **W. E. B. DuBois:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/w-e-b-dubois-1868-1963>.

- See <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/w-e-b-dubois-1868-1963/w-e-b-dubois-powerpoint-and-study-aids> for PowerPoint and Study Aids
5. **Emile Durkheim:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/emile-durkheim-1858-1917>
See <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/emile-durkheim-1858-1917/emile-durkheim-powerpoint-and-study-aids> for PowerPoint and Study Aids
 6. **Harriet Martineau:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/harriet-martineau-1802-1876>
 7. **Karl Marx:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/karl-marx-1818-1883>
See <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/karl-marx-1818-1883/karl-marx-powerpoint-and-study-aids> for PowerPoint and Study Aids
 8. **George Herbert Mead:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/george-herbert-mead-1863-1931>
See <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/george-herbert-mead-1863-1931/george-herbert-mead-powerpoint-and-study-aids> for PowerPoint and Study Aids
 9. **Robert K. Merton:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/robert-king-merton-1910-2003>
 10. **C. Wright Mills:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/charles-wright-mills-1916-1962>
 11. **Robert Park:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/robert-ezra-park-1864-1944>
 12. **Georg Simmel:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/georg-simmel-1858-1918>
See <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/georg-simmel-1858-1918/georg-simmel-powerpoint-and-study-aids> for PowerPoint and Study Aids
 13. **Max Weber:** <http://www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/max-weber-1864-1920>
See www.bolenderinitiatives.com/sociology/max-weber-1864-1920/max-weber-powerpoint-and-study-aids for PowerPoint and Study Aids

Karl Marx

With your students watch as Karl Marx – the puppet – visits Occupy Wall Street at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFrKhBiervM>. He interviews protesters while Adam Smith sets up the First Occupied Bank. Mexican artist Pedro Reyes shot the video series entitled, “Baby Marx.” In terms of the discussion in Chapter 2, discuss what Marx might have thought of Occupy Wall Street. Since your students may be unfamiliar with the movement, offer them an overview first.

Grounded Theory

The instructor may opt to visit <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8CB91CC62C1C2C7E> where a series of videos on Grounded Theory are located, which make for valuable in-class teaching tools. Also, included is a selection of videos on YouTube regarding Grounded Theory (GT), including four by Barney Glaser, one of the founders of GT, and videos of more recent writers on GT such as Kathy Charmaz, Tony Bryant, and Cathy Urquhart.

The Pandit article entitled, “The Creation of Theory,” located at <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-4/pandit.html> is an interesting text to use as a working example of grounded theory. According to <http://www2.widener.edu/~aad0002/714grounded.html>:

Pandit demonstrates how technical literature is reviewed to refine research questions and to develop concepts and assumptions. He shows how theoretically important cases were

selected so that substantive information about the setting and its travails would be accessible. He describes the development of a database through the use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data collection, arguing that this will ground his study in a network of information and ultimately will improve both accuracy and construct validity. Pandit further describes how he allows data analysis and data collection to be overlapping. In this way emergent themes and patterns can be permitted to refine definitions of concepts and new questions can be pursued. Pandit illustrates how open, selective and axial coding are all used to integrate data and develop connections between patterns and themes. Finally he describes how saturation determines the end of data analysis ... Pandit returns to his original propositions and compares them with two conceptual frameworks. One is the framework that emerges from the data after data analysis. The other is the framework suggested by the literature. He concludes his study by demonstrated how his original propositions concur and deviate in some way with data and with theory. This allows him to describe how his original thinking must be revised (compared to emergent themes in data) and how the literature and theory need to be rethought (<http://www2.widener.edu/~aad0002/714grounded.html>).

Hypothesis Generating

For variations on this lesson plan, whereby students generate a hypothesis, visit http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/psyc320/lessons/lesson02/lesson2-2-1_activity.htm.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning is using logic to move from generalisations to a more concrete and specific conclusions. Inductive reason, on the other hand, employs logic to move from specifics to generalisations. Many fields of study rely upon deductive reasoning; consequently, it is imperative that students learn to develop this method of critical thinking. Audrey Farley, an eHow Contributor (http://www.ehow.com/info_12015563_fun-activities-using-deductive-reasoning.html), recommends that educators use entertaining activities to teach and practice deductive reasoning. The following are a version of the activities Farley suggests. These in-class activities teach students how deductive reasoning works, by moving from general statements of fact to a precise conclusions. These activities also encourage students to become acquainted; thus, serving as an ice-breaker early in the course.

1. **Guess Who:** Divide the class into groups. Explain to students that they will play a variety of the board game *Guess Who*, which requires deductive reasoning. Distribute to students a full roster of the class. Read aloud clues, such as the following: This student has blond hair. This student wears a nose ring. This student was born on 10 February. Also, use clues based on amusing facts and trivia regarding students, such as students' favourite books, favourite television shows, their non-human animal companions, and/or foreign countries visited.
2. **Murder Mystery:** Together, the entire class will piece together clues presented by the instructor and draw conclusions about a murder. Present to students different clues that are established facts upon which to decipher the mystery. For example, offer clues about the murder weapon, items found at the scene of the crime, and information concerning probable suspects. To make this activity more stimulating, include extraneous clues to function as 'red herrings.'
3. **Literary Analysis:** Deductive reasoning, while generally employed in logic-based disciplines such as science and mathematics, is also used to critically think about literary

texts. To establish how deductive reasoning is applied to fiction, read aloud a chapter from a book. Then, based on the details and plot presented, ask students to make deductive conclusions about characters or themes. As a case in point, ask students if a character has moral or immoral intents. Students must refer to specific passages to support their claims.

4. **Logical Syllogisms:** To practice deductive thinking skills, invite student volunteers to complete logical syllogisms. Explain to the class that a logical syllogism is an argument that is dependent on two premises to infer (i.e. deduce) a conclusion. For example, Audrey Farley, an eHow Contributor (http://www.ehow.com/info_12015563_fun-activities-using-deductive-reasoning.html), offers the following logical syllogism: “Tigers are cats. All cats have four legs. Therefore, tigers have four legs.” Ask students to generate premises based on humorous scenarios or fascinating facts that will engross them in the lesson.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Practicing deductive reasoning is fun, takes only a few minutes, and you can use most anything to create a practice activity. At first, you should talk through the activity while you are presenting it. Here are some examples:

Activity 1: Choose four students to stand at the front of the classroom. Choose precise attributes when choosing students. Examples: two students should be taller females; one tall female student should have red hair and the other black hair; the two other students should be male and female. Next, make the following prompts and, after each prompt, ask the class if they are sure of the answer.

1. The student I am thinking of is female. (Students cannot be certain of a final response at this point because three of the four students are female. Students can only exclude the male at this point.)
2. The student I am thinking of is tall. (At this time, students can exclude the shorter female, but are still unsure of the absolute answer.)
3. The student I am thinking of has red hair. (Students can use all of the clues to provide the right answer.)

Activity 2: Place a loonie, quarter, nickel, and dime in the center of a circle of students. The instructor will make the following prompts:

1. The coin I am thinking of is silver in color.
2. The coin I am thinking of is not the largest in size.
3. The coin I am thinking of is bigger than a dime in size, but smaller than a quarter.

Answer: The nickel

Activity 3: To answer the discussion questions that follow, students must first read, “Transforming the political agenda? Gender differences in bill sponsorship on women’s issues,” located at <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/transforming%20agenda%2010-00.pdf>

1. Is this research study in the positivistic tradition? Justify your answer.
2. Categorise the research steps the researchers followed.
3. What is the research question?
4. Is the research question suited to a qualitative or quantitative research approach? Justify your answer.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. A literature review is a piece of discursive prose. Explain.
2. Describe the commonalities and dissimilarities between a research article and a non-research article.
3. Discuss the issues you need to take into consideration before critiquing a research article.
4. Why is it necessary to review the literature when doing a research study?
5. Describe in detail what a literature review is and how it is beneficial when completing social scientific studies.
6. Discuss where and how to search the literature. Provide a social scientific example during the course of the discussion.
7. Discuss what constitutes a well-written abstract.
8. Discuss how to amass and manage the information you find when completing a literature review. Provide a social scientific example during the course of the discussion.
9. Discuss how to develop a theoretical framework when completing a literature review.
10. Discuss standards that a good literature review will uphold.
11. Discuss why one must locate existing knowledge in their topic area when one wants to complete a social scientific research study.
12. Discuss how to find existing sources of knowledge in a topic area of your choice. Provide a social scientific example during the course of the discussion.
13. What are journal articles?
14. What are peer-reviewed journals?
15. How does one go about critically evaluating social scientific evidence?
16. Discuss why all empirical evidence is *not* made equal.
17. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the positivistic research approach to knowledge generation.
18. Four key paradigms are outlined in Chapter 2. Discuss each. Which of the four is most appealing to you? Explain.
19. Positivist, interpretive, critical, and pragmatic paradigms all offer a broad worldview from which theoretical frameworks emerge. Discuss the connection between paradigms and theoretical frameworks.
20. Palys and Atchison (2014) – as cited in Chapter 2 – state: “[G]ood theory is not imposed; rather, it emerges from direct observation and contact with people in context.” Discuss.
21. A chief criticism of the positivist paradigm concerns the separation of the researcher from what is being researched. The expectation that a researcher can observe without allowing values, or interests, to interfere is arguably impossible. Where do you stand on the issue? Be sure to cite Chapter 2 in your answer.
22. One of the criticisms of the interpretive paradigm (also called constructivism) is that it does *not* allow for generalisations. Your task is to argue that the details and efforts involved in interpretive inquiry permit researchers to gain insights and perspectives that may not come to light under the positivist paradigm.
23. In a nutshell, the critical paradigm focuses on eliminating injustice in society. Critical researchers aim to transform society to address inequality, in relation to ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, for example. Similar to interpretivist researchers, critical researchers recognise that research is not value-free. They go further, however, in

arguing that the goal of the research is to actively challenge interpretations and values in order to bring about change. Do you think social scientists should take on the dual role of researcher and activist? Why or why not?

24. In 1845 the young Karl Marx wrote, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world. The point, however, is to *change* it.” Using the conflict paradigm as your starting point, explain what Marx means.
25. Compare and contrast the pragmatic paradigm with positivism and the interpretive paradigm.
26. Within the discipline of sociology, the functionalist, conflict, interactionist, feminist, and postmodern frameworks provide different lenses from which sociologists view society. Which theory or theories come closest to your view of the world?
27. The functionalist framework is rooted in positivism in its focus on observables in the form of “social facts” and “universal truths.” What “social facts” or “universal truths” arise from sociological research?
28. According to Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera, the authors of *Liberation Sociology* (Westview Press), the goal of liberation Sociology is not merely to study and understand the social world, but ultimately to shape a more just world. As they suggest, “questioning and researching hierarchies of class, gender, and racial power are at the heart of a sociology of liberation and emancipation. The point of liberation sociology is not just to research the social world but to change it in the direction of democracy and social justice” (2001:11; ix;1). Sociologists working in this tradition take sides with, and the perspective of the oppressed, employing sociological insights and findings as tools for their liberation. Liberation sociology is better understood, therefore, as a perspective on, rather than a topic of, sociological inquiry. Research that adopts this perspective characteristically involves: questioning social hierarchies, identifying sources of oppression, facing challenges in communities, looking beneath the surface and probing underlying assumptions, and taking an overt moral stance. The task of the student is to locate an example of a Canadian social scientist working in this tradition and come to class prepared to discuss the individual and her/work. For example, American-born sociologist, William K. Carroll’s (The University of Victoria) research focus, for some years, has been on mapping the structure of the transnational capitalist class, using social network analysis. This work falls within the tradition of ‘power-structure research.’ For liberation sociology, the contribution is one of providing a detailed analysis that shows how concentrated corporate power is, worldwide, and thereby raises issues of inequity and lack of democracy. He published a book on this in 2010 (*The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class*, Zed Books), and he has an essay in *Socialist Register 2014* entitled, “Whither the transnational capitalist class?”
29. “Alternative Policy Groups and Global Civil Society” is a collaborative research project involving scholar/activists based in Canada, France, the United States, South Africa, and Japan. It is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (2011-14). The project concerns the role that transnational alternative policy groups play in producing knowledge for democratizing kinds of social change. Data include transcripts from more than 100 in-depth interviews with activist-intellectuals whose work powers these sites of counter-hegemony. Based on this information alone, students will determine the paradigm on which the research is based along with the theoretical frameworks most likely informing the collaborative research project.
30. Compare and contrast deductive and inductive logic. Describe explicit research issues that are applicable to each. Explain why.

31. Grounded theory is an inductive approach in the extreme. Explain.
32. As inductive theory, grounded theory makes no distinction between theory and design. Explain.
33. Compare and contrast grounded theory and ethnographic interviewing. How are they similar in their assumptions about how people think and what the goals of research are? How are they different?
34. Compare and contrast content analysis and grounded theory. Be sure to consider similarities and differences in purposes, categories of data, procedures, epistemology, and relationship to quantitative approaches.
35. Describe in detail and critically assess the grounded theory methodology.
36. The practises of grounded theory vary from those of conventional social science research. A literature review is needed. Nevertheless, it is not used to discover a theoretical model, ready made in the work of other researchers that will be used to make design choices. Discuss then how you would go about doing such a literature review. Is it really that different from the more characteristic literature review?
37. There are numerous ways to structure a literature review. Two common ways are chronologically and thematically. Which would you prefer? Does circumstance matter? Explain.
38. Literature reviews can have different types of audiences. Discuss how this ‘fact’ influences how literature reviews are conducted (e.g. literature reviews are characteristically written as a chapter for a thesis or dissertation; hence, the readership will want to know in what manner the research is significant and original).
39. Challenge the notion that scientists can be as objective as the positivist ideal proposes.
40. Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera (2008:23) address the notion of objectivity in their book *Liberation Sociology*, stating:

Mainstream sociology is often committed, albeit in disguised ways, to vested interests in the established hierarchies. The noncommittal attitude of much sociology today—usually formulated as scientific detachment, objectivity, or value freedom—is often a cover-up for the dominant group interests actually being served by the research so labeled. Sociology, like other intellectual endeavors, is part of the political, social, and psychological status quo.

Discuss Feagin and Vera’s claims as a criticism of positivism.