

Introduction

History of SP shows it has been more influenced by the principles of (scientific) method than by what it (supposedly) investigates.

PSP - majority tradition - bound by experimentation and measurement.

SSP - minority tradition - naturalistic studies, use of qualitative methods as well as quantitative ones.

There is an argument that methods produce knowledge - i.e. they have an active role in how SP phenomena are either focussed on or ignored. Methods do not simply uncover 'the truth' - they have the ability to both reflect complexity of real life and also constrain and distort what is reported as knowledge.

Four social psychological methods

Note:

Ontology = theory of the person / theory of being

SPM Chapter 2 - Methods and Knowledge in Social Psychology

Four social psychological methods

Discursive psychological

Ontology: The socially-constructed, situated and contingent identity

Methodology & description: Discourse analytic: i.e. qualitative, text and conversation analysis

Methods: Conversation analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis

History: started in 1970s, influenced by linguistic turn and SSP

Unit / focus of analysis: The external world of discourse, its meanings and effects

Phenomenological

Ontology: The experiencing embodied individual and their relationship with others

Methodology & description: Phenomenological: i.e. qualitative, rich description of experience

Methods: First person written accounts of experience, interview, literary text

History: From the philosophy of Husserl late 19th/early 20th century

Unit / focus of analysis: Detailed descriptions of social experiences as perceived through the senses

Cognitive social

Ontology: The individual as a processor of information in a social context

Methodology & description: Statistical: i.e. quantitative, scientific (controlled) methods

Methods: experimental and social psychometrics

History: Dominant in PSP, emerged in mid 20th century as a result of critiques of behaviourism

Unit / focus of analysis: Individual cognitions within controlled social conditions

Social psychoanalytic

Ontology: The conflicted psyche as it relates dynamically to the external world

Methodology & description: Social psychoanalytic or Psychosocial: i.e. qualitative interpretation of what is said and unsaid

Methods: Case study, FANI, observation

History: Clinical use only prior to late 20th century

Unit / focus of analysis: The internal world of the psyche in relational settings and its effect on how we act

How the four approaches view a headline about hate

From 24th May 2004 (The Guardian) - story about an Iraqi family. Woman's husband had disappeared in detention during the war - "I will always hate you people"

Social cognitive (experimental) approach

Spears - some ESP find it difficult to use experiments to explain such an extreme emotion like hate. But, they are useful as:

- (i) Accounts would otherwise be 'anecdotal' - SP needs empirical evidence.
- (ii) Experiments provide control to assess causal relations between variables that may not be obviously apparent.

Gives example of his own study into schadenfreude. This is not openly expressed, but experimental techniques can help to discover what is hidden.

Used a 'bogus pipeline' (deception) and told participants it could detect their real emotions. Argues this causes people to be more honest and show more schadenfreude to a rival than otherwise would be permitted by social convention of not gloating over a rival's downfall.

Is able to model some of the underlying processes behind hatred, if not simulate what it is to be a suicide bomber for example. E.g. have tried to show the disempowering conditions of stable low status can be associated with aggressive forms of discrimination - people have 'nothing to lose'.

Experiments offer:

- (i) Depth of explanation (dig beneath the surface)
- (ii) Ability to investigate hidden psychological processes (e.g. shame of admitting schadenfreude and unconscious thoughts and desires)

Acknowledges interpretative care is required and that experiments are not the only valid approach to research. Argues they are complimentary to other techniques.

Different methods seen as providing different levels of explanation of psychological phenomena.

Social psychoanalysis

Hollway - argues psychologists should start with their own subjective responses to the issues they investigate as it is not possible to stand outside of (for example) the group constructions of the headline - she is British and therefore one of the 'you people' the Iraqi woman hates.

Argues her meanings will frame the shape of the analysis and that of the headline writer too. The hatred in the headline is reflected in the final sentence of the article which quotes the woman's daughter.

Says that this perspective is one of the few which not only understands an extreme emotion like hate and does not shy away from it.

Could research the topic using many different research questions - e.g. social identity theory would be interested in the group identities constructed by 'I', 'we', 'you people'. A social psychoanalytic account would be interested in the inner feelings/investments - the inner psychic contributions to meaning. Recognises the importance of relational, discursive and wider social contexts.

Research questions are not neutral tools - but they shape the knowledge produced from the research as they also have a payload of meaning.

Determining the research question needs to be done before the design of the analysis is decided upon - e.g. to take the headline, whole article, underlying interviews, new interviews etc.

A single case study may be enough to look at the phenomena of hate; if the question is how widespread it is design would have to go in a quantitative, survey based questionnaire; if it is what makes some hate and others not a comparative design is more appropriate.

Hollway argues that to understand more deeply what it means to 'hate you people' a qualitative approach is required - to understand experience and meaning. Results can be extrapolated (generalised) from a single case study (from one or more in-depth interviews) by using theoretical understanding of hate and group relations provided context is retained.

This (psychosocial) method provides data on the complexity of an individual's meaning and their relation to specific experiences. Goes beyond 'conscious appearances and surface accounts' of (say) discourse analysis. Focus is on the person, not the text.

Discursive social psychology

Edwards - interested in how specific words in the headline and story are combined and put to work, rather than attempting to pursue deep, underlying significance.

This approach is often criticised as 'only' analysing discourse when other more important things need to be established. However, if you turn away from the text, you are turning away from the actual object (newspaper report) presented for analysis which is as 'real' as the events and the inner world of the participants.

Discourse is important in itself as without it there would be no politics, war, understanding of what is happening. The report is not a departure point (as other approaches would see it), but how it provides causal explanations, trigger particular psychological states and its implications for politics and policy.

Analysis of the original text may require other

materials to be needed - but likely to be more discourse - not experiments, surveys or in-depth psyche-probing interviews. DP prefers to collect the discourse that is found, rather than performing specific research interviews. Such discourse is always: situated, indexical, sequentially relevant, of and for its context, doing something. Research interviews however tend to usurp the everyday circumstances in which things are said or written.

To examine the headline, DP would look at what the direct quotation does and what its general characteristics are. DP is about finding order in the way quotations are used, not about formulating as IVs theoretically generated (types of) quotations and measuring their effect.

DP assumes the social world is already orderly and intelligible because we make it so - so specific experimental situations are not required to separate out causal factors and variables. It is not a preliminary form of research (which will eventually lead to experiments) - it is complete in itself. Discourse and social interaction should not be treated in the same way as a chemistry experiment.

Phenomenological social psychology

Langdrige - primarily interested in experience - his desire from reading the text is to want to make contact with the affected family. Although a newspaper article is what is presented, it is the story and experience of the family that is most important if the hatred felt is to be understood.

Phenomenological social psychology is a descriptive discipline - vital to describe what is happening in the story if the emotions and experience is to be understood.

A process known as epoché is required - the process of bracketing off your everyday way of perceiving to world to discern the essence of 'things in their appearing'.

Data is collected through first person written accounts and/or interviews. Experimentation is avoided; projects focus on describing the experience and elaborating its hidden qualities.

Aim of this kind of research is to identify invariant structural qualities across the experience and those which are more idiosyncratic.

Reasons (not causes) behind the phenomena are the focus of study - in order to provide new insight to effect change.

Similarities and differences between the approaches

Similarities:

(i) Reflexivity - researchers put themselves in the picture in knowledge production. This is explicit in the social psychoanalytic and phenomenological approaches.

Differences:

(i) The (obvious) quantitative / qualitative divide.

(ii) Object of analysis is hidden from view in ESP, in FANI - social psychoanalysis and in the phenomenological approach (rich description leads to new insights). Discourse analysis however is only interested in what is in the words - e.g. emotion terms, rather than emotions themselves.

(iii) Control over research setting - the qualitative approaches seek ecological validity by performing their research in social settings, ESP 'models' social processes to enable their controlled investigation in lab settings.

(iv) Within the qualitative methods, DP prefers to collect discourse as it can be found rather than using specific research interviews.

(v) Social psychoanalytic and phenomenological approaches focus on experience, grounded by a narrative. **Polkinghorne** - narrative is the fundamental form in which we make sense of our experience and life.

Narrative can be argued to construct our identity - e.g. **Hollway and Phoenix** study into how identities form and change when women become mothers for the first time.

Starting point was identity is influenced by life experience - qualitative, narrative interviewing method used to investigate. FANI (free association narrative interviewing) used as it was appropriate to the theory that people are not always aware of what goes to make up their identity or the motivation behind their relationships and actions.

Supplemented by the use of psychoanalytic observation method to overcome the limitations of the dependence on talk that interviews have - originally developed to investigate infant-mother relationships (**Reid**).

In-depth nature implies small sample size - 30 mothers, interviewed 3 times; 6 mothers involved in once a week home observations. Took place over the first year of the child's life as identity unfolds over time. Different ethnic groups sampled, but from the same London Borough so current context was similar w.r.t. welfare provision and other services.

Observers used their subjective responses to analyse and interpret data, led by a group leader. Allows for reflexivity and the group context for many subjectivities to act on the same data - opening out its interpretations.

Historical change

All four approaches products of the changes in SP over the course of its history.

Newest approach is the social psychoanalytic one (late 1990s) but roots go back to 19th century clinical psychoanalysis.

DP - dates back to the 1980s - arising from a (European) focus on language, discourse and culture being central to SP. Variants focus on the macro - e.g. Foucault's analysis of historical shifts in the discourse surrounding madness and the micro - e.g. conversation analysis.

Phenomenological - originates with Husserl within philosophy (late 19th century) - with recent new interest in psychology.

Experimental SP has the longest tradition - but has changed in nature in response to the 1970s 'crisis' and the 1980's 'linguistic turn'.

The experimental approach and the crisis

The ability of 19th century natural science to predict and control was very influential on the development of SP during the 20th century.

Danziger - notes statistically based methodologies (in psychology) are very effective at solving specific practical problems, where questions have limited scope and need an answer which is unambiguous - as, for example, problems in industry or agriculture where such designs were first used. However, they are not appropriate for situations where the properties of theories being tested are not congruent with those that the methodology imposes on the data. Argues psychoanalysis and phenomenological psychology are at odds with such statistically methodologies.

The social (statistical??) conventions established to achieve consensus between quantitative researchers were no more valid than those preceding them which were case-based, but are taken 'utterly for granted'. The work of producing quantitative data largely ignores the psychological reality that the data represents.

Three methodological beliefs require revision:

(i) Statistical inference is the only valid procedure to relate data and theory

(ii) Rules about what is valid evidence is fixed and is independent of theory

(iii) Structure of theory must be accommodated to the structure of methodology and not vice-versa.

Hollway argues the dominance of the experimental approach could not have happened without institutional power - of university departments, publishers and funding bodies. The crisis occurred when the weaknesses of the method became evidence and practitioners voiced their concerns.

Chronology of the crisis:

Orne (1962) - effects of demand characteristics noted

Rosenthal (1966) - experimenter effects noted

Tajfel (1972) - experiments often lack validity

Kelman (1972) - experiments pose serious questions about ethics

Gergen (1973) - experiments do not offer knowledge which remains relevant over time

Silverman (1977) - SP does not have substance and direction as we falsely believe complex social phenomena can be studied using lab methods

Gergen (1978) - experiments take 'variables' out of the context of everyday life with which they derive their meaning, which changes over time

Danziger (1996) - topics of psychology are constantly redefined to fit a very limited range of allowable procedures

The experimental setting: obedience to authority

It took (according to **Danziger**) nearly 100 years before the assumption that the setting of a psychological experiment did not affect the behaviour of 'subjects' was properly challenged. Even so, progress in recognising this limitation of the experimental method has been slow.

Milgram (1963, 1965) - "obedience to authority" experiments. Found more than 60% of participants would continue to administer "shocks" to a recipient when told to by the "experimenter" even when they heard the supposed recipient begging them not to, screaming in pain and then falling silent.

Observational records also kept; follow-up interviews conducted with participants and given debrief. Follow-up questionnaire sent a year after "confirmed" **Milgram's** view that participants felt positively towards the experiment.

Power relations in the production of knowledge

Milgram's study is used to show people are prepared to submit to authority even when it is cruel and harmful. Gives scientific authority to knowledge about a general phenomena he called 'obedience to authority'. Findings are transmitted as SP fact.

Criticisms:

(i) The role of the authority of the institution and power relations between researcher, assistants and participants can be seen in this experiment.

Milgram moved the location of the experiment from the elegant offices of Yale University, to the basement and then to a site unconnected with the university on the basis of participant feedback. Obedience dropped from 65% to 48% - but this was not a statistically significant reduction. But this is dependent on how the results are evaluated and then disseminated - if this 'fact' had been selected to show the difference

between the groups, the history of this experiment and SP may have been different.

Milgram's stated interest was in the three party situation - one person being commanded by another to hurt a third. (Background of post-WWII interest in why German soldiers had co-operated in genocide). Thinking was that perhaps all organised hostility might be seen in such a way - i.e. authority, executant and victim.

His study used pre-determined responses to the participant (e.g. you have no other choice, you must go on). Standard experimental set-up used was not just convention - but as a way of looking at the consequences of such a social structure, rather than the personal power of the experimenter.

Milgram's design passes **Gergen's** test - i.e. it created a social context in an experiment that was appropriate to the hypothesis being tested.

Milgram later reflected on the experiment in the context of informed consent but argued 'you don't know that there will be stress before you perform such an experiment' - understandable when the experimental approach means that you are supposed to avoid making assumptions about outcomes before you conduct an experiment. However, observations made during the experiment did show considerable participant stress in many.

Use of deception in SP has attracted much criticism - but at the time **Milgram** conducted the research, **Hollway** argues that the prevailing value was that the pursuit of scientific knowledge outweighed concerns about protecting participants from trauma. **Milgram's** own earlier (1960) PhD thesis did show concern for ethics - participants in his study were asked if the experiment had been ethical or not - but the majority said it was neither ethical nor unethical - there was no understanding how the term might be used with a scientific experiment.

Harré - an alternative perspective on the power relation in the lab comes to a different conclusion to what **Milgram's** experiment was about. He suggests it was an experiment about trust, not about obedience.

This is because the assistant re-assures the participant at the point they start to object and so come to believe that it will only affect the 'learner' beneficially.

This argument is founded on **Mixon** - demonstrated that a participant's trust in a researcher significantly affects their willingness to continue.

Trust is one response to power not considered in **Milgram's** experiment - and as such, casts doubt on his conclusion that it is obedience to authority which is being demonstrated.

Milgram stressed that the context of the experiment was important - addresses the criticism of other experiments performed in the 1970s by **Gergen** that meanings are always socially situated.

However, the meanings of obedience and disobedience to participants are not included in the study, so the part trust may play in moving the setting from the institution to a less prestigious location is not considered - raising questions about the interpretation of the 'facts' of the results of the experiment.

Evaluating **Milgram's** experiments from the perspective of situating knowledge:

Three improvements on traditional experimentation:

(i) Acknowledgement of the role of social relations in the lab; pays attention of the effect of different settings too.

(ii) Structure of lab relations parallels those in the larger world w.r.t. authority - conferring some ecological validity.

(iii) Supplemented experiment with some qualitative research too - e.g. into how people felt about it.

However:

(i) Statistical analysis means that the 40% of participants who refused to obey have been largely disregarded.

(ii) Meanings that participants made of the experimental situation did not inform the analysis.

(iii) 'Objective' position of the research left no room for reflexivity - so unable to account for his own position in the three-way power relations that were under investigation. Also precludes an ethical stance in identifying with participants' distress.

Social psychometrics - the case of attitude research

Jones - attitude research was an important area for SP by the end of the 1920s and remains so today. Dominated by the use of measurement, rather than experimentation.

Has an applied emphasis, usefulness is defined not by theoretical insight, but by technological efficacy of its methods. As with much quantitative research, methodology has determined theory.

Graumann - techniques used to measure attitudes are less interesting than the certainty each new technique generates to confirm "attitudes can be measured".

Danziger - argues the new technical language of attitude research meant impoverishment c.f. centuries of language use that had built up subtleties of meaning and social behaviour. Concepts like intelligence and attitude were reduced by practitioners to things that could be measured using psychometrics.

Attitude measurement meant the turning of information about this subject into things that can be counted - e.g. on a bipolar **Likert** scale. Different

methodologies could open questions of attitude out, rather than reduce them to a forced choice. Such methodologies would have to attend to what makes us unique, as well as what makes us similar to others - would require case-based methodologies to be used.

But prediction and control do not require such methods - the averaging of information about populations has been much more useful (and so funded) for governments and organisations to make use of for determining policy, marketing options etc. This means research into attitudes is developed in specific directions rather than in others.

Potter and Wetherell used the discursive approach to critique attitude measurement in the mid 1980s.

Argue that attitude research implies when one is expressed, it locates objects of thought on a dimension of judgement. (after **McGuire**). Took an example from **Marsh** (1976) - asked respondents to express on a Likert scale (dimension of judgement) their attitude towards immigrants (object of thought) - completely sympathetic to completely unsympathetic.

Method assumes each respondent is using the same object of thought - if not, results cannot be generalised. **Potter and Wetherell** argue each person's object of thought is different - so a quantitative approach will fail to allow for this and variation in participant's responses.

A statement like "I'm not anti them at all, you know" cannot be fixed on such a scale.

They argue you cannot separate an object of thought from its evaluation - as the speaker constructs their own version of the object.

Power relations in attitude measurement:

Change in the meaning of common words such as attitude or intelligence to an operational definition to allow measurement means that to answer at all, they

have to comply with the notion that such attitudes are fixed and unitary, rather than dynamic and conflictual phenomena.

It fits with the purposes of prediction and control; it also shapes subjectivity.

To date, psychometrics (unlike experimentalism) has been subjected to fewer critiques - but **Hollway** argues like experimental methodology, it has a limiting and distorting effect on images of people.

The power of social psychometrics lies in their usefulness and application, not their theoretical credentials.

Sampling and generalising in different approaches

Position and status of qualitative research in SP raises major theoretical questions, as in the past, quantitative research has been associated with terms such as 'scientific' and 'acceptable'.

Some experimentalists now acknowledge that meaning and experience has a place in understanding behaviour - something previously ignored.

Critique of quantitative methods clarifies when they are / are not appropriate for application.

(Small) sample size is often seen as a problem for qualitative research. However, it is possible to generalise from a small sample - it's just not possible to generalise statistically.

Yule - (British statistician, 1921) - statistical methods are ancillary, not essential. **Danziger** notes the unhealthy reliance of quantitative research of the 'average animal'. Original quantitative research was done on a case by case basis - not aggregated and averaged.

Patton - suggests 'extrapolation' is a better term than 'generalisation' to use for qualitative research.

His idea is that extrapolation can be used to see what findings from individual case studies can be applicable more widely - but care is required to understand the constraints that operate (e.g. location, social position, etc.)

Situating knowledge is therefore a central tenet in qualitative research.