3

Redefining the Contours: A Survey on the New Methods Used in Social Sciences

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Abstract: *The two intellectual and scholarly alignments, one with constructivism, logical induction and theory-building and the other related to positivism was reflected and manifest in two differing cerebral discourses. These intellectual alignments were rooted in different domains of philosophy of science reflected through different research paradigms. The result was a deepening divide between scholars who applied either quantitative or qualitative methods in their studies. In the late 1970s an initiative led to the publication of a Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences further enriching the long struggle and intellectual reticence to mix differing and opposing philosophical flagships. This paper will take this struggle as a context and explore and analyze the emerging methods and the new philosophical breakthrough in social science researching particularly in the context of the study in everyday life.*

Keywords: Turning Points in epistemology, Methods in everyday life, Ethnography, Mixed Research.

Introduction

Research in Sociology has shown very little agreement in expectations from research and on how it can be conducted. There has been a division between what can be called 'scientific' and how science can be achieved alternatively not merely by practicing scientism. Such deliberate and sometimes careful dispositions within the field has led to choices among scholars to choose their methodological positions and also sometimes to create their own. The choices between two positions, quantitative and qualitative, within sociology have been encouraged so far leading to invent new ways of practicing the art in recent times. Such endeavours have led

to enormous and countless different topics and research with a massive emergence of epistemologically differentiated schools of thought and dominant research paradigms. Sociology has witnessed paradigmatic conflicts and contestations. Sometimes there has also been a trend to mix both and invent still further ways of doing it. What emerges is discovering new ways to establish what has been proposed at the beginning of the research on the one hand and also leading to discover new ways of explanations too. This article will revolve around the possible ways of doing a research that various researchers have discovered in order to carry out what they wanted to study. In doing so, this article will focus on micro-situations and the methods that have been employed in recent years barring the popular methods used.

The most popular way to know the everyday through research is to visit the field directly. This way of researching where the researcher completely immerses oneself in the culture of the indigenous people has its roots in anthropology. In sociology it started to be employed in studying one's own culture in its day-to-day setting. Ethnography as the method was called was developed in 1920s and 1930s in Chicago University under the tutelage of Robert Park. Well-known studies of this period included Thrasher's (1927) ethnography of a criminal gang and Thomas and Znaniecki's (1958 [1918–20]) study of Polish immigrants to Chicago. Later it developed as an approach to any study and interprets a way of life found in particular sub-cultures (Bryman, 2008). Thus, we see the potential to explore both the surface-level rituals and routines of a culture and the social order that hinges them, through a deep structure of grammar-like rules (Lévi-Strauss 1963). This interplay between agency and structure was also what inspired Giddens (1984) towards his theory of structuration (Scott, 2009). This may mean researching under cover, or covertly, which always involves the researcher living alongside the people they are studying and participating to a greater or lesser extent in their daily activities. This enables them to develop an insider's view of what is going on in that setting; in terms of the meanings people give to their actions and interactions. Consequently, the ethnographer may claim to be in a stronger position to write about the group than other types of researcher, by virtue of their privileged standpoint; ethnographic writing is often regarded as being high in face validity (Bryman 2008) because it is full of 'authentic' illustrations and descriptions.

The ethnography as a methodological standpoint often employed different methods such as participant observation, covert research, in-depth interviews, semi or unstructured interviews. The approach lends itself well

to phenomenology, by providing an insight into the subjective realities, or *lifeworlds* (Schütz 1972), of individuals. It is important to consider not only the manifest content of these – the concepts and categories people use – but also the motivations behind them. Another innovative source of information about everyday life is visual data that include photographs; drawings, diagrams and illustrations; computerized graphics; and so on. Researchers may also be interested in collecting artwork, commodities and other items of 'material culture' (Mukerji 2002; cf. Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]). Using such alternative methods can help to elucidate features of a culture or group that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or reveal different perspectives on a problem. In Cultural Studies, visual data are often explored critically as texts through which dominant values and ideologies are said to be transmitted. For example, the advertisements pasted on buses can be read critically as embodying themes of consumer capitalism: they represent the colonization of urban spaces by market forces. Visual data can also be used to put a new spin on the traditional method of ethnography. Sarah Pink (2001) describes how social researchers can conduct a visual ethnography, using photographs, video recordings and online imagery rather than the more conventional techniques of interviews and observations written up after the event. She distinguishes between two ways of reading visual data: the 'realist' assumption that they authentically portray social reality, and the 'reflexive' approach, which recognizes the researcher's role in placing an interpretive theoretical framework upon the data. This corresponds to Scott's (1990) distinction between extant, naturalistic and demystifying photographs, and to the challenges posed by the narrative turn. Subsequently, the feminist, the postmodern turns have also influenced choices of methods in Qualitative studies and in the researches on everyday life.

Autoethnography is another method in recent use is a variant of evolution of ethnographic research. It is a convergence of autobiography and ethnography where the author situates her/him at the center of observing unit. It is an autobiographic narrative where the researcher and the observed speak about the acts of social transgression. In doing so the researcher tells a story which becomes a transgressive act revealing what has been kept hidden, or speaking of what has been silenced. It is a form of critique and resistance that can be found in diverse sources like fiction, memoir, texts etc. auto ethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one's position as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their construction of self and their interaction of others within socio-historical contexts. The researcher becomes an active agent

with narrative authority over hegemonic dominant cultural myths that restrict social freedom and personal development (Ellis and Bochner 1996; Goodall, 1998; Spry 2001). The reader of an autoethnography should be critical. Godall argues that a good autoethography completely dissolves the idea of social distance, cannot be generalized upon, is self-reflexive and richly vulnerable.

New methods of data collection

In 1993 Carol Gilligan started a method of psychological analysis known as *The Listening Guide* where she emphasized on identity and moral development. In this method the researcher listens to a person's distinct and multilayered voice recorded during an interview. The researcher engages with unique subjectivity of each research participant. The basic question in this research is who is listening to whom, telling what stories about relationship in what social context. Each time a researcher is exposed to such voices, each step is called 'listening' because listening requires active participation of both the teller and the listener. The first stages of listening are prescribed but later on the listening is shaped by the particular question the researcher seeks to answer (know) from the interview. Each listening is marked and documented through notes and interpretative summaries. The reason for a series of listening is arrived at from the assumption that the psyche, like the voice is polyphonic so that simultaneous voices are co-occurring. For example, in the research Gilligan shows multiple listening exposed her to a "happy voice" of the mother at first but later "a little worried voice". Each listening amplifies another aspect of one's voice. In the first listening the researcher listens to the plot and the listener's response to the interview. The question asked is, what is happening? Or, what stories are being told? In the second listening the focus is on the voice of the "I". The purpose of this step is to listen to the first-person narrative and also listen to how the person speaks about him or her. In the next step the researcher listens to the polyphonic voices and brings the analysis back into the relationship with the research question. It offers a way of hearing and developing an understanding of several different layers of a person's expressed experience as it bears on the question posed. It means the researcher's questions shape this listening which may be based on the theoretical framework guiding the research or the questions raised by the previous listening or both. *The Listening Guide* method is a way of analyzing qualitative interviews that is best when one's question requires listening to particular aspects of a person's expressions of her or his own complex and

multilayered individual experiences and relational cultural contexts within which they offer (Gilligan 1993).

Friendship is also considered a source and a method of data collection now. In *Friendship Matters* in 1992 William K. Rawlins defined friendship and used the interpersonal bonds developed with his friend David Holland in ongoing communicative management of the dialectical tensions, characterized by binaries such as idealization and realization, affection and instrumentality and judgments and acceptance. Rawlins claimed that friendship occupies a marginal position within the matrix of interpersonal relations where no normative assumptions and prerogatives are recognized. The analysis of friendship ties and a source of data are based on principles of interpretivism, hermeneutics and verstehen. In addition to these the feminist tradition of political commitment to consciousness raising, empowerment and social change are also used to focus on intersecting power relations. In 1994, Michelle Fine has also used friendship as a method to understand relational truths where the dividing line between the researcher and the researched (Fine calls it hyphens) is blur. To record the data gathering process the researcher needs to engage with a community (Cherry 1996 had used this method to study an account of people living with AIDS), use the natural rhythm and context of friendship (Rawlins 1992).

NizaYanay and NitzaBerkovitch (2005) have used personal electronic correspondence as a reflexive strategy to explore ideas, theories and personal commitments. Their aim was to problematize experience, telling of their "stories" as a personal response to the construction of knowledge in place of theory. They used a form of dialogue to understand their own positioning of experiences as well as create, negotiate and understanding relations between ideas and emotions regarding sexuality, gender, desire and fantasy (Yanay and Berkovitch 2005). Their work combined three different genres: symposium, writing letters and formal analysis attempting an amalgamation of spontaneity, immediacy of speaking, intimacy of writing letters and rigour of scholarship.

Lauri L. Hyers, Janet K. Swim and Robyn K. Mallet used daily diary to understand experiences with everyday forms of discrimination (2001, 2005 and 2006) like sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, minority and majority group prejudice and sizeism. Diaries of respondents revealed the different sorts of prejudice hey experienced in their everydays while interacting with friends, family and acquaintances. In their study women were asked to keep diaries for a week to keep record of their stress. The women who participated in research were called collaborators instead of participants

where their assigned role was not to perform but be observed only to the researcher-observer. Ordinary experiences thoughts and emotions, the essential components of daily life were recorded and it opened up the possibility of access to information about people's lives (Swim, Hyers, and Cohen 2001: 31-53; Mallet and 2005).

Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) have shown the importance of combining different methods and specific research designs for meeting research goals. For example, Campell and his colleagues (1959, 1966) have shown how the results of two or more studies can be combined, demonstrating that the results of each study cannot be trusted due to invalidity associated with a particular method. Triangulation as the method of combination, convergence or confirmation was called was based on the arguments of Webb et al. (1966). Currently, in more recent research there is an increasing decline in interest in such combination of results mainly because results fail to converge. In seeking alternative to convergence, one is combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This is an effort to integrate the contemporary strength of different methods through division of labour. The division of labour is achieved through a pair of decisions: priority decision and sequence decision. Both the strategies of assigning priority to one method and sequencing the two methods (priority and complementary method) are part of the research design. The strategy is to select one method as the principal means of data collection and a complementary method. The aim of the complementary method is to assist the principal method. This division of labour can either be qualitative or quantitative. The complementary method is then selected on the basis of what can assist the principal means of data collection. The second step is to select a contrasting complementary method that offers a set of strengths that add to the research design's overall ability to meet the research's aims. The sequence decision involves the order in which the qualitative and quantitative data can be used. Here too the researcher wants to maximize the value of the research. Here the researcher selects a second option to follow-up the principal method used. Recent studies with such combination designs combine and create teams that combine expertise. For a team-based work there can be clear expectations about what each piece of work consists and why is it done. A different approach to integrating is mixed-method research. Rather than transgressing borders mixed-method research requires new set of skills related to coordinating combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods.

In the second edition of the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* published in 1998 the editors A. Tashakkori and C. Teddie dwelt with how mixed research can be an alternative to the continuous struggle between quantitative and qualitative studies. If the first edition was focused on gathering a community of scholars to engage in discussions over the advantages of using a mixed method paradigm, the second edition was zeroed on creating connections between rich and incongruent conceptualizations. It also focussed on a perceptible shift from describing mixed methods and its legitimacy for systematic discussion of an integrated field with clear methodological ideas and advances for a guidance to the second-generation scholars. The editors believe that mixed methods research help in everyday problem solving. As such methodological position help in humanistic conceptualization of the research process thus rubbishing issues that are incompatible and irrelevant from a humane perspective. Jennifer Greene (2002) has rightly shown that mixed method evaluates by using diverse ways of knowing and thus it provides a better understanding and evaluation of differences both constitutive and generative. Even so, mixed method engages with challenges of human diversity and respects human differences inviting democratization into the process of research. Greene (2005) contends that mixed method research can aim to know something better by bringing multiple ways of knowing one phenomenon at the same time respecting multiple diverse ways of knowing. Boyte (2000: 3) also makes the similar argument. To him, traditional monolithic ways of knowing emphasize detached, rational observer and in this way, it celebrates the scientifically educated expert as the initiator of all kind of information and marginalizing the amateur. He propels the idea that a far more civic craft is needed to witness democratic renewal of contemporary times. The reason for giving credit to mixed method research in the context of research on micro contexts is that first, the researcher positions him/her in the context of the research and tries to look at the scenario through his/her behaviour. Once done, the researcher has to articulate the questions that will drive the project. These research questions will focus and extend the specific research activities that will be undertaken. In developing these questions, the researcher becomes aware of the contextual environment within which the research will occur. Any social phenomenon is complex in the way that in order to understand it the researcher has to be interested not only on what has happened but also on how or why it has happened. The multidimensionality of a social phenomenon is the reason for a mixed method paradigm in research on every day. Second, once the problem has been identified, the researcher on every day scans

the environment for possible actions that might be relevant to those issues in the specific context. Here the researcher must go horizontal seeking the widest variety of intervention that might address the issue. Third the researcher should consider the most diverse arrangement of methodological tools available to answer those questions though a process called 'methodological eclecticism'. Fourth, the researcher now goes vertical by selecting those actions most likely to be effective in addressing identical issues. Sternberg et al (2000) conceptualizes this step as 'carefully fitting strategies to specific demands of a problem and modifying these strategies in response to the problem' (p. 54). When a researcher goes vertical by selecting best methods available, Teddie and Tashakkori refer to it as 'methodological connoisseur' (2010: 8). As a final step the mixed method researcher goes deeper into the understanding of issues s/he faces within the context of their work. That is, s/he should understand that their work is limited by time and space.

Conclusion

The first step in studying the micro every day context is to *defamiliarize* the familiar. It means the researcher has to ask questions on how, when and why the setting seems 'naturally given'. The second step is to look for underlying rules that govern the 'familiar', natural, taken for granted setting. This means delving deep under the surface of events. Here the researcher needs to learn that the actors involved have been instrumental in creating the 'naturalness' of the social phenomenon by repetition. Therefore, the researcher has to question how this was done and who helped in such creations. Third by asking who made the rules or how they were formed the researcher has to ask what happens if they were broken? The deviant helps us to study the conformist or sometimes a rule becomes visible only after it is broken. Such is the ordinariness (*taken for grantedness*) of social norms. The classical theorist Durkheim (1893) argued that deviance was actually functional for society, in that it unites 'us' against 'them' and reinforces 'our' adherence to a common set of values (1984 [1893]). By identifying the rule-breaker as a deviant individual, the behavior is safely contained and disassociated from the group, which becomes more cohesive. Finally, challenges refer to the instances of norm-breaking outlined above: the 'exceptions that prove the rule' and that elucidate the values of a group. These rule-breaking acts and the reactions they evoke will help us to understand who is seen as deviant or conformist, which values are important and how they are sustained. The three themes: social order, structures and

underlying rules; interactive rituals and routines; and challenges to the taken for granted helps us to identify the ways of studying the everyday context. Put together, these help us to see how we can make sense of our everyday lives, and why it is important to do so. Traditional forms of data gathering such as quantitative interview at one point of time may not provide a researcher with insights into the understanding of nuanced experiences of life. Instead a multidimensional methods approach that crosses traditional disciplinary borders by using methods other than conventional ones may help researchers to get the subjugated experience (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

What we have learned from the above is that there is no rule in picking methods of data collection. Methods are flexible and fluid. Platt (1996) have argued that the history of American sociological research has shown that there was a shift in use of research methods from 1920s marking a flow of a new direction in the history of research methods (p.1). Sometimes the researchers do not like to come out of their comfort zones of known methods. But crossing boundaries sometimes help in realizing how important it is to reflect on their position within the research process. This is precisely what it means to work between disciplines, sometimes bridging the quantitative and qualitative divide.

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