Reflexive Methodology

M96MC
Introducing Reflexivity

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-rKWykVecJ4
The Matrix – Discussion Points

- You know something but what you know you can’t explain? Do you feel like this about your research?
- What is the Matrix? (Everywhere, all around us)
- What is the truth? No one can be told; you have to see it? (feel it?)
- Blue Pill vs Red pill – which would you take?
Today’s Lecture:

- Look at the use of reflexivity in theory and practice
- Identify its relevance to new forms of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences
- Critically reflect on its implications
- Understanding the importance of double reflexivity
Outcomes:

- By the end of today’s session, you should be able to:
  - Think about the importance of reflexivity for your own narratives of becoming researchers
  - Engage in reflexive practice as part of your projects
  - Understand the relevance of reflexivity for the broader research agenda in CCM
Reflexive Theory – or Whatever Happened to the Truth?
History of Reflexivity

- Traditional science has assumed that knowledge is objective – independent from people who created it

- Gradual acceptance that researcher is part of their research, but not explored – ‘bias’ can be managed and eliminated

- Massive pendulum swing in the 1980s – tied to new theory and ‘crisis of representation’
What is reflexivity?

Knowledge cannot be separated from the knower (Seedman 1991)

We produce knowledge about the word, but we also live in it – we are the ones ‘writing culture’

‘The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory…therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory’ (Gramsci 1975 in Said, 1978)
Reflexivity

Part and parcel of setting (Altheide and Johnson 1998:285)

Issues about how our socio-historical contexts shape understandings and interests.

Reflecting on shaping – minimising and acknowledge influence.

Need to understand the consequences of research

Reflexivity = key aspect of ethnography allowing the free flow of integrity and meanings that are present in social interactions (Coffey, 1999), Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, O’Reilly, 2005)
Reflexivity

- Reflexivity and process of writing-up – bound together
- Reflexivity and interpretation – bound together

(Brewer 2000:126)

- Meaning bound in these processes – need for reflexivity
- Reflecting on social processes

‘Reflexivity thus acts as a bridge between interpretation and the process by which it is conveyed in text’ (Brewer 2000:127)
Pierre Bourdieu – Reflexivity

- Increases scope and solidarity – more issues tackled in analysis?
- Requirement and shapes sociological research
- Important to destabilise bias

- 3 example's of bias (Bourdieu (1992:39):
  1. Who the researcher is
  2. Researchers position (academic field)
  3. Intellectual bias
‘The relationship between distance and reflexivity is a difficult one as reflexivity suggests that you are merely trying to claim back a bit of distance, when in fact you are trying to make personal feelings and emotions, alongside the field be seen as credible and legitimate’ (Commane 2011: 122)
Reflexive Turn

- Social world = reflexive ‘nature’
- Understanding the effects of the researcher (never can be eliminated)
- Anti-realism and postmodernism – reinforcing the turn

‘The upshot now is that we are encouraged to be reflexive in our account of the research process, the data collected and the way we write up, because reflexivity shows the partial nature of our representation of reality and the multiplicity of competing versions of reality’ (Brewer 2000: 129)
The New Reflexivity and the Crisis of Representation

New reflexivity – awareness of prejudices / subjective influence

New reflexivity – researcher engagement with researched, ‘to produce a text has to to be accounted for through the sensitivity of the research relationship, understood as the emotional context’ (Blackman and Commane, 2011:244)
Crisis of Representation

- The crisis of representation is a body of thought interested in representational practice in research.

- When we do research, we represent it – it is only ever an interpretation.

- Research become political activity and reality or truth is fiction.
Crisis of Representation

‘We assert that a weakness of the crisis of representation argument is that ethnographic accounts impose unity on research subjects is not borne out of our studies because both during fieldwork and textual construction we struggled with a fragile connectivity where research subjects constantly required human reparation. Through fieldwork intimacies our approach of taking on many different roles and statuses toward research subjects was characterised by friendship on the basis of gathering joint memories. When the research subjects told stories the ethnographer was part of the telling, or sometimes participants cited the field diary or interviews as a source of legitimacy.’ (Blackman and Commane 2011:242)
The Political Spheres of Research

Research has different functions:

- Research as social function - policy making and preserving normativity
- Research as challenging status quo

‘...even where the truth of our beliefs is the main issue, in practical activities judgment of factual and value claims are more or less reliable will be based on somewhat different considerations than in research directed towards producing knowledge: we will probably be concerned above all with whether the information is sufficiently reliable for our current purposes’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:20-21)

- Researchers goal should always be the production of knowledge
- Reducing distortion of findings = imperative

Whose side are you on??
Becoming reflexive

Becoming a reflexive researcher is about reflecting on your position in the research process.

It means thinking about yourself as a person located in society, history, culture...

And it means writing yourself into your own research process.
Research Objectivity

- Becoming reflexive combines objectivity
- Immersion in the field must be ‘accompanied by a critical, analytical, self-conscious awareness’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:32)
- Throughout research process
- Reducing presuppositions
- Open to emergent themes
‘Science was to perform the ‘God trick’: of speaking authoritatively about everything in the world from no particular social location or human perspective at all’ (Haraway 1990)

where do we see the world from?
Questioning objectivity means that we also have to question our own subjectivity.

We need to locate ourselves and understand our place in the world:

- Who am I and why am I interested?
- What kinds of knowledge can I create on the basis of this?
Activity 1:

Think about your own research projects

- Why are you interested?
- What kinds of knowledge could you produce?
- Who is this knowledge for?
- Purpose?
- How could it be used by other people?
Who can research who?

- Second Wave feminism criticized for producing white middle class knowledge

- Authority of white feminist work as ‘non-ethnic theory’ and black feminist work as ‘black experience’ (Hooks 1992)
'It's not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection (Paolo Freire)
What does it mean?

- Makes the researcher active, rather than framing them as a neutral bystander
- Means recognizing errors, vulnerability and conceptual baggage – but not to overcome ‘bias’ (needs to be unpacked etc?)
- It involves the researcher turning the lens of the research in on themselves, as is done in the media…
Researcher Reflexivity

- Been very important in media, and particularly in forms of documentary film making (and digital storytelling!!)
- However, for researchers, there are very few guidelines to practicing reflexivity
Activity 2: Why is Researcher Reflexivity Important?

In small groups note down 5 reasons why reflecting on yourself, your research and your research practice (etc) is important.
Confessional (or 1st Person)

The confessional is an account of how we relate to the research and how it effects us in our own lives.

Takes the form of notes to the self on how a situation or research moment felt.

‘I really believe this or that which is why I started the research,’ ‘I felt this or that very powerfully while I was carrying out the research’ (Parker 2005)
Why might this be very problematic to use as ‘data’?
Position(al?) (2nd Person)

- Attempt to address another and explain how subjectivity has come in a social world which is gendered, classed, raced etc
- Interested in how your identity is created through structures of inequality shaped by history
Activity 3:

- Who are you? Draw a picture of yourself (it doesn’t need to represent ‘reality’)
- Label your picture with what makes you ‘you’
- Reflection in pairs:
  - What does your position bring to your research?
  - Who can you speak legitimately for? (common connections?)
Limitations

- ‘It can ‘relapse into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power’ (Butler 1990)

- ‘We do not escape from the consequences of our own positions by talking about them endlessly’ (Patai 1994:70)
Praxis (3rd Person)

- Living through the crisis of representation by treating the researcher as something to be analyzed in and of themselves
- Using the research process to trouble the very claims to represent
- Means using reflexivity as a whole approach to doing research
Limitations

- Difficult to do well
- Vanity ethnography
Reflexivity in the Field
Reflexivity and the Field

MacRae (2007) – need to understand initial subjective position

Must be present throughout the research process

Understanding various roles in the field but also continually recognising place / purpose in the field

Working through emotions and closeness – objectivity?
‘Ethnographic research and the approach to the field are personal and human. Although emotions are valid forms of knowledge there still needs to be reflexivity and scope so that other themes can appear without being clouded by sadness or fond memories. As there are many ways to feel, there are a variety of ways to understand and approach analysis and critique. Introspection is therefore needed into how humans relate to each other and the causal factors which make people feel a certain way’ (Commame 2012:123)
Reflexivity and Write-up
‘Double Reflexivity’

- Developing Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology
- DR = Two defining moments (fieldwork; write-up)
- DR = Facilitated by / through friendships

‘Fieldwork is where reflexivity in a practical sense begins, because researchers are engaged in negotiation and entry into the field. This necessitates close communication with human subjects as the ethnographer makes decisions in action and manages expectations within field relations’ (Blackman and Commane 2011:241)
‘Double Reflexivity’ - Blackman and Commane

- Two defining moments of reflexivity – fieldwork and representation (in text)
- Intimate relationship of double reflexivity – true to original feelings v’s distance

‘When the ethnographer is writing the researched and structuring their cultural and social world into a text it is a political and ethical action’ (Blackman and Commane 2011:242)

- More realistic accounts put forward – response to pomo / crisis of representation

‘Through participatory and exchange-based interactions the shared experience is woven into the social life of the research method’ (Blackman and Commane 2011:245)
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