

MY410: Seminar Week 3

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WK2 seminar refresher

- ▶ Mason's categories provide a useful starting point, but they are not mutually exclusive. Certainly it is not the only typology available out there.
- ▶ A research project can address one or more of the following questions – for instance,
 - How and why does X happen? Under what conditions will we see X?
 - Do these conditions “cause” X?
 - How and why do these different conditions lead to X?
 - Why does X happen in some places but not others? Why does X happen in some years but not others?
- ▶ Note that we never intend to match these RQs to any specific methods.

WK3 lecture takeaway

- ▶ There is not one “best” method – yes, but why?
- ▶ There should always be clear **congruence** between theory, question, and method.
- ▶ Evaluating this fit is a fundamental part of being a **critical reader**.
- ▶ Ensuring that your work has such fit is essential to producing **valuable and valid** social science.

Warm-up: Sumner & Tribe (2004)

- ▶ Let's break into pairs to review different sections of the article.
- ▶ Focus on the following tasks/questions:
 - What is epistemology? According to the authors, how many epistemological positions are common in international development studies?
 - What are the “problems” in development?
 - The authors discuss descriptive, interpretative, explanatory research – what does each of them do?
 - What do the authors mean by “rigor?” Why is it in scare-quotes?

Epistemology in intl development studies

	<i>A positivist approach</i>	<i>A constructivist approach</i>
What is 'reality'?	A definable 'reality' or 'truth' exists and is observable	There is no 'reality' or 'truth' beyond our experiences
What is the goal of academic enquiry?	Acquisition of the 'truth'	A more informed construction of the world
How are the researcher and the 'researched' related?	The researcher is independent of the 'researched'	The researcher is not independent of the 'researched'
What should be the role for values?	None - objectivity sought	Part of 'reality' - subjectivity celebrated
What kind of approach?	Predominantly based on observability or measurability and with the aim of seeking 'evidence'	Predominantly based on discourse and meaning with the aim of seeking a more informed understanding of the world
What kind of data is preferred?	Predominantly quantitative	Traditionally associated with a predominantly qualitative approach
Examples of such studies in Development Studies	Dollar and Kraay (2002) <i>Growth is Good for the Poor</i>	Narayan <i>et al.</i> , (2002) <i>Voices of the Poor</i>

Epistemology in intl development studies

Lack of income and assets

If you have a job at all now, you're overworked and underpaid.

—Young woman from Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

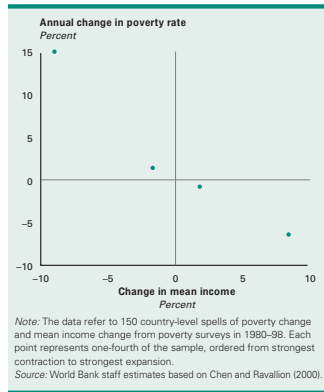
Some have land, but they can't buy fertilizer; if some work as weavers, they aren't well paid; if some work for daily wages, they aren't paid a just wage.

—Cackchiquel Indian, Guatemala

Poor people consistently emphasize the centrality of work to improving their lives. A country's overall wealth is an important influence on this: as countries grow richer, so on average do poor people in those countries,

Figure 2.1

Poverty shows a strong link with economic contractions and expansions



Epistemology in intl development studies

“Is development studies an objective, natural science-like search for one ‘truth’ or is it a subjective, constructivist search for many ‘truths’, or is it perhaps both?” (Sumner & Tribe, 2004)

Epistemology in intl development studies

“Is development studies an objective, natural science-like search for one ‘truth’ or is it a subjective, constructivist search for many ‘truths’, or is it perhaps both?” (Sumner & Tribe, 2004)

And yet, given that the authors say that “*across every conceivable fault-line the two approaches (i.e., positivism and constructivism) sit diametrically opposed,*” how can the answer possibly be *both*?

Epistemology in intl development studies

	Economics	Politics	Sociology	Social Anthropology
What is reality?	One reality exists; reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts; what is observable is real	One reality exists. Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts	One reality exists; Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts, but much of reality is unobservable	There are <i>different</i> realities associated with different standpoints and cultures
Goal of enquiry?	Acquisition of a <i>single</i> truth -- a universal, general law	We can establish truths or <i>generalizations</i> about human beings	Truth needs to be understood in terms of <i>practical adequacy</i>	<i>Interpretation</i> of local meanings; there is <i>no universal truth</i>
How are the researcher (you) and the "researched" related?	The researcher is <i>objective</i> and is <i>independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"



Sumner, A, and M Tribe. 2008. *International Development Studies*. London: Sage, p.72.

Exercise: RQ and Design

- ▶ Let's break into small groups and/or pairs again.
- ▶ Take a problem in development (e.g., poverty, inequality, corruption, violence/conflict, etc.).
- ▶ Come up with a research question.
 - Mason (2002): Developmental, mechanical, causal/predictive, and/or comparative?
 - Sumner & Tribe (2004): Descriptive, explanatory, and/or interpretative? Causes of effects and/or effects of causes? Positivist and/or constructivist?
- ▶ Given your question, what will be the associated design? And what is a possible misaligned design?

Exercise: RQ and Design

- ▶ What are the “question” words you are using (e.g, what? why? how? does?)
- ▶ Additional issues associated with various questions and designs. Limitations? Trade-offs? Feasibility?
- ▶ How do you ensure **rigor** in your project? Clarity, alignment, and a thoughtful reflection on any potential sources of bias.