

Reviewing & Critiquing the Methods & Strategy of an Existing Research Project

ENVS441 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS: Assignment 1

P.I. Prescott (201442927)

Structure



INTRODUCING
THE RESEARCH
PROJECT



REVIEWING ITS
METHODS &
STRATEGY



DESCRIBING ITS
FINDINGS



CRITIQUE &
COMMENTS



FURTHER
QUESTIONS...



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Secular values and the location of religion: A spatial analysis of an English medical centre

Kim Knott*, Myfanwy Franks

School of Humanities, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

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Abstract

What do contemporary controversies in healthcare reveal about secular values and the location of religion within an English medical centre? Using a socio-spatial methodology designed to break open ideological perspectives and normative values, we analyse the doctor–patient relationship, complementary and alternative medicine, and an issue that bridges the two, evidence-based medicine. In the physical, social and mental spaces of the medical centre we uncover the traces of religious activity and roles, and of alternative therapeutic regimes often informed by spiritual or religious systems. Furthermore, we disclose the heterogeneity of values that comprise the secular worldview of one group of contemporary general practitioners.

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Keywords: Spatial methodology; Religion; Secular values; Doctor–patient relationship; Complementary and alternative medicine; Evidence-based medicine

The Authors

Kim Knott



Myfanwy Franks



Approach & Aims

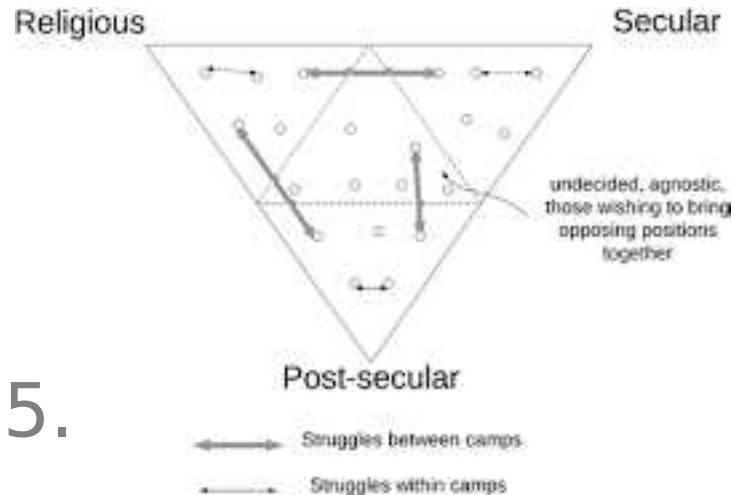
- ▶ “Our approach is broadly inductive... Nevertheless our work is contextualized by a perspective on religious/secular relations outlined by Knott (2005) which argues that, in the modern West, the religious and the secular are... a binary constitutive of modernity” (p.1)
- ▶ “our principal aim is to...look at what constitutes the secular... and to consider in what ways [its values] are informed by religion, particularly western Christianity but also other religious traditions...” (p.3)
- ▶ “our aim was not primarily a study of contemporary healthcare or general practice but the application of a spatial methodology to secular discourse and values, [so] we selected only one medical centre...” (p.4)

Spatial Methodology

- ▶ “This particular approach [ie. Knott’s *Spatial Methodology*] is not a set of practical methods, but an analytical process applied once data has been collected.” (p.5)
- ▶ “It is particularly suited to examining places as sites of contestation” (p.5)

The Religious/Secular Field, and its Force Relationships

Knott (2005): 125.



The Research Process

- ▶ “Our ethnographic process entailed spending time in the waiting room, observing the various physical and social spaces, taking field notes, and interviewing practitioners in their habitats. No patients were interviewed for ethical reasons.” (p.4)
- ▶ “Attention was paid to the nature of the medical centre as a place with history and context... and these sometimes generated questions and discussion points at interview.” (p.4)
- ▶ “[Then] we reviewed the data for cases of controversy and debate” (p.4)

Findings of the Research (1)

“To what extent has religion been unearthed in this study?

We have recognised its normative and genealogical relationship to modern medicine (Parsons, Foucault), witnessed traces of it in the physical and social spaces of the medical centre, and have noted its parallel geographical and ideological presence. We have seen it used metaphorically within a secular controversy to parody those with an extreme position. Because it was not referred to directly at interview, we have sensed rather than examined its location at the heart of some alternative therapies...

How one assesses the relationship between these secular values and those of contemporary religions or their forebears depends on the way one understands both the dynamic relationship between religion and the world and the process of secularisation.”

Findings of the Research (2)

Two particular locations of interest with regards to *a spatial analysis of religion* were unearthed:

1. The Doctor-Patient Relationship

- a. Social: “informed by gender, class, age and other variables” (p.22)
- b. Physical: “large waiting room... resembles meditative, monastic space” (p.11);
“chairs of similar size... [suggest] discourses of equality and co-agency” (p.12)
- c. Mental: “it comprised a complex configuration of interwoven gazes, many of which have invaded the relationship as a result of recent government policy, contractual change, professional surveillance, scientific testing and technological innovation” (p.22).

2. Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Concluding Critique: Putting Knott & Bruce in Conversation

Knott & Franks: *“Schools, medical centres and hospitals are... precisely the types of disenchanted public institutions from which, according to theorists of secularization such as... **Bruce**, religion is said to have retreated in terms of its social and political significance? But is this really the case?” (p.2)*

Increasing Secularism?

Knott & Franks: *“How one assesses the relationship between these secular values and those of contemporary religions or their forebears depends on the way one understands both the dynamic relationship between religion and the world and the process of secularisation.”*

Bruce (2018:13): *“We might haggle over every step in the process, but... [p]rovided we agree that there is a single real world out there, we should be able to test propositions about it.”*



Steve Bruce
Professor of
Sociology, University
of Aberdeen



Concluding Critique: Putting Knott & Bruce in Conversation



Substantive Conclusions

Bruce: “While detailed ethnographies have enormous value in helping us get ‘inside’ religious belief and behavior, they are severely limited by problems of scale and representativeness in their value for generating and testing explanations” (Bruce 2018: 34).

Knott & Franks: “As we had no comparative ambitions, and our aim was not primarily a study of contemporary healthcare or general practice but the application of a spatial methodology to secular discourse and values, we selected only one medical centre. We are aware that we would have learnt other things, witnessed different controversies, and encountered other spaces if our choice of medical centre had differed.” (p.4)

Defining Religion

Bruce: “...the serious study of any phenomenon requires that we know what we are to study... but students of religion make rather heavy weather of identifying their business”. (Bruce 2018:39)

Knott: “Settling for a conventional, substantive definition [of religion] would be straightforward, but also counter-productive given that my interest lay in looking at non-religious places”. (Knott 2005: 230).

Ethics

Knott & Franks: “No patients were interviewed for ethical reasons”. (p.4)

Bruce: “...the possibility of such research causing serious harm is so remote it need not much concern us.” (Bruce 2018:129)

Summary

- ▶ Introduced the paper and its authors.
- ▶ Discussed its approach and aims, its *spatial methodology*, and its research process.
- ▶ Reviewed its research findings
- ▶ Critiqued some aspects of Knott & Franks' approach, by developing the contrast already made with the work of Bruce.

Any Questions?



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