

THEORY CONSTRUCTION 2018-2019 INSTRUCTIONS ASSIGNMENT 3

DATES

- Explanation in class: 4 December 2018
- Deadline submission: 23 December 2018

LEARNING GOALS

In lectures six to nine we discussed a number of fundamental issues in post-positivist and interpretive theorizing. In this assignment you will apply these issues to your own social phenomenon, thereby deepening your knowledge of one of the two approaches. The main goal is for you to demonstrate that you can insightfully reflect about the pitfalls and opportunities of a research project before conducting it.

INSTRUCTION

You briefly describe your social phenomenon and choose between either a (deductive) postpositivist or an (abductive) interpretive approach. Make use of academic articles, books or book chapters to make your reflections more concrete and convincing. We recommend you to use at least three sources.

Use your phenomenon that you study, write the assignment:

A. If you choose for the post-positivist approach, follow a two-step approach:

1. Description

- Define the key concepts in your research question by using the academic or policy-based literature.
- Engage in instantiation (see Jaccard & Jacoby) by turning your abstract concept(s) into a series of dimensions and indicators (similar to the example of “Stigma” in the course).
- Discuss the validity and reliability of your indicators. This includes a reflection on potential bias.
- Where relevant, reflect about a particular typology you might use, adapt or develop from your data analysis. A. If you choose for the post-positivist approach, follow a two-step approach:

1. Description

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- Engage in instantiation (see Jaccard & Jacoby) by turning your abstract concept(s) into a series of dimensions and indicators (similar to the example of “Stigma” in the course).
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2. Causal explanations

- In the previous assignment you have developed a research question and several hypotheses. In this assignment you further develop your model by making it more detailed, including different types of causal relationships (mediating, moderating, bidirectional, turning direct into indirect relationships,...). Describe each of the steps you take when developing your model (see Jaccard & Jacoby).
- Support your decisions on whether or not to include particular variables by drawing on the academic literature on your phenomenon. You do not need to provide a comprehensive literature review, but you have to show how your research question, hypotheses and model emerges from these references. Support your hypotheses, and indicate how you support them (i.e. from below, above or laterally, see Elster). Explain why you think these different variables (may not) play a role. Be explicit about the causal mechanisms that you assume to be at work (see Jaccard & Jacoby’s example of the influence an adolescent’s relationship with his/her mother has on drug use).
- When outlining your model, make sure you use the correct visual representation forms as indicated in the course and the reader (Jaccard & Jacoby). These include, among other things: straight arrows for causal relations and curving two-way arrows for correlations.
- Identify any causal attribution errors that lay people might tend to make. You can use media reports, anecdotes or hypothetical errors.
- Explain how your model helps to explain a social phenomenon. Be explicit: what is the variance it addresses? For which other variables do you need to control?

B. If you choose the interpretive approach.

This assignment is an exercise in reflexivity. You will write a research plan, in which you reflect about potential pitfalls and opportunities. Substantiate how you will deal with these issues by drawing on the literature throughout your assignment. There are two types of literature we recommend you to draw upon:

- Literature that deals explicitly with qualitative research methods and try to relate this to your phenomenon. You can have a look at: a) journals like *Qualitative Inquiry* and *International Journal for Qualitative Methods*; b) more specialized journals like *Cultural Sociology* and *Journal of Refugee Studies*; and c) you can consult readers on methods.

- Literature that is related to your research topic (e.g. if your topic is refugees' experience, look for interpretive research articles on refugees' experience, or those of immigrants or newcomers more generally).

In this assignment you will reflect upon:

- Entering the field. Describe where, when and how will you look for relevant. How, when and where will you approach respondents? How will you try to acquire formal and social access? How will you develop a trust relationship with your participants?

- Researcher positionality and researcher roles. Reflect on the potential power relations that might emerge between you and your respondents. What impact might your personal (demographic and social) background and characteristics have on your relationship with correspondents? What may be your impact on the field (e.g. changing interactions, actual consequences for the people you conduct your research with)? How does the research design (not) fit with your personal competences. Be honest about your weaknesses and how you can (not) address them.

- Concepts. Which existing concepts might you use as sensitizing concepts? If you have prior knowledge of your phenomenon, try to think about emic (experience-near) concepts that might emerge from words or expressions your respondents already use in daily conversations.

- How will you keep notes? Where and when? Will this have an impact on your observations? Choosing along the continuum of participation and observation?

- Building up evidence. What different types of data do you think will be relevant for your research (which subject, objects, places, times, practices,

conversations,...)? How are you going to expose yourself to those data? How do these elements relate to your phenomenon? Most importantly, reflect about how you will look for common perspectives across a variety of sources.

- Explaining: where will you look for explanations? Which individual intentions and contextual explanations might emerge?

SUBMISSION

Submit your assignment on the deadline (**23rd of December 2019**) in electronic format, via email 73198435@fsv.cuni.cz

The intended length of the assignment is 2000 to 2500 words. It is graded out of 15 and **Late submissions** receive a reduction of 2 out of 15, repeated for every extra week of delay.

But, as always: quality above quantity.

Make sure your name, course title and the title of the assignment are clearly visible on the first page.

If you do not succeed in submitting the assignment before the deadline, give me a heads up by email and try to submit as soon as possible.

EVALUATION

While grading this assignment, I take into consideration the following criteria:

- Correct use of relevant concepts & theories introduced during class and in the reader.
- Degree in which you demonstrate understanding of differences and similarities of the various research goals and approaches.
- The research questions and how well they fit the corresponding approach.
- Formal requirements (e.g., use of scientific language, respecting the deadline, etc.).

FEEDBACK

I will provide individual feedback for each one of you and send it back by email. If you have any questions to clarify the assignment, you can contact me through email. After you receive your assignment, if you have any comments or questions you can ask me either after lecture or by email.

