



CONCEPTS, CONCEPTUALISATION & OPERATIONALISATION

DR. SYED OWAIS
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR

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CHAPTER CONTENTS

- 4.1 Meaning and Functions of Concept
- 4.2 Conceptualization (and Re-conceptualization)
- 4.3 Operationalization
- 4.4 Reliability and Validity [A separate series of Lectures!]

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LECTURE FORMAT

- **Concept**
- **Conceptualisation & Operationalisation**

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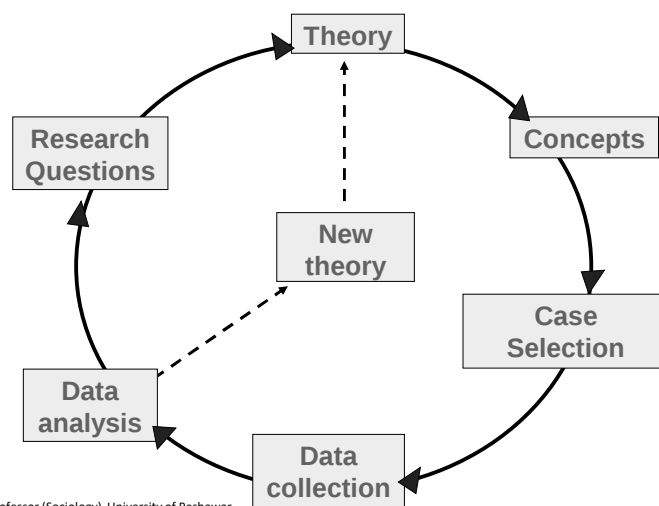
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THE FUNCTION/PLACE OF CONCEPT IN S/RESEARCH



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CONCEPTS: MEANING & DEFINITION

1. A term (nominal definition) that represents an idea that you wish to study;
2. Represents collections of seemingly related observations and/or experiences
3. "... an **idea** expressed as a **symbol** or in **words**" (Neuman, 2000: n.p.).
4. "A **concept** is the notion or image that we conjure up when we think of some cluster of related observations or ideas".

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CONCEPTS: MEANING & DEFINITION

- Natural science concepts expressed in
 - **symbolic form:** Ω , β , Σ , π , α etc.) or
 - **Formulas:** e.g. $S=d/t$.
- Most social science concepts = **words**.
- Concepts are the building blocks of theory and represent the points around which social research is conducted (Bryman, 2012: 163).

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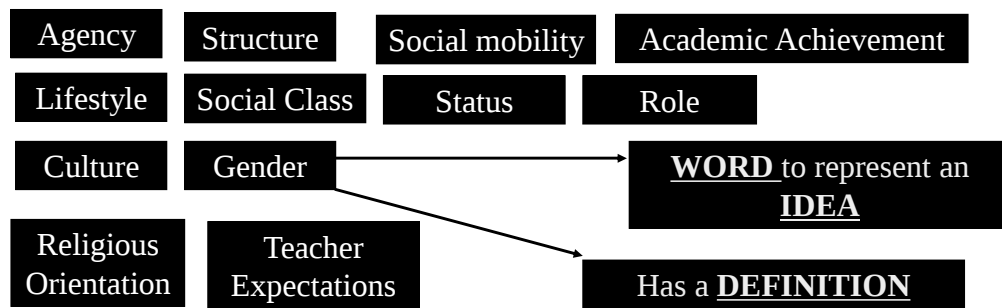
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PARTS OF A CONCEPT

- Every concept has a word/symbol with which it is represented



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IT ALL DEPENDS HOW YOU DEFINE "CHOP"



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CLASSES OF CONCEPTS

- Three classes of things that social scientists measure:
 - **Directly observable**
 - No. of people in a room
 - **Indirectly observable**
 - income
 - **Constructs**
 - creations based on observations; cannot be directly/indirectly observed.
- **E.g., gender :**
 - Directly observable (gender presentation)
 - Indirectly observable (check box)
 - a construct where you develop dimensions and indicators of gender (which would then require more conceptualization).

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SOME EXAMPLES OF SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

- Every concept has a **definition**
- BUT ...
- there is never a single, always-correct **definition** of a concept!
- E.g., MASCULINITY (a concept).
 - What do you think of when you hear that word?

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SOME EXAMPLES OF SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

1. We can't necessarily assume that everyone comes up the same set of ideas or images when they hear the word *masculinity*.
 - there are many possible ways to define the term.
2. Some definitions may be more common or have more support than others, there isn't one true, always-correct-in-all-settings definition. (Why?)
 - What counts as masculine may shift over time, from culture to culture, and even from individual to individual (Kimmel, 2008).
 - *This is why defining our concepts is so important!*
 - We refer to **CONCEPTS** as **CONSTRUCTS** to recognize their *social construction*!

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CONCEPTUALISATION!

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CONCEPTUALISATION

- **CONCEPTS/CONSTRUCTS** are the **END PRODUCTS** of **CONCEPTUALISATION**
 - E.g., **Satisfaction, Happiness, Health.**
- Since everyday language is usually vague and words don't have specified meanings, we cannot research these words until we know exactly what they are.
- To specify the meaning of a concept, they undergo **conceptualization**.

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CONCEPTUALISATION

1. Conceptualization is to specify exactly what we mean (& don't mean) by the terms we use in our research.
OR
 2. The process whereby fuzzy and imprecise concepts are made more specific and precise, taking a broad idea and making it smaller .
- **Conceptualization = creating a definition for something .**

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CONCEPTUALISATION

- involves developing agreement about the meaning of the concept.
 - Practically, we often move back and forth between loose ideas of what we are trying to study and searching for a word that best describes it.
- involves writing out **clear, concise** definitions for our key concepts.
 - E.g., Masculinity.
 - What comes to mind when you read that term.
 - How do you know masculinity when you see it?
 - Does it have something to do with men? With social norms?
- If so, it could be defined as
 - ***the social norms that men are expected to follow.***

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CONCEPTUALISATION

- No exact recipe for defining (& refining) concepts we use in our research, but
 - Discussion
 - Brainstorming,
 - Consulting literature, especially subject specific THEORY & (as much as possible) up-to-date scholarly literature.
- Understanding how concepts have been defined in the past will give us an idea about how our conceptualizations compare with the predominant ones.
 - This doesn't necessarily mean we must use their definitions
- After defining ***masculinity***, we learn that other scholars have already defined the concepts we're interested in.
- Consult others work on key concepts will also help us decide whether we plan to challenge those conceptualizations or rely on them for our own work.

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CONT'D.

- E.g., after consulting literature on Masculinity, we may decide to discard its definition as
 - *the social norms that men are expected to follow*
- And decide to use Michael Kimmel's (2000; 2008) definition, which is
 - "the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time".
- This (latter definition) is more **PRECISE** yet more **COMPLEX**. i.e.,
 - Rather than simply addressing one aspect of men's lives (norms), it addresses three aspects: roles, behaviours, and meanings. + implies that roles, behaviours, and meanings may vary across societies and over time.
 - since, we are also required to specify the particular society/location and time period being investigated, the above definition is more to the mark.

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CONT'D.

- Once a clear **clear definition** has been given, also make sure that the terms used in definition makes sense to others.
 - Since there are concepts within a concept (e.g., behavior, norms, society in the above definition), we should ask
 - Are there terms used within our definition that also need to be defined?
 - If so, → **conceptualization is not yet complete.**
 - Secondly, concepts are often multidimensional...

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OPERATIONALISATION!

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OPERATIONALISATION

1. Operationalisation (also called operational definition) is complete set of instructions for what to observe and how to measure a variable (concept)
2. The process of creating a definition(s) for a concept that can be observed and measured.
3. Operationalisation links a conceptual definition to a specific set of measurement techniques or procedures, the construct's *operational definition* (i.e., a definition in terms of the specific operations of actions a researcher carries out)" (Neuman, 2007: 112).
 - Operationalisation specifies the exact operations involved in measuring a variable = determining how you will measure your concept.
 - Putting operational definition into practice is called measurement.

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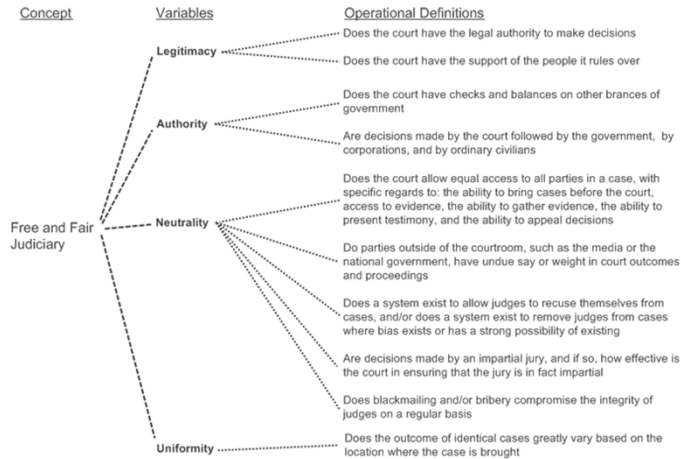
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OPERATIONALISATION: AN EXAMPLE

Operationalization of "Free and Fair Judiciary"



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WELDING CONCEPTUALISATION & OPERATIONALISATION

- E.g., based on the above critical review of literature about **effective teaching**, we can conceptualise/conceptually define it as "a combination of".
 - Thus defined it will be operationally measured in terms of the following questions/by asking the following questions...
 - The development of questions (or characteristics of data in qualitative work) that will indicate a concept

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