

NAVIGATING SOCIAL WORLDS: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the theoretical foundations of phenomenological sociology, examining how subjective experiences and intersubjective relationships construct social reality. Drawing on the works of Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Hermann Schmitz, it synthesizes key concepts such as the lifeworld, social construction of reality, and embodied phenomenology. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), this study systematically interprets and compares foundational texts, demonstrating the role of human agency in shaping societal norms and meanings. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, it critically engages with contemporary sociological challenges, particularly in digital communication and evolving social structures. This theoretical analysis contributes to the existing literature by offering a structured synthesis of phenomenological thought and its continued relevance in modern sociological discourse.

Keywords

Phenomenological sociology, lifeworld, social construction of reality, embodied phenomenology, intersubjectivity, digital communication

Introduction

Phenomenological sociology is a rich and influential theoretical framework that examines the construction of social reality through the lens of everyday experiences and intersubjective interactions. This approach emphasizes the role of individuals in shaping their understanding of the world around them, highlighting the subjective and intersubjective aspects of social reality (Bliss, 2016). Rooted in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology pioneered by Edmund Husserl, phenomenological sociology applies this introspective approach to understanding the social world. Two key figures in this tradition are Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, whose work has significantly influenced the development of phenomenological sociology. Additionally, Hermann Schmitz's concept of embodied phenomenology offers a more comprehensive understanding of social reality by incorporating bodily experiences.

Alfred Schutz, a prominent phenomenologist, applied phenomenological principles to sociology to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Flood, 2010). Schutz focused on the concept of the "life-world" (Lebenswelt), which refers to the shared, taken-for-granted understanding of the social world that individuals rely on in their daily lives (Pollio et al., 1997). He argued that individuals actively construct meaning by interpreting and

illustrating their experiences, rather than passively perceiving an objective reality (Ratner, 1973). This emphasis on the active role of the individual in constructing social reality contrasts with the "natural attitude" which assumes that the world is simply given (Muzzetto, 2015).

Building on Schutz's work, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's seminal text, "The Social Construction of Reality", is foundational for phenomenological sociology. Berger and Luckmann propose that social groups and individuals who interact with each other over time create shared concepts and reciprocal social roles, which become institutionalized as cultural knowledge. This process of social construction shapes the very nature of social reality, which is not simply an objective given but rather a product of human activity and meaning-making (Berger and Luckmann's View, 2018).

Additionally, Hermann Schmitz's concept of Embodied Phenomenology enriches this perspective by emphasizing the role of embodied experiences such as spatiality, emotions, and sensory perceptions in shaping individuals' engagement with their social surroundings. Schmitz's work highlights the intimate connection between bodily existence and the construction of social reality, offering a deeper understanding of how lived experiences influence interpersonal relations and societal norms.

Thesis Statement

This paper intends to investigate the foundational concepts of phenomenological sociology as illustrated by Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Hermann Schmitz. By analyzing their respective works, namely "The Social Construction of Reality" by Berger and Luckmann, and Hermann Schmitz's "Embodied Phenomenology", the study explores how subjective experiences, social constructions, and embodied interactions collectively contribute to our comprehension of social reality. Through this examination, the paper underscores the enduring relevance of phenomenological sociology in contemporary sociological inquiry, challenging traditional objectivist and positivist social theories by emphasizing the active role of human agency and social interaction in shaping the complexities of social reality.

Methodology

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was used in this study as a methodical approach to interpreting and analyzing qualitative data. To systematically compare, interpret, and synthesize important concepts essential to comprehending social reality, QCA employing comparative analysis provides an organized method for interpreting foundational texts in phenomenological sociology (Mayring, 2000). QCA fits into this strategy in the following ways:

Systematic Categorization of Key Concepts

QCA makes it possible to systematically identify themes that are essential to each theorist's vantage point, such as subjective experience, social construction, and embodiment, by concentrating on important works like "The Social Construction of Reality" by Berger and Luckmann and "Embodied Phenomenology" by Schmitz. Classifying these into unique conceptual frameworks then demonstrates each author's contribution to the comprehension of social reality.

Comparative Theme Identification

This review uses QCA to find themes in various texts that connect to the fundamental concepts of phenomenological sociology, including agency, intersubjectivity, and the lifeworld. By contrasting these motifs, the study can identify differences and similarities between Schutz, Berger, Luckmann, and Schmitz. Schmitz's concentration on embodied phenomenology and

Schutz's emphasis on intersubjectivity, for instance, might be compared to show the similarities and differences between the two theorists.

Contextual Interpretation

Through the application of hermeneutics, QCA enables an interpretive approach that comprehends the language used by each philosopher. As part of this process, concepts like social reality and agency are examined as they occur in each text, offering insights into how theorists' philosophical positions are reflected in their linguistic choices. For instance, comparing Schmitz's concept of embodiment with Berger and Luckmann's definition of social construction may highlight minor differences in their methods.

Synthesis of Theoretical Contributions

The findings are then utilized to highlight the applicability of phenomenological sociology to current problems, which are made possible by QCA. By recognizing the distinct and overlapping viewpoints of each theory, QCA contributes to the development of a comprehensive understanding of how human action and subjective experience influence social reality. Because it emphasizes how social norms and meanings are co-constructed, this synthesis undermines objectivist ideas.

Historical Context

Phenomenological sociology's historical background traces back to early 20th-century philosophy, where Max Weber and Edmund Husserl offered fundamental concepts for the investigation of social reality through subjective experiences and intersubjective relationships. Husserl developed the idea of intentionality in his phenomenological writings, especially in *Ideas about a Pure Phenomenology* and a *Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), which postulated that consciousness is constantly focused on the object. This work laid the foundation for comprehending how people view and understand their environments through subjective experiences (Husserl, 1913). He promoted a "return to the things themselves", emphasizing that human knowledge and meaning-making are fundamentally derived from subjective experience. A crucial aspect of phenomenological sociology, Husserl's theories highlighted the significance of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), or the world as directly experienced (Husserl, 1970).

Max Weber introduced the idea of *Verstehen* (understanding) as a central idea in social research, extending this philosophical approach to sociology. Weber argued in *Economy and Society* (1922) that the only way to completely comprehend social phenomena is to analyze the individualized interpretations people ascribe to their behavior. According to Weber (1922), there was a change from objective, quantitative methods to a more interpretive framework that took into account people's understandings and intentions. The foundation for interpretive sociology was established by Weber's work, which made it clear that social behaviors, as well as their motivations and meanings, must be examined. His work was essential in changing sociology's perspective from one that was exclusively positivist to one that also valued personal agency and subjective experience (Swedberg, 1998).

Alfred Schutz integrated Weberian ideas with Husserl's phenomenology in the middle of the 20th century. Schutz first proposed the idea of intersubjectivity in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967), arguing that people jointly create reality through common perceptions and daily interactions. He maintained that the lifeworld, a pre-reflective realm of common experiences and meanings that people take for granted, is the foundation of social knowledge. According to Schutz, people deploy an archive of shared knowledge that they have accumulated via socialization to navigate their social environments, which aids in how they

perceive and relate to others. His research made clear how crucial social contacts and common knowledge are to creating a common social reality (Schutz, 1967; Natanson, 1970).

Schutz's theory was expanded upon by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their influential work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), which offered a thorough model of social construction. They maintained that social structures and processes, including language, conventions, and common practices, produce reality rather than it being objective. The work of Berger and Luckmann offered a methodical explanation of how social interactions and institutional procedures create, preserve, and alter knowledge and reality. They popularized the idea of institutionalization, which is the process by which recurring social behaviors reinforce shared meanings in society by becoming accepted norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). They argued that this process is essential to comprehending how social reality is constantly created and reinforced, influencing people's experiences and perceptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In the latter half of the 20th century, Hermann Schmitz popularized the concept of embodied phenomenology, which broadened the scope of phenomenology by emphasizing the role that bodily experiences have in the comprehension of social reality and the self. Schmitz contends in his study that the body's sensory and emotional reactions to the outside world are closely linked to subjective experience and that these reactions in turn affect how people perceive reality and social interactions (Schmitz, 2011). His method demonstrates how people physically feel and navigate their social situations, highlighting the embodied element of the human experience. By highlighting the significance of the body in influencing consciousness and social interaction, this contribution to phenomenological sociology expands the field's focus to encompass physical and sensory aspects.

The historical shift from considering social phenomena through objective frameworks to acknowledging the subjective, socially created, and embodied aspects of reality is reflected in these contributions. This change challenges conventional objectivist viewpoints by highlighting how social interaction and human agency actively alter the complexity of social reality (Mayring, 2000; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). These viewpoints work together to create a strong framework for examining current social challenges and demonstrate how phenomenological sociology offers a deep comprehension of how people experience, create, and negotiate their social environments. Alfred Schutz had a major impact on the study of social reality in the middle of the 20th century by helping to close the gap between Husserlian phenomenology and sociological investigation. To comprehend how people create social meanings through their interactions, Schutz focused his work on the ideas of the lifeworld and intersubjectivity.

Lifeworld and intersubjectivity

According to Schutz's conceptualization, the everyday world of lived experiences is the "lifeworld" (Lebenswelt), from which people draw meaning. It includes the common experiences and circumstances that shape people's perceptions of their social surroundings. According to Schutz, people in society form their common experiences and understandings to construct the lifeworld, which is intrinsically intersubjective. He underlined that social interaction and the creation of social reality depend on this shared understanding (Schutz, 1967). To properly interpret and react to a variety of social situations, Schutz maintained that people need a "stock of knowledge" drawn from their lifeworld to navigate their social worlds (Schutz, 1970).

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's work, especially their landmark book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), is a notable example of Schutz's influence. In this paper, they elaborated on how language, norms, and institutional practices are social processes that shape knowledge and reality rather than being purely objective phenomena. They maintained that

social reality is constantly negotiated through interactions between people and is affected by collective views. According to Berger and Luckmann, people internalize cultural norms and values, creating a manufactured world that seems objective to those who embrace it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Significant concepts like institutionalization, the process by which common behaviors become accepted standards and so reinforce social structures, were presented by the writers. Additionally, they talked about the idea of legitimation, which explains how these structures are upheld and justified via a variety of channels, such as social structures and cultural narratives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The social circumstances in which we live have a significant impact on how we perceive the world, and this paradigm emphasizes how human activity actively shapes societal norms and meanings.

Contemporary relevance

The theories advanced by Schutz, Berger, and Luckmann have had a long-lasting impact on sociological study by motivating academics to emphasize people's subjective experiences and how they construct and negotiate meaning in their social contexts. By demonstrating the intricate nature of social reality as a construct formed by human interaction, their contributions challenge conventional objectivist views (Smith, 2009; Hacking, 1999). Through the incorporation of phenomenological perspectives into sociological research, these theorists have contributed to a deeper comprehension of the formation and evolution of social realities. For modern sociologists studying identity, culture, and social interaction, their work continues to be a fundamental resource (Gergen, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Through the notion of embodied phenomenology, which highlights the significance of physical experiences in forming one's sense of self and comprehension of social reality, Hermann Schmitz has made significant contributions to contemporary phenomenological sociology. Schmitz argued that our bodily connections with the outside environment and our sensory experiences are essential components of consciousness that impact our social interactions. A perspective that emphasizes the connection between the body and social experience represents a significant advancement in phenomenological thought (Schmitz, 2011).

Personified Phenomenology

According to Schmitz's embodied phenomenology, human experiences are profoundly embedded in the body rather than emerging solely from abstract thought. He highlights how senses like touch, taste, sight, and sound are essential for creating social meanings and connections in addition to being ways of seeing the outside world. Schmitz contends that people relate to their surroundings and other people primarily through their bodies, which form the foundation of a shared social reality. This method builds on the older phenomenological theories of scholars such as Alfred Schutz, who investigated the intersubjective aspects of social interaction, and Edmund Husserl, who concentrated more on consciousness and intentionality. Schmitz's emphasis on the body gives phenomenology an actual component that enhances our comprehension of how lived experiences and bodily interactions shape social reality (Schmitz, 2011).

Shift in Sociological Paradigms

A larger movement in sociology from objectivist to subjectivist methods is reflected in the development of classical phenomenological ideas to modern interpretations. The focus of early sociological ideas, which were greatly impacted by positivism, was on measurable and observable events. On the other hand, Schmitz and colleagues' work emphasizes how human agency and subjective experience dynamically shape social reality. This shift represents an effort to acknowledge the complexity of social life and people's active role in creating their

social environments. Traditional positivist perspectives that place greater emphasis on measurable facts than on lived experiences are challenged by the recognition that embodied experiences are essential to comprehending social reality. This change is essential for examining modern societal challenges because it creates opportunities for learning how people perceive, interpret, and co-create their reality through intimate and interpersonal connections (Mayring 2000; Vaismoradi et al. 2013).

Comprehensive Foundation for Understanding Social Realities

The literature of phenomenological sociology, which includes Schmitz's contributions, provides a strong basis for examining how people move through their social contexts. By highlighting that social realities are not only created through abstract ideas but are also intricately woven into people's physical and sensory interactions with their surroundings, this theoretical framework encourages researchers to consider individuals' subjective experiences (Gergen, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Through their distinct methodologies, these academics emphasized the interaction between social constructions and subjective experiences, thus contributing to a more profound comprehension of social reality. By demonstrating the intricate complexity of interpersonal relationships and the dynamic processes that shape and interpret social reality, their combined work contributes to the field of current phenomenological sociology. Phenomenological sociology has benefited greatly from Erving Goffman's research on how people portray themselves in daily life. The "dramaturgical model" he developed characterized social contact as a performance in which people control their perceptions to affect how other people observe them.

The above perspective highlights the significance of context in forming human interactions by emphasizing the relational and situational dimensions of social reality (Goffman, 1959). Another crucial perspective for understanding social reality is provided by Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. His research explores how people interpret their daily lives and emphasizes how a common understanding of rules and behaviors creates social order. Garfinkel's work supports the notion that social reality is actively created through encounters, which is in line with phenomenological understandings (Garfinkel, 1967).

A philosophical foundation for phenomenological sociology is provided by Hannah Arendt's theories regarding the nature of human behavior and the public sphere. She highlights how social realities are created through group activity and conversation by drawing a contrast between the private and public domains. Individual experiences and conceptions of reality are shaped by social and political situations, and Arendt's work encourages investigation of this (Arendt, 1958). Understanding the construction and maintenance of social realities is impacted by Michel Foucault's investigation of discourse and power relations. The idea of a permanent social reality is contested by his examination of how cultural norms influence individual behaviors, which claims that realities depend on social settings and power dynamics (Foucault, 1975).

Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity, which examined how identities are created via repeated social performances, also have connections to phenomenological sociology. Butler suggested that social realities are actively created by individual behaviors and societal expectations, emphasizing the fluidity of identity and the influence of norms on human experiences (Butler, 1990). Seyla Benhabib shed light on how personal narratives interact with more general societal narratives through her research on the interaction between social structures and individual agency. Her feminist phenomenological approach emphasized the importance of acknowledging the variety of voices and experiences that shape social reality (Benhabib, 1992).

Critical Analysis. Key Figures and Contributions

Alfred Schutz: Lifeworld and the Application of Phenomenology to Sociology

Schutz introduced the lifeworld as the pre-structured background of everyday existence. In this context, individuals interpret and engage with their surroundings based on shared meanings and societal norms. The concept highlights the importance of understanding social reality through the lens of everyday experiences and interactions (Schutz, 1962).

Application of phenomenology to sociology

Schutz applied phenomenological principles to sociology by examining how individuals characterize and comprehend their social environment. His approach allowed for an analysis of how people collectively establish and sustain social order through their daily interactions and shared meanings. This integration provided insights into the ways individuals navigate and make sense of their social worlds, contributing significantly to the development of phenomenological sociology as a theoretical framework within the discipline (Schutz, 1962).

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann: "The Social Construction of Reality"

Their influential work explores how social realities are collectively constructed and sustained.

Externalization is the process through which individuals express their subjective experiences and interpretations into the social world. This involves articulating personal meanings, beliefs, and intentions through language, symbols, and actions, thereby contributing to the creation of shared social realities. By projecting internal experiences and thoughts onto the external world, individuals use language and other forms of communication to express their thoughts and feelings. This process is fundamental to social interaction, as it allows for the exchange and construction of shared meanings within a society (The Ideas of Berger and Luckmann, n.d.).

Objectivation occurs when externalized subjective experiences become embodied or objectified into objective social structures. This transformation process converts subjective meanings and actions into enduring social institutions, norms, and cultural symbols that shape collective behavior and perceptions (The Ideas of Berger and Luckmann, n.d.). By turning internal experiences and thoughts into external, objective phenomena, objectivation is crucial to social reality. It enables individuals to interact with each other and the world around them, providing a stable framework for social interaction and understanding.

Internalization is the process by which individuals adopt externalized social constructs as part of their subjective reality. Through this process, individuals accept and embody the norms, values, and roles prevalent in their social environment, which in turn influences their attitudes, behaviors, and self-identities. By incorporating external experiences and thoughts into their internal world, internalization is fundamental to socialization, enabling individuals to learn and integrate their society's norms, values, and expectations (The Ideas of Berger and Luckmann, n.d.).

Intersubjectivity - this concept emphasizes understanding social reality as a product of interactions between individuals. It highlights the role of intersubjective understanding in shaping social reality and underscores the importance of considering individuals' subjective experiences to comprehend social phenomena (The Ideas of Berger and Luckmann, n.d.). These concepts challenge the traditional objectivist and positivist social theories by asserting that social reality is not a pre-existing, objective entity, but rather emerges from human activity and shared meanings developed in everyday life.

Examples

There are several examples depicting the work of Berger and Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality":

- Berger and Luckmann emphasize the role of language in shaping our understanding of reality. They argued that language is a fundamental tool for constructing social reality, as it allows individuals to express their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences to others. For instance, when we use language to describe a particular event or situation, we are constructing a shared understanding of that event or situation.
- Berger and Luckmann also discuss the objectivities of social institutions, such as marriage. Initially, marriage can be seen as an externalization of a couple's subjective feelings and intentions to form a life-long partnership. Over time, marriage becomes objectified as a societal institution with established norms, roles, and legal implications. Individuals internalize these norms and roles, shaping their behaviors and expectations within marital relationships. The institution of marriage is maintained through intersubjective agreements and practices within the broader society, reinforcing its significance and influence on social reality.

Hermann Schmitz's Contribution to Phenomenological Sociology

Hermann Schmitz expands phenomenological analysis with his concept of Embodied Phenomenology, which emphasizes the role of bodily experiences in shaping social realities. His approach acknowledges that social interactions and perceptions are influenced not only by subjective experiences but also by physical and sensory aspects of human existence. Schmitz enriches our understanding of how physical presence and sensory experiences contribute to the ongoing construction of social reality (Flood, n.d.).

Spatiality and atmospheres

Spatiality refers to how physical spaces and environments influence social interactions and interpersonal dynamics. Schmitz conceptualized atmospheres as encompassing the emotional and sensory qualities of spaces that contribute to individuals' experiences and social engagements (Merleau-Ponty 1945/1962).

For example, in a classroom setting, the spatial arrangement can significantly influence social interactions and the learning atmosphere. Desks arranged in a circular formation encourage more open communication and equality among students, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Conversely, desks arranged in rows facing the teacher create a more hierarchical atmosphere, emphasizing authority and passive reception of knowledge. Schmitz's concept of spatiality shows how physical spaces shape social dynamics and interactions within educational contexts.

Emotional and sensory experiences

Embodied phenomenology also explores how emotions and sensory perceptions such as touch, sound, and visual stimuli, mediate individuals' engagement with their surroundings and affect their social interactions. These embodied experiences provide rich insights into how individuals experience and interpret their social reality through their physical presence and sensory engagements.

For example, walking through different urban spaces can evoke distinct emotional responses based on sensory experiences. A walk through a park with lush greenery, birds chirping, and fresh air can evoke feelings of peace and relaxation, promoting a sense of well-being. In contrast, walking through a crowded and noisy city street with heavy traffic, pollution, and sensory overload can induce stress and anxiety. Schmitz's focus on embodied

phenomenology highlights how these sensory and emotional experiences in urban spaces shape individuals' perceptions and interactions with their environment.

Another example related to this concept is attending a live concert that provides a vivid explanation of how emotional and sensory experiences shape social reality. The physical sensations of the music's vibrations, the collective energy of the crowd, and the visual effects of the lighting all contribute to a shared emotional experience. This embodied engagement creates a sense of unity and collective identity among the concertgoers, illustrating Schmitz's idea that sensory and emotional experiences play a crucial role in forming social bonds and shared realities.

Integration of Theories

Alfred Schutz's concept of the lifeworld provides the backdrop for understanding how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences. This lifeworld is filled with pre-existing social norms, values, and meanings that individuals navigate and interpret. Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality builds on this by detailing the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, explaining how these shared meanings and structures come into existence and are maintained over time (Muzzetto, 2016).

The lifeworld serves as the stage where externalization occurs and individuals express their subjective experiences and contribute to the social fabric. As these expressions become objectified, they shape the lifeworld, influencing how future experiences are interpreted and internalized by individuals. Thus, the lifeworld and the processes of social construction are interdependent, continuously shaping and reshaping each other.

Intersubjectivity, the shared understanding among individuals, is crucial for maintaining a cohesive social reality. This concept is deeply intertwined with Schmitz's embodied phenomenology, which emphasizes the role of bodily experiences and sensory perceptions in forming these shared understandings.

Embodied phenomenology enriches the concept of intersubjectivity by highlighting how physical presence and sensory experiences influence social interactions. For example, the atmosphere of a place, shaped by its spatial and sensory characteristics, affects how individuals feel and interact, contributing to a shared emotional and experiential context. This embodied aspect ensures that intersubjectivity is not merely a cognitive process but also an embodied one, deeply rooted in the physicality of human existence (Overgaard & Zahavi, 2007).

Holistic Understanding of Social Reality

Dynamic interplay of concepts

Integrating these theories provides a holistic understanding of social reality as a dynamic interplay between subjective experiences, shared meanings, and embodied interactions. The lifeworld provides the foundational context within which social construction processes operate. Individuals externalize their experiences into the social world, these experiences become objectified into stable social structures, and individuals internalize these structures, which in turn influence their lifeworld. Embodied phenomenology adds depth to this understanding by emphasizing that these processes are not purely abstract or cognitive but are deeply influenced by our physical and sensory engagement with the world. Social reality is constructed not only through language and symbols but also through the lived, bodily experiences that shape our perceptions and interactions.

Practical implications

Understanding the integration of these theories also has practical implications for addressing contemporary social issues. For example, in urban planning, acknowledging the

lifeworld of residents can inform designs that reflect their shared meanings and values, while considering embodied phenomenology can ensure these spaces promote positive sensory and emotional experiences. In digital communication, recognizing the social construction of online interactions and the embodied nature of user experiences can lead to more inclusive and user-friendly platforms.

Critiques, Strengths, and Limitations

Strengths of Phenomenological Sociology

- Emphasis on subjectivity - Phenomenological sociology emphasizes the importance of understanding social reality through the lens of individual experiences and interactions. This approach highlights the role of subjective experiences in shaping our understanding of social reality.
- Focus on everyday life - Phenomenological sociology focuses on the everyday experiences and interactions of individuals, which provides a deeper understanding of social reality.
- Holistic perspective - This approach offers a holistic perspective on social reality, considering the interconnectedness of individual experiences, social interactions, and bodily experiences.

Critiques from Other Sociological Perspectives

Objectivist sociologists argued that phenomenological sociology is too focused on individual experiences and ignores the broader social and structural factors that shape social reality (Examine Ethnomethodological and Phenomenological Perspectives as Critique of Positivism - Sociology OWL, 2024).

Critics from structuralist and functionalist perspectives argue that phenomenological sociology places too much emphasis on individual subjectivity and micro-level interactions, often neglecting the macro-level structures and systems that shape social life. Structuralists contend that social structures and institutions exert a significant influence on individual behavior and experiences, which phenomenological sociology tends to underplay (C. Mocombe, 2021).

Marxist sociologists critique phenomenological sociology for its perceived lack of attention to power dynamics and material conditions. They argue that by focusing on subjective experiences and intersubjectivity, phenomenological sociology overlooks how economic structures, class relations, and power inequalities shape social reality. Marxists emphasize the need to consider society's material base and the impact of capitalist structures on individual and collective experiences (Smart, n.d.).

Positivist sociologists argue that phenomenological sociology is too subjective and lacks a scientific basis for understanding social reality.

Postmodern and poststructuralist scholars criticize phenomenological sociology for its reliance on the idea of stable, coherent subjectivities and shared meanings. They argue that social reality is fragmented, fluid, and characterized by multiple, often conflicting, discourses and identities. From this perspective, phenomenological sociology's emphasis on shared lifeworlds and intersubjectivity may oversimplify the complexity and plurality of contemporary social life (Polizzi, 2009).

Critiques by scholars on phenomenological sociology and its theoretical foundations

Aspects of phenomenological sociology and its conceptual foundations have been criticized by several scholars. Here are a few noteworthy criticisms:

➤ Objectivity vs. subjectivity

David W. McDowell (1998) and other critics contended that although phenomenological sociology places a strong emphasis on subjective experience, it runs the risk of undervaluing the objective social structures that influence these experiences. This criticism drew attention to the conflict between recognizing institutional limitations and human agency, arguing that a thorough sociological understanding requires striking a balance between the two.

➤ Overemphasis on individual Experience

Andrew Sayer (2000) criticizes phenomenological approaches in his work for perhaps placing an excessive focus on personal experiences at the expense of more general societal processes. Although subjective interpretations are significant, he contends that they shouldn't take precedence over the role that structural elements play in forming social realities.

➤ Generalizability

Some academics, like Jürgen Habermas (1987), contend that the emphasis placed on individual narratives in phenomenological sociology may produce results that are difficult to generalize to other contexts. According to Habermas, this may restrict the phenomenological insights' wider applicability in the discipline of sociology.

➤ Methodological critiques

Thomas Schwandt (1996) expressed doubts regarding the methodological soundness of phenomenological techniques. He argued that the scientific legitimacy of phenomenological research is undermined by the possibility of subjective and unreliable results in the absence of specific guidelines for analysis and interpretation.

➤ Ambiguity in concepts

Researchers like David R. Heise (1979) argued that empirical study and practical application may be impeded by the ambiguity and poor definition of important concepts in phenomenological sociology, such as the lifeworld and intersubjectivity.

Limitations of the Approach

➤ Difficulty in generalizing findings

Phenomenological sociology tends to focus on unique individual experiences, which makes it difficult to generalize findings to wider populations.

➤ Limited relevance in theory development

Phenomenological sociology may be limited in its relevance for developing more general theories of social reality.

➤ Potential for Intellectual Laziness

Phenomenological sociology may be criticized for celebrating the ordinary or mediocre, which could lead to intellectual laziness.

Conclusion

This paper has explored phenomenological sociology through the lens of foundational theories and contemporary applications. It highlighted the key texts by Berger and Luckmann and Schmitz's concept of embodied phenomenology. The literature review part provided a historical context, detailing contributions from Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Hermann Schmitz. Core concepts such as the lifeworld, social construction of reality, and embodied phenomenology were examined, illustrating how these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of social reality.

Examples from Berger and Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" and Schmitz's "Embodied Phenomenology" demonstrated how these concepts operate in everyday life. Modern applications of these theories to contemporary social issues, such as digital communication, mental health, and urban planning, were discussed. The integration of theories

section highlighted how these concepts complement each other to provide a holistic understanding of how social reality is constructed and experienced. Finally, the strengths, critiques, and limitations of phenomenological sociology have been addressed.

Phenomenological sociology is significant for its rich, detailed exploration of lived experiences and the subjective dimensions of social life. By emphasizing the importance of intersubjectivity and shared meanings, it offers valuable insights into how social realities are constructed and maintained. The integration of embodied phenomenology further enriches this perspective, recognizing the critical role of bodily and sensory experiences in shaping social interactions. This approach provides a robust framework for understanding the complexities of social life, from the micro-level interactions of everyday experiences to the broader social structures and institutions. It challenges researchers to consider the dynamic interplay between individual agency and social structures, offering a more comprehensive view of social reality.

Areas for Future Research

1. The integration of phenomenological sociology with other theoretical perspectives, such as objectivism and positivism.
2. Apply phenomenological sociology to specific social issues, such as social inequality, social justice, and social change.
3. Examine the role of technology in shaping social reality, considering how technology influences individual experiences and interactions.
4. The implications of phenomenological sociology in digital and virtual environments. As digital communication and social media continue to evolve, examining how these platforms shape and are shaped by users' lifeworlds, social constructions, and embodied experiences could provide valuable insights into the changing nature of social interactions and identities.
5. More research that incorporates intersectionality into phenomenological sociology is needed. This research should examine how various aspects of identity, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect to shape individuals' lived experiences. This approach could provide a deeper understanding of the diverse and multifaceted nature of social reality.
6. Integrating phenomenological sociology with other sociological perspectives, such as structuralism, Marxism, and postmodernism. This interdisciplinary approach could enrich the theoretical framework of phenomenological sociology and provide a more comprehensive understanding of social reality.

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