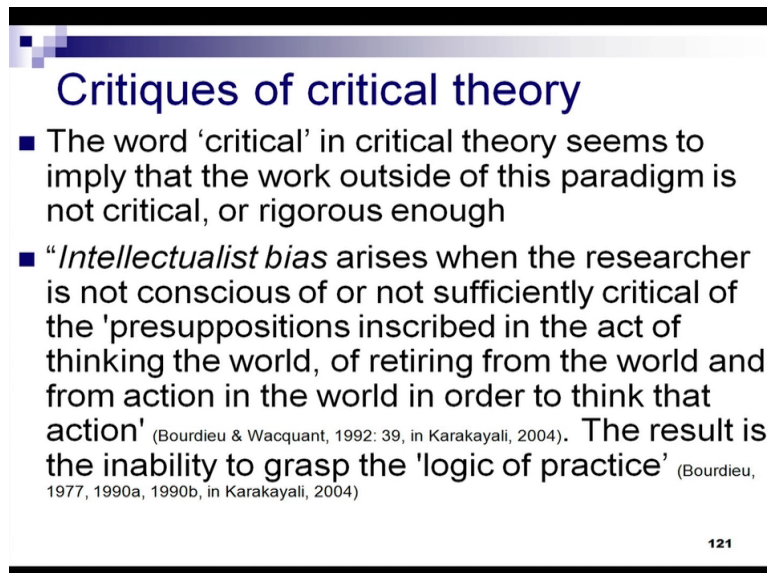


Qualitative Research Methods
Assistant Prof. Aradhna Malik
Vinod Gupta School of Management
Indian Institute of Technology - Kharagpur

Lecture 15
Critiques of Critical Theory

Welcome to the NOC course on Qualitative Research methods; my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and in this particular lecture we will wind out the discussion on critical theory. We have discussed various paradigms of qualitative research and we were discussing critical theory and in this discussion we are going to wrap up the discussion by providing some critiques of critical theory, so let's move on with it.

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Critiques of critical theory

- The word 'critical' in critical theory seems to imply that the work outside of this paradigm is not critical, or rigorous enough
- "*Intellectualist bias* arises when the researcher is not conscious of or not sufficiently critical of the 'presuppositions inscribed in the act of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from action in the world in order to think that action' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 39, in Karakayali, 2004). The result is the inability to grasp the 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1990b, in Karakayali, 2004)

121

The first critic here that we will talk about, is this whole discussion about the word critical, so the word critical in critical theory seems to imply that the work outside of this paradigm is not critical or rigorous enough and that has been under fire for a long time and peoples say, if you say that this is critical and you are doing everything in your capacity to uncover the truth and so on and so forth.

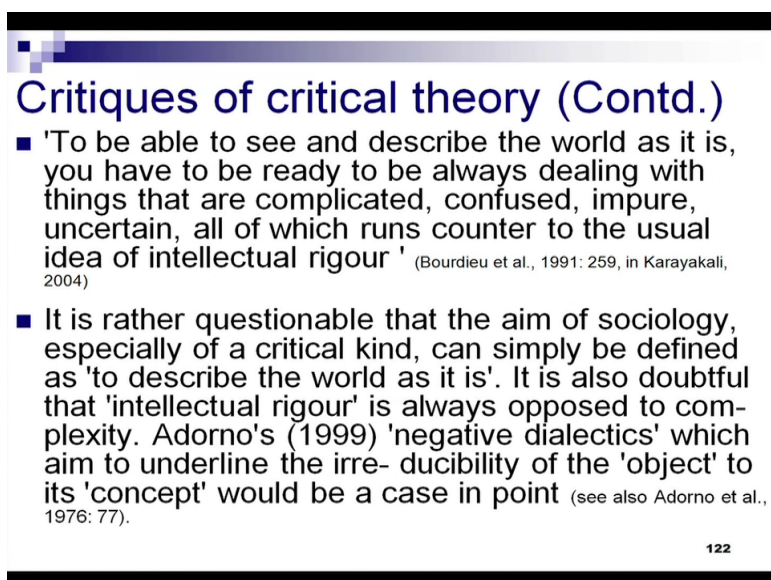
Then do you mean that the other research is not regress enough, how can you say that were on what basis are you saying that, so and that needs to you know, the people who are proponents of critical theory being treated as a different class of people and it leads to a false sense of hegemony over other inquiry paradigms. So you know the false cells sense of superiority, the seeming superiority over other paradigms of research, that if this is critical, are other thing is not critical, are they not doing the same kind of in-depth research, Etc.,.

The second critique is the “intellectualist bias that arises when the researcher is not conscious of or not sufficiently critical of the presuppositions inscribed in the act of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from action in the world in order to think that action. The result is the inability to grasp the logic of practice.” So intellectualist bias which means that one is not, you know we are not sufficiently critical of the assumptions, the presuppositions that are involved in thinking about the world.

The world is not a system of logic, the world has its own method, reality has its own methods and when the research is not as critical, as the researcher is required to be there is whole bias that creeps in called the intellectualist bias of. So the result is the inability to grasp the logic of practice there is a difference between the way the researcher thinks that the things should be and the way they actually happened.

And the way the researchers thinks the things should be or the way the researcher things that a phenomenon should be and the way this phenomenon shapes up, are two different things for want of a better world. And so the researcher’s bias in assuming that the phenomenon should be in a certain way affects the researcher’s perception of the way, the phenomenon is in reality and that can impact the interpretation as well and that is one big critique.

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Critiques of critical theory (Contd.)

- 'To be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour ' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 259, in Karayakali, 2004)
- It is rather questionable that the aim of sociology, especially of a critical kind, can simply be defined as 'to describe the world as it is'. It is also doubtful that 'intellectual rigour' is always opposed to complexity. Adorno's (1999) 'negative dialectics' which aim to underline the irreducibility of the 'object' to its 'concept' would be a case in point (see also Adorno et al., 1976: 77).

122

The others next critique is, ‘to be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be you have to be ready to be the always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour.’

So intellectual reserve means that everything has to be systematic, everything you know the data that doesn't make sense should be cleaned out, and you know one should probe, and probe and probe and dig out things and ultimately things should fit together and they should make sense and real world is not like that.

The real world is chaotic and messy and things may make sense and most of the times things don't fit in together and patterns don't reveal themselves until very late and many times the patterns just don't exist, so one has to, you know in order to be able to see the world the way it is, as a researcher as an inquirer one has to be ready and to be always dealing with things that are confusing, that are confused themselves, impure, uncertain Etc., and these things are not in line with the concept of intellectual rigours, so where does one draw the line.

It is rather questionable that the aim of sociology and this is all a part of this paper, I'm sorry I should have had quotation marks here, this is all a part of the information I got from this paper by Karayakali in 2000, the other thing is that "it is rather questionable that the aim of sociology especially of a critical kind, can simply be defined as 'to describe the world as it is'. So it is also doubtful that 'intellectual rigour' is always opposed to complexity. Adorno's 'negative dialectics' which aim to underline the irreducibility of the 'object' to its 'concept' would be a case in point."

So that means that we cannot reduce this whole idea of a complicated world, into a concept and that is the other critique that the aim of sociology cannot be to reduce the world to a simple concept, there is a difference between the object and concept and the object may not be representation of the concepts that the inquirer has a mind. The object maybe in most cases is a lot more than a mere representation of a concept, of a set of concepts in the researchers mind.

The aim of sociology of social logical inquiry of a critical kind is not to reveal the one single concept, it could also be two or it should not be to reveal that one single concept because the single concept just doesn't exist. And the other point that is mentioned here is that intellectual rigour may not always be opposed to complexity, which means that intellectual rigour may not always aim at simplifying every complex phenomenon, intellectual rigour does not or should not aim at simplifying complex phenomenon.

Intellectual rigor can also mean seeing things as they are in their own complexity, in their own chaos in their own murkiness and accepting them and trying to understand how this murkiness adds flavor to the context or the concept that we are studying and how it enriches it and what shape it gives to that concept, so the concept may not exist without this murkiness, without this chaos, without the context that we are able to understand and one has to accept that so that is one more pretty clear.

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Critiques of critical theory (Contd.)

- It stems from a need to liberate common people from the injustices they are facing. But who decides what is injustice?
- It highlights social hierarchies as a basis for the injustices that human beings face? But social hierarchies are a reality of society.
- Discounts the merits of capitalism
- Too pessimistic
- If we emerge out of the historical social fabric, are we not likely to forget why we did what we did, and possibly make the same mistakes?

123

Another critique is that it seems to stem from a need to liberate common people from the injustice they are facing. But who decides what is injustice? It is rooted in Marxism, it is rooted in these perceived injustices. I will give an example and at the expense of maybe being questioned later, we are very close to Calcutta, we are living in West Bengal and in Calcutta there has been a drive and you know I can understand the reasons behind the drive, there has been an ongoing effort to phase out hand pulled rickshaws.

Now I also feel for the people who are pulling this because I live here in Kharagpur, I have visited Calcutta innumerable times, but sorry I have visited Calcutta numerous times, have visited this place very often, this has been pulled, numerous times I have not had the heart to sit on a rickshaw that is pulled by a person physically, a person I'm not talking about a cycle rickshaw and Human Rights groups activists have come and said that this is inhuman.

Why should another person run barefoot on these streets, littered with all kinds of things, you know pulling somebody who is sitting on a rickshaw that is already so heavy to pull, I fully understand the background behind it, but my point and I have read a lot of literature about it and

I will try to think about it from a critical standpoint and my point is, who are we to decide that this is injustice.

For the simple reason that person who was pulled that cycle rickshaw for maybe the past 20, 30, 40 years has earned honest living out of pulling that rickshaw, even at the cost of his own health, only knows how to pull that rickshaw, now if we take that source of living from this person, where does this person go, how does this person earn and feed his family, so who decides what is injustice. I had done a project on the implementation of the convention on the rights of the child in Gujarat many years ago.

In doing that project I realized that the child, just the word child is defined in probably over forty to fifty ways, I have that implementation handbook also and it is defined you know one definition is so complicated, how do we define a child? How does so that is one of the critiques, who decide what is injustice? Where do we draw the line between injustice and just a different way of life.

if you speak to the this rickshaw puller who pulls the rickshaw by hand, he will say that this is injustice to me because you're taking away my only source of living, you expect me to learn a new way of feeding my family at the age of 50, 55, 60 and still well enough from his perspective justice would be to let him do what he has been trained to do and pay him enough to compensate him for the trouble he takes, do not ill treat him.

So as customers we feed him, we wear respectful to him, we give him enough for the effort that he has put it in, from his perspective that is justice, he is fit his capable and as long as nobody forces him to pull the rickshaw, for him it is okay because he is trying to earn an honest living by indulging in hard labor, if we have to stop that then maybe we also need to stop hiring labor that put, you know that carry bricks on their heads, we also need to stop other forms that seem unjust.

Other forms of employing people were people are doing their jobs, I think the job of an airline pilot is even tougher because this person is responsible for the lives of maybe you know 3 to 400 people, the person flying a plane in bad weather and carrying a plane full of hundreds of people, the stress physical stress is not there, yes just sitting in a very, very

beautifully decorated aero plane, everything is there, they have food, they can ask for any kind food, whatever they want in the plane.

But just imagine the kind of stress this person is experiencing or the kind of stress is fighter pilot in the armed forces is experiencing, there in anybody in the armed forces that is the kind of stress or stress a surgeon experiences when the surgeon holds an organ of a living person in his or her hand, that is also very stressful, somebody else's depending on you for their lives. So where does one draw the line, okay.

The other critique is it highlights social hierarchy is as a basis for injustices that human beings face? But social hierarchies are a reality of society. How can we say that this is unjust? How can we say that hierarchy, you know you can't remove, or you cannot change an entire social system because it is resulting in injustice, it is there, it is real, so we say historical realism is a foundation for critical theory? So if the social hierarchy is not there, maybe the injustice would not be there and maybe critical theory would not have existed, who knows.

It also discounts the merit of capitalism and it is too pessimistic, so it is discounting the merits of capitalism, it is not taking into account, it doesn't seem to take into account, the benefits that have accrued as a result of people being able to earn a lot of money, then it seems too pessimistic, that you start with the assumption, that things are not right. You are always sad, always uncomfortable with the state of affairs and that discomfort is seems to be indicator of a very negative way of looking at things.

Another critique that is related to what we were discussing earlier and I am sorry I should have clubbed this little properly, if we emerge out of the historical social fabric, are we not likely to forget what we did, and why we did it and possibly make the same mistakes again? The ultimate goal of critical theory is to unravel, whatever is unjust, find out, you know more about situations and go deeper and then reconstruct or present the same phenomenon to the world in a more thoroughly thought of way.

And if you do not do that then on or in doing so what we do is and then there is a call to action, we say okay this is what was wrong, this is the way it has been fixed and this is the way it has been fixed in light of making lives better for people's or people's lives better and

the injustice has been removed and let's imagine a situation comes when all these gaps are closed.

So the same things will keep happening again and we will, we are likely to forget what had happened in the past, because we have close to that part of reality that hierarchies were a part of, we say how hierarchies bad, let's get rid of vertical organizations, let organizations be horizontal and if a situation arrive, where the you know the hierarchy comes back, we will not know how to deal with it, so this is one of the critiques that have read about.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:04)

Criticisms of critical theory (Contd.)

- It says that action is required but it fails to provide a plan for that action.
- It aims towards an ideal. But who defines that ideal? How do we know that no other ideal is there? In aiming for this ideal, the practicality of the action is missed.
- Is all this rigor towards a thorough critical analysis really worth it?

124

Another criticism here is, it says that action is required but it fails to provide a plan for that action. The stimulus is there, but the plan for that action is not really mentioned, so you know yes, fine, okay, we need to do something about it but critiques say that okay, then why don't you suggest based on your in-depth inquiry, what the next steps should be.

And if you cannot do that, then your whole idea about doing something, you know having your inquiry rooted in action is futile because you haven't given a plan of action. So anyone wanting to take this forward will not know how to go about it, so some directions, something needs to be given that is what the critique say.

Another it aims towards an ideal. But who defined that ideal? Who decides what is ideal? How do we know that no other ideal is there? And in aiming for this ideal, the practicality of the action is missed. So we are trying for an ideal but the practical aspect behind this ideal is

missed and I will just show you a cartoon that I soft and I have applied for permission to use that that little caricature here.

So the whole idea behind this is, that is all this rigour towards a thorough critical analysis really worth it? we are digging, digging, digging, digging, what are we getting out of it at the end that is what critical theory really about the critics are saying about the critical theory.

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So this a very interesting images that I found in on this website and you can see that this person is saying you know, in a word, I see no synthesis of poetry and ideology and you know saved perhaps in the dialectic between meaning and chance. He is trying to be very, very, you know he's trying to rip apart whatever has been said and this lady here is only concerned about her dinner and she says okay, that's fine but where is my dinner?

You know all this analysis is great, but at the end of the day I need my dinner, so that is the biggest critique or sorry one of the most significant critiques of critical theory. What do we do out, what we discover, what we are unravel and one of the major applications of critical theory is equity and justice, it is only in and through this unraveling, it is only in and through this ripping apart of whatever you know we explore that we really get to the bottom of things.

And one major application is that we are able to at least fulfill the notion of justice or equitable treatment for the people involved for the common masses. So that is all we have time for in this discussion and we will wrap up the discussion here and with this we wrap up the discussion on the critical theory paradigm. Thank you very much for listening.