Glossary

Note: The glossary entries seek to help you understand the way in which some key terms are to be understood in the context of this book. They are not formal definitions of the terms.

Many terms explained in the text are not included in this glossary. They can be found using the index (p. 587). If there are two or more page entries for a term, the number in **bold** indicates the main page on which it is discussed.

action research Research which is orientated towards bringing about change, often involving respondents in the process of investigation. Researchers are actively involved with the situation or phenomenon being studied.

agency A social force which has an effect on how things are organized. For some, individuals are seen as the main agents. Others would focus on groups, social classes, or organizations.

case study A research strategy focusing on the study of single cases. The case can be an individual person, an institution, a situation, etc. As used in this text, case study design studies the case in its context, typically using multiple methods of data collection. Qualitative data are almost always collected; quantitative data collection can also be used.

causal relationships A relationship between A and B is causal if A causes B to occur. In realism this indicates the operation of a mechanism. The positivist view is that causal relationships are simply the constant conjunction of A and B.

cause The reason why something happens. The central goal of science is commonly viewed as seeking to establish such reasons (usually expressed in terms of developing theories and/or laws). The successionist view of causation is central to positivist science. Realism adopts a generative view of causation.

closed systems Systems from which all external influences have been excluded. Approximated to by laboratories. Real world research takes place in open systems.

coding The process of collecting observations or responses into groups which are like one another, and assigning a symbol (known as a *code*) as a name for the group.

constant conjunction When one thing regularly follows another. It is the successionist view of causation. This empirical regularity is, in the positivist view, all that is meant by causation.

constructivism *See* social constructivism.

content analysis A method of studying the content of documents or other research material. It typically involves categorizing information and then comparing the frequency of occurrence of different categories.

contingency table A table of numbers in which the relationship between two variables is shown by giving frequencies of occurrence for each of the table cells.

control A procedure employed in experimental designs with the purpose of ensuring that extraneous factors or variables do not affect assessment of the effect of the independent variable(s) on the dependent variable(s).

correlation A measure of relationships between variables describing the direction and degree of association between them. The statistic assessing this is known as a correlation coefficient. A correlation matrix is a table containing the values of the correlation coefficients for the variables involved.

credibility Refers to the ability to demonstrate that the research was designed in a manner which accurately identified and described the phenomenon to be investigated. It calls for a detailed specification of the methods used and the justification for their use.

critical realism Version of realism particularly associated with the work of Roy Bhaskar. It is critical of society and holds that social research has an emancipatory purpose.

data The plural of datum, which refers to a record of an observation. Data can be numerical (and hence quantitative) or consist of words or images (hence qualitative), which may, or may not, be subsequently quantified.

demand characteristics The understandings developed by participants about the researcher's expectations. Different demand characteristics can lead to different outcomes of an experiment.

dependent variable The variable in experimental research where one looks for possible effects of the independent variable manipulated by the experimenter.

discourse Refers to systems of knowledge and their associated practices. More narrowly, it is used in discourse analysis to refer to particular systems

of language, with a characteristic terminology and underlying knowledge base, such as in medicine.

elaboration An approach to the exploration of causal relationships between variables through the examination of contingency tables. By introducing third variables to bivariate tabulations, arguments about causal direction and spuriousness are tested.

embeddedness Realist view that human action can be understood only in terms of its location within different layers of social reality.

empiricism A school of thought claiming that experience via the senses is the source of all knowledge. It is characteristic of positivism generally. However, empiricism is also the basis for phenomenology which relies on the observation of evidence.

ethics Principles and systems relating to what is right and wrong. Standards and codes of conduct.

ethnography An approach to the description and understanding of the life and customs of people living in various cultures. Originally focused on primitive and exotic cultures, but now commonly used more generally. A full ethnography calls for participation in the culture for a period of months or even years. Ethnographic approaches may, however, be employed in smaller-scale studies.

ethnomethodology Method of identification of the assumptions through which we make sense of the social world. Involves the analysis of rules of conduct and shared cultural assumptions.

experiment A research strategy characterized by the researcher actively manipulating or changing aspects of what is studied. So-called 'true experiments' involve the researcher allocating or assigning participants to different experimental conditions on a random basis. 'Quasi-experiments' are experiments where such random allocation is not feasible.

experimenter effects Effects on the outcomes of experiments due to some aspect of the experimenter (e.g. their expectations).

fixed design research A research strategy where the research design is fixed (i.e. highly pre-specified) prior to the main phase of data collection. Almost always involves the collection of quantitative data and the use of statistical analysis. The experiment is a prime example of fixed design research.

flexible design research A research strategy where the research design develops (emerges, unfolds) during the process of data collection and analysis. Almost always involves the collection of qualitative data, but can also involve collection of quantitative data.

generalizability The characteristic of research findings that allow them to be applied to other situations and other populations.

generative view (of causation) Holds that there is a real connection between things that are causally linked. In seeking an explanation, we are not only concerned with external observable causes, but also with the possibility of there being some internal feature, liability, or power (commonly referred to by realists as a mechanism). Cause describes the potential for change; whether or not the change actually takes place (i.e. the mechanism operates) depends on the conditions and circumstances.

grounded theory An approach which emphasizes the systematic discovery of theory from data, so that theories remain grounded in observations of the social world, rather than being generated in the abstract.

Hawthorne effect The possibility that the mere fact of being observed in a research project can influence the behaviour of those being observed.

hermeneutics The interpretation of texts. Developed from the tradition of biblical scholarship, hermeneutic strategies are now employed in the analysis of all textual materials. Non-verbal things (e.g. clothing, architecture and group interactions) can be viewed as kinds of texts, and treated hermeneutically.

heterogeneity Where different constituent elements differ considerably from each other, or are of different kinds.

holistic In case study, refers to a study focusing on a single case.

homogeneity Having the different constituent elements similar to one another.

humanistic A term with many, widely differing, meanings. Here used to refer to disciplines and approaches where a scientific approach is considered inappropriate.

hybrid approach Approach which brings together in one study characteristics typical of different traditions of doing research.

hypothesis Used in this text in the restricted sense of a predicted or expected answer to a research question. Used more generally as an idea that can serve as a premise or supposition to organise certain facts and thereby guide observations.

hypothetico-deductive approach The view that science proceeds by deriving hypotheses from theories, which are then tested for truth or falsity by observation and experimentation. It is the opposite of the inductive approach, which proposes that theories can be derived from observations.

independent variable A term used in experimental design to refer to the variable which is directly manipulated by the experimenter.

inductive approach The process of making conclusions from the specific and concrete to the general and abstract.

inferential statistics Statistical tests which allow conclusions from sample data to be generalized to the population on a probabilistic basis.

internal validity The extent to which a study establishes that a factor or variable has actually caused the effect that is found (and in particular that it has not been caused by other factors).

interpretive/ist approaches Emphasize the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and cultural life. The focus is on an analysis of the meanings people confer upon their own and others' actions.

materialist Approach which maintains that 'matter' is the only substance.

mechanism Key term within the realist approach to explanation. Effects are considered to take place through the operation (or 'firing') of mechanisms. It is their action which produces results. They are underlying, i.e. typically not observable.

methodology The theoretical, political and philosophical backgrounds to social research and their implications for research practice, and for the use of particular research methods.

model A representation of a system or some other aspect of research interest. It may be expressed in symbols, equations and numbers, or in pictorial images (e.g. boxes and links between them), or in words. Models are mainly used to help explain and understand the phenomena of interest.

modus operandi Way of working.

multiple correlation A form of correlation between a dependent variable and a group of independent variables.

multivariate analysis Analysis of the relationships between three or more variables (as opposed to bivariate analysis involving two variables, or univariate analysis involving one).

natural science The science of 'nature' typified by disciplines such as physics and chemistry. Distinguished here from social science.

naturalism The view that the methods and approach of natural science can and should be used in social science.

naturalistic Term used by ethnographers and others to indicate that they are collecting naturally occurring data. It sounds confusingly similar to naturalism.

objectivity In simple terms, refers to a lack of bias or prejudice. Objectivity is associated with claims to authority, universality and detachment. Typically linked with an empiricist use which assumes that facts and values can or should be separated from each other. Subjectivists contest these claims.

open systems Opposite of closed systems.

paradigm wars Debates between proponents of different research paradigms (e.g. between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' researchers).

paradigms The overall conception and way of working shared by workers within a particular discipline or research area.

phenomenology A theoretical perspective advocating the study of direct experience taken at face value. It sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience, rather than by external, objective and physically described reality.

plagiarism Passing off the work of someone else as your own.

policy research Research seeking to inform or influence policy. One form of applied, real world research. Distinguished from academic or 'pure' research.

population The universe of elements from which the sample elements are drawn. It can be a literal population (i.e. of people) but is also used more generally (e.g. could be the population of all hospitals in a given region).

positivism A school of thought seeing reality as the sum of sense impressions, equating social sciences with natural sciences, employing a deductive logic and quantitative research methods. An extremely influential intellectual trend from the mid-nineteenth century, forming, until recently, the generally accepted view of science. Although some social scientists still take this position, it is widely discredited by methodologists and philosophers of science.

postmodernism A movement in intellectual circles of the late twentieth century which rejects the view of social science as a search for over-arching explanations of human nature or the social and cultural world. It is characterized by an eclecticism of styles, combining forms from different eras and geographic locations. There is an irreverence for past achievements, which postmodernists wish to 'deconstruct', destroy or ignore.

pragmatism An approach which makes practical consequences the test of truth. It seeks solutions demanded by the problems presented by a particular situation.

pre-experiments Studies which follow a general experimental style, but where the weakness of the design does not allow an adequate interpretation of the findings to be made.

primary data Data collected from original sources and not already published, secondary sources, such as directories or databases.

probabilistic basis When something is known or asserted to a certain degree of probability (i.e. not with certainty).

probability The likelihood that a particular relationship or event will occur. Expressed by a number between 0 (it will not occur) and 1 (it is certain to occur).

qualitative data Non-numerical data (typically but not necessarily in the form of words).

quantitative data Data in the form of numbers.

random allocation A procedure which ensures that there is an equal probability of assignment of participants to the different groups in an experiment (e.g. by using the toss of a coin to decide whether each participant is allocated to an experimental or to a control group).

randomized controlled trial (RCT) An experimental design which involves random allocation of participants, either to an experimental group which receives some form of 'treatment' or intervention, or to a control group which receives no such special treatment or intervention.

reactivity Changes produced by the process of measurement itself (e.g. by the presence of an observer).

realism The view that a reality exists independently of our thoughts or beliefs. Research is seen as referring to this reality rather than constructing it. Comes in several versions, including critical realism.

reductionism The view that theories at one level of explanation can be derived from those at a lower level (e.g. that social science theories can be derived from psychological ones, which can in turn be derived from biological science theories, etc.).

reflexivity The process of researchers reflecting upon their actions and values during research (e.g. in producing data and writing accounts), and the effects that they may have.

regression analysis A method used to study the relationship between variables, especially the extent to which a dependent variable is a function of one or more independent variables. The values of one variable can then be used to predict the values of another.

relativism A stance which rejects the notion of any absolute standards for judging truth. Radical versions contend that all explanations of the world, from science to magic, have equal status. Cultural relativism asserts that different cultures define phenomena in different ways, hence the perspective of one culture cannot be used to understand that of another.

reliability The extent to which a measuring device, or a whole research project, would produce the same results if used on different occasions with the same object of study. There are well-established procedures for assessing reliability in fixed design research. The issues are more difficult to deal with in flexible design research, where some researchers would regard the concept as inappropriate.

replication Repeating a piece of research in order to establish the reliability of its findings. Reporting of fixed design research should be in sufficient detail for replication to be feasible. Anything approaching an exact replication is rarely feasible in flexible design research.

sample The units chosen to be included in a study. The term suggests that it is drawn from a wider population Sampling can involve attempts to rep-

resent a population statistically, in which case random selection methods should be used.

scientific Relating to science. This, very broadly speaking, refers to knowledge obtained by the collection of evidence or data, critically assessed, systematized and brought under general principles.

scientistic An approach which assumes that, without considering the nature of the subject matter, following the procedures and conventions of (usually natural) science is the way to proceed.

secondary analysis Analysis of data already collected in some other context than the present study.

social constructivism (or constructionism) The view that reality is socially constructed, i.e. that the phenomena of the social and cultural world and their meanings are created in human social interaction.

social sciences The study of people and their ways using a rigorous, systematic approach. Those disciplines that have adopted a scientific model for understanding human beings and their forms of social organization. The social sciences include sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, and parts of psychology, law and geography. A wide range of applied areas and fields relating to people (e.g. business and management studies, education, health-related studies) make use of social science research approaches.

stakeholder Refers to everyone in an organization or other focus of a research study who has some interest (stake) in the research and its outcomes. Includes participants or clients, workers, management, etc. Particularly relevant in evaluation research and other approaches such as action research where there is a focus on change and hence there are likely to be direct effects on such stakeholders.

statistical inference The generalization of findings from a sample to the broader population using a statistical test.

statistical significance Refers to the probability that a particular result of a statistical test could be due to chance factors alone.

subjectivism *See* objectivism.

successionist view (of causation) Causal inferences are made solely on the basis of observational data. By setting up a sequence of observations under carefully controlled conditions, it is possible to differentiate causal links from spurious associations (e.g. as in the true experiment). A 'constant conjunction' between treatment (cause) and outcome (effect) under such conditions, constitutes the evidence for a causal relationship.

theory A proposed explanation for phenomena, or sets of occurrences, or of relationships. A statement describing how some part of the world works. To be a scientific theory, it has to be testable.

triangulation A research approach employing more than one perspective, theory, participant, method or analysis. The notion is that this helps in getting a better 'fix' on the object of study.

true experiment An experimental design in which the allocation of participants to different (e.g. experimental and control) groups is on a random basis. Contrast with a quasi-experiment where some other means of allocation is used.

trustworthiness General, relatively neutral, term referring to the extent to which one can have trust or confidence in a study and its findings.

validity The degree to which what is observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured. At its most simple, this refers to the truth status of research reports. However, a great variety of techniques for establishing the validity of measuring devices and research designs has been established, both for quantitative and for qualitative research. More broadly, the status of research as truth is the subject of considerable philosophical controversy, lying at the heart of the debate about postmodernism.

value-free (value-neutral) The notion that values (e.g. of the researcher) do not play a part in research and its outcomes.

variables A measure which can take on different values. The term is widely used in fixed design research.