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On Sociological Reflexivity

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Abstract

This article offers a critique of the self-observation of the social sciences practiced in the philosophy of the social sciences and the critique of epistemological orientations. This kind of reflection involves the curious construction of wholes under labels, which are the result of a process of distillation or abstraction of a position somewhat removed from actual research practices and from the concrete claims and findings that researchers produce, share, and debate. In this context, I call for more sociological forms of reflexivity, informed by empirical research on practices in the natural sciences and by sociomaterial approaches in science and technology studies and cultural sociology. I illustrate the use of sociological self-observation for improving sociological research with two examples: I discuss patterns in how comparisons are used in relation to how comparisons could be used, and I discuss how cases are selected in relation to how they could be selected.

Keywords: self-observation, philosophy of social science, epistemology, abstraction, positionality, comparison

Full text

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