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Finding Our Feet with Sociological Thinking Using Movement

Question

What is the relationship between moving and knowing?

Importance of the issue

Since the millennium, a new movement has emerged in the humanities and social sciences that focused on movement. Termed the mobilities paradigm, it has led to calls for new approaches to doing social research, ones which shift attention to the ways in which our movements through the world might help us make sense of things in different ways (Ingold 2011).

Informed by the mobilities paradigm, some academics have begun to theorize and conceptualize welfare practice (e.g. social work) through the lens of movement, also employing new research methods. Approaching welfare practice through the lens of movement has opened out a set of important considerations about the ways in which the movements exhibited by workers are important to what and how they come to know. What the research approaches of Ferguson (2014) and Hall and Smith (2013) unearth is that welfare

practice is predicated on forms of corporeal and embodied knowledge which is built in the environment and through movement. So, whereas historically people have imagined that the knowledge practitioners apply in practice is learned elsewhere, mobilities research has shown that the movements of practice and practitioners are central to the delivery of relational and embodied forms of welfare practice and hence to the provision of care and support.

In the two examples below, we see how mobile research methods help animate the everyday professional experience of welfare work, providing researchers with the means to provide vivid descriptions of small everyday details, rituals, movements, and habits of practice which constitute the lived experience of welfare work and its everyday interactive order. The value of this work lies not in its character of being dramatic, although undoubtedly some of it is, or even — often at least — in what is said, but in the careful attention given to detailed descriptions of scenes and movements, which depict the mundane features of the difficulties of realizing everyday social work practice.

Recommended readings and other material

Ferguson, Harry. 2016. "Researching Social Work Practice Close Up: Using Ethnographic and Mobile Methods to Understand Encounters between Social Workers, Children and Families." *British Journal of Social Work* 46 (1): 153–68.

Harry Ferguson (2008) seeks to understand the daily lives of movement of social work practitioners (including the sights, smells, feelings, and affects of practice), offering a distinctive lens on child protection social work. He employs "go-along interviews" — in cars, streets, and social work offices — encouraging practitioners to reflect on their professional actions/inactions, approaches, and feelings in the moments before and after client interactions, as well using ethnographic observation of practice itself. He uses this data to develop arguments about the place and function of movement in allowing social work practice to happen.

Hall, Tom, and Robin J Smith. 2014. "Knowing the City: Maps, Mobility and Urban Outreach Work." *Qualitative Research* 14 (3): 294–310.

Hall and Smith's research, conducted with homeless outreach workers in Cardiff, Wales, uses go-along interviews; they describe how the outreach workers are "experts in the terrain in which they operate." The works help us to reconsider the relationship between movement, perception, and knowing.

References

Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. New edition. London: Routledge.