

Sociology 2210 Qualitative Methods
Habits of Thinking and Writing: Choices in the Craft of Qualitative
Research*

Spring 2009

Thursdays 9-12

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INTRODUCTION:

“Are twelve interviews enough for my prelim paper?” – Actual Question

This course is based on the premise that there is no such thing as “Qualitative Methods.” Scholars engaged in qualitative research face a number of choices – from the epistemological assumptions they take with them, to the kinds of justification they deploy to the larger discipline, among others. But even a cursory look at recent work shows that there is not a correspondence between those identified as “qualitative scholars” and those choices, not to mention there are modes of research that are difficult to qualify as “quantitative” or “qualitative.” So rather than try to define and codify “the qualitative” (and perhaps then offer a toolbox that goes with it), this course is designed as an admittedly incomplete field guide to the choices involved in the craft of qualitative research, or, a course in Qualitative Methodology (as opposed to a course in “qualitative methods”). The course is organized around four stages, or four moments in the process of research when we face choices: *Epistemology* (How do we know what we know?), *Design* (How do structure the inquiry to know what we want to know), *Methods* (What do we actually do to get to know what we want to know?), and *Justification* (How do we present and justify what we know as valid?). The course will be oriented around the specificity of those questions to qualitative modes of research, like ethnography, but the themes are generally applicable to a wide range of research modes.

The discussion on epistemology will be a review of positions and debates in the philosophy of science as relevant to the social sciences. We will cover classical positions (from Popper’s Logical Positivism onwards), contemporary positions (such as realism and sociological feminism), and radical positions (such as Law’s anti-methodology). We will then proceed to discuss design issues with a focus on case studies, in the process dissecting two classic works in the social sciences (Freud’s Dora, and Durkheim’s Suicide). Two of the weeks are set aside for special topics, such as a discussion of particular methods (ie. ethnography) or particular issues (ethics, or politics in qualitative research). Throughout the course we will also spend some time with some “how to”

* This syllabus draws on many syllabi from my own education as well as on the syllabi of friends and other fellow travelers. It draws on the *methods* syllabi of: Collins (sociology, UW-Madison), Wright (sociology, UW- Madison), Lamont (sociology, Harvard), Auyero (sociology, SUNY-SB), Sheper Hughes and Wacquant (sociology, Berkeley), Guerring (political science, BU), Smith (political science, Penn), Saunders (philosophy), Mayer (sociology, Yale).

books, as well as with programmatic statements for sociologists that cover choices from epistemology to justification, and discuss the differences among them. You are not expected to choose among the various positions represented in the course, but instead should focus on understanding each of them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

This is a reading-intensive course and you should plan on spending **several hours a week** in reading for this course, and you should realistically assess the workload of this course before deciding to take it. You are expected to come to class having done the all reading and ready to actively participate in discussion. It is not assumed that students have background in philosophy of science or qualitative methods, but but it is assumed that you have a basic working background in social theory.

The most important requirement of this course is that you read the materials each week closely, carefully, and thoughtfully, and that you attend class as an active participant. Some of the weeks have more reading than others – the reading load generally varies inversely with its difficulty. In addition to general attendance/participation you will be expected to write weekly memos, prepare presentation(s) to the class, and two small writing projects. My assumptions in making these papers smaller and of lesser importance in the overall grade scheme is that you will devote your energies to careful reading (and thinking).

- **Memos (50 percent of final grade).** Before 6pm on Sundays (that is, the day before the seminar meeting), submit to the seminar distribution list an analytical memo of no more than 600-1,000 words. Comment succinctly on what you found most interesting, important, puzzling, infuriating, fundamental, etc. about the readings. Distributed over email in a timely manner, these abstracts will not only help you organize your response to the readings but will also serve as a guide for discussions. At least four times during the semester you should write your response as if it were a book review in a journal, based on the style and format of standard reviews in sociology journals. Altogether, these short written assignments contribute fifty percent to your final grade.
- **Critical reviews / class presentations (30 percent of final grade).** In groups of 2-3 you will write and distribute in class a discussion guide for the week's reading in which you briefly summarize some of the key ideas of the readings and offer some guiding questions for discussion. The discussion guide will also contain **a dictionary of key terms** used by the authors as well as a summary of questions submitted to the email list. I would like you to enter those terms on our class wiki. You will then briefly present some themes for discussion in the first **fifteen minutes** of class (this is a firm limit); you should **not** read your discussion guide, or feel each member of your group needs to present. Your presentation could consist of identifying particularly problematic passages in the text, contextualizing the debates implicit or explicit in the text, or preparing specific questions for discussion. I expect you to take some time preparing this presentation.

- **Small Papers (20 percent of the grade).** For the first paper, you will engage in a close, methodological critique of two classics in sociology. For the second, and final, paper, you will engage in such a critique of two books of your choosing. These papers should be no more than 10 pages (2,500-3,000 words).

BOOKS:

1. Becker, Howard. *Tricks of the Trade*.
2. Feyerabend, Paul. *Against Method*
3. Alford, Robert. *The Craft of Inquiry*.
4. George, Alexander and Andrew Benet. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*
5. Stinchcombe, Arthur L. *The Logic of Social Research*.
6. DeVault, Marjorie. *Liberating Methods: Feminism and Social Research*.
7. Law, John. *After Method*
8. Freud, Sigmund. *Dora*.
9. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. (IESBS). Available online.

Additional Readings will be made available by the instructor.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

01/29 – Introduction to the Course

Devereux, Georges. 1966. *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences*. The Hague: Mouton.

Part I: Epistemology and The Philosophy of Social Science

02/05 – Logical Positivism and its discontents

Carnap, Rudolf. 1966. "The Nature of Theories." From *Philosophical Foundations of Physics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Basic Books) 225-46.

Blackburn, Simon. 2001. "Ladies, Truth, and Logic." *New Republic* (January 29) 36-40.

Popper, Karl. 1953. "Conjectures and Refutations." Reprinted in Klemke, E.D., Robert Hollinger, and **David Wyss Rudge** (eds), *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998) 38-47.

Lakatos, Imre. 1970. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs." In Imre Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Editors. "Glossary." In Richard Boyd, Philip Gasper, and J.D. Trout (eds), *The Philosophy of Science*

Feyerabend, selections.

02/12 - The Philosophy of Social Science: Naturalism, Interpretivism, and Scientific Realism

Hempel, Carl G. 1942. "The Function of General Laws in History." *Journal of Philosophy* 39, 35-48. Reprinted in Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (eds), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

Friedman, Milton. 1958/1994. "The Methodology of Positive Economics." An abridged version Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (eds), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

Machlup, Fritz. "Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?" Reprinted in Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (eds), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

Taylor, Charles. 1994. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." Reprinted in Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (eds), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. Cambridge: MIT Press).

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of **Culture**." In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books).

George and Bennet, 2004. Case Studies and Theory Development. Chapter 7

IESBS: Theory: Conceptions in the Social Sciences.

02/19– The Philosophy of Social Science: Critical Realism, Two Versions of Feminism, and Something Altogether Different

Bohman, James. 1999. "Theories, Practices, and Pluralism: A Pragmatic Interpretation of Critical Social Science." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 29:4 (December) 459-480.

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Palgrave, 2001). Chapter 8. "Critical Realism and the Social Sciences". pp. 119-139

Harding, Sandra. 1987. "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?" In *Feminism and Methodology* (Milton Keynes:Open University Press).

DeVault, Marjorie. 1999. *Liberating Methods*. Chapters 2 and 3

Law, John. 2004. *After Method*. Chapters 1 and 2

Feyerabend, selections.

Recommended:

Donna Haraway. "Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* (14, 3 1988): 575-99.

Ray Pawson, *A Measure for Measures* (London: Routledge, 1989), ch.5.

PART II: From Conceptualization to Design

02/26 – Getting Some Things Down: What is a Concept, What is a Theory, What is a unit of analysis?

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. (2005): *The Logic of Social Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, ch. 4 and 6

Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*. Chapter 4

Gorski, Phil. (2004): *The Poverty of Deductivism: A Constructive Realist Model of Sociological Explanation*. *Sociological Methodology*, vol. 34 (2004, pp. 1-34 (see also the comments and exchanges with Goldstone, Sewell).

Coleman, James (1986): "Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (6): 1309-1335.

Recommended: IESBS: Constructivism/Constructionism; Explanation; Generalization; Grounded Theory; Ideal Type: Conceptions in the Social Sciences.

03/05 – The Mystery of Research Design

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. (2005): *The Logic of Social Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, ch. 7

Lieberson, Stanley and Freda B. Lynn (2002): "Barking Up the Wrong Branch: Scientific Alternatives to the Current Model of Sociological Science." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (August): 1-19.

Becker, Howard. Tricks of the Trade (Chapters 1-3)

Alford, 1-3.

03/12 – So, if you have a concept and a theory, what is a Case? And should you Compare?

George and Bennet, 2004. Case Studies and Theory Development. Intro and Chapter 1, 8, 9.

Charles Ragin, “Turning the Tables: How Case-Oriented Research Challenges Variable-Oriented Research,” *Comparative Social Research* 16, 1997.

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory* 16-1 (March): 4- 33.

Becker, Chapter 5.

Additional Resources on Cases and Comparisons:

John Stuart Mill, 1973. “Of the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry.” Pp. 388-406 in *A System of Logic*. London: Routledge.

John Walton, 1973. "Standardized Case Comparison: Observations on Method in Comparative Sociology," Pp. 173-188 in *Comparative Social Research, Methodological Problems and Strategies*. New York: Wiley.

Charles Ragin, 1987. *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 1-102.

David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls – Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 49, 1996.

03/19 – Three Classics:

Read Freud, Sigmund. Dora

Durkheim, Emile (1963): *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (6 ed.). New York: Free Press of Glencoe. Preface, pp. 35-39; Introduction, pp. 41-52; Book II: Social Causes, ch. 1-2, pp. 145-70; ch. 3, pp. 171-80 & 198-216; ch. 4, pp. 217-228; ch. 5, pp. 241-258.

OR... AN alternative

Tocqueville, Alexis de (1835/1840): *Democracy in America*, 2 volumes. Vol. I: Author's Introduction, ch. XVII, Vol. II, 2nd book : ch. 1, 6, 7 ; 3rd book : ch. 1, 8, 22

Part III: Strategies Of Research

04/02 – Types and Strategies of Research.

Jane Hood. Teaching Against The Text: The Case Of Qualitative Methods, in Teaching Sociology.

Jeff Goodwin and Ruth Horowitz, 2002. "Introduction: The Methodological Strengths and Dilemmas of Qualitative Sociology." *Qualitative Sociology* 25 (1): 33-47.

Read Alford, 3-7

National Science Foundation, Sociology Program. 2004. *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research*. Washington, D.C. National Science Foundation

04/09 – Types and Strategies of Research (II) – Topics TBC (to be chosen)

04/16 – Types and Strategies of Research (III) – Topics TBC

Part IV: Putting It All Together – Some Proposals

04/23 – Bourdieu's Relational Sociology and akin approaches

Bourdieu, P. 1996. "Understanding," in *Theory, Culture, and Society*.

Charles Tilly, "Mechanisms in Political Processes," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, 2001.

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 103, Number. 2. (Sep., 1997), pp. 281-317

William Sewell, Jr., 1992 "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology*. 98 (1): 1-29.

Wacquant, Loic J.D. 1989. "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory* 7:26-63.

Somers, Margaret R. 1993. "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere." *American Sociological Review* :549-595.

Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (University of California Press, 1984), chapter 1, "Elements of the Theory of Structuration", pp. 1-34, especially pp.5-38

04/30 – A Messy Approach & A Feminist Proposal:

Read Devault, Marjorie. Liberating Method, Remaining Parts

Read Law, John. After Method, Mess in Social Science. Remaining Parts

Addendum: Resources on Possible Further Topics

1. Ethics in Research:

Christopher Shea, 2000. "Don't Talk to the Humans." *Lingua Franca* 10 (6): 27-34.

John Van Maanen, 2001 (1983). "The Moral Fix: On the Ethics of Field Work." Pp. 269-287 in *Contemporary Field Research*.

Katherine S. Newman, 2002. "Qualitative Research on the Frontlines of Controversy." *Sociological Methods and Research* 31 (2): 123-130.

Scheper-Hughes, "Ire in Ireland," *Ethnography* 1-1, July 2000, pp. 117-140.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2004. "Parts unknown: Undercover Ethnography of the Organs-Trafficking Underworld." *Ethnography* 5-1 (March): 29-73.

2. Comparative Historical Sociology:

Victoria Bonnell, 1980. "The Use of Theory, Concepts, and Comparison in Historical Sociology." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (2): 155-173.

Theda Skocpol, 1984. "Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology." Pp. 356-391 in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stanley Lieberson, 2000. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." Pp. 105-118 in Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Theda Skocpol, 2003. "Doubly Engaged Social Science: The Promise of Comparative Historical Analysis. Pp. 407-429 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. New York: Cambridge University Press.

James Mahoney, 2004. "Comparative-Historical Methodology." *Annual Review of*

Sociology 30: 81-101.

Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, 1980.

Richard Snyder, "Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36, No. 1, Spring 2001.

3. Interviewing:

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. 1994. "Interviewing. The Art of Science," in Denzin and Lincoln *Handbook of Qualitative Research*

Wacquant, L. 1998. "Inside the Zone. The Social Art of the Hustler in the Black American Ghetto," *Theory, Culture and Society*. Vol.15(2):1-36.

Bourgois, Ph. 1998. "Just Another Night in Shooting Gallery." *Theory, Culture and Society*. Vol.15(2):37-66.

Tilly, Ch. 1998. "The Trouble with Stories." Unpublished Manuscript.

Marcus, G. 1985. "Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System," in *Writing Culture*, edited by Clifford and Marcus.

Joel Aberbach et. al., "Exploring Elite Political Attitudes: Some Methodological Lessons," *Political Methodology* 2, 1975.

Stanley Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 3-54, 228-237.

William Foot Whyte, "Interviewing in Field Research," in Robert G. Burgess, *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982). pp. 111-22.

4. Ethnography

The whole Political Ethnography Syllabus, PLUS

"Ethnography and Participant Observation" by Atkinson and Hammersley ." In Denzin and Lincoln *Handbook of Qualitative Research*

Geertz, Clifford. "From the Native Point of View" in *Local Knowledge*.

Wacquant, Loic. 1995. "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about their Trade." *Theory and Society* 24:489-535.

Wacquant, Loic. 1995. "Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers." *Body and Society* 1,1:65-93

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In The Interpretation of Cultures

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. "Introduction: Subject, Method, and Scope of Inquiry," and "The Meaning of the Kula," in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge and Sons pp. 1-25, 509-518.

Goffman, Erving. 1989. "On Fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18-2 (July): 123-132.

Katz, Jack. 1997. "On Ethnographic Warrants." *Sociological Methods and Research* 25-4: 391- 423.

Burawoy, Michael. 2000. "Reaching for the Global." Pp. 1-39 in M. Burawoy et al., *Global Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*, chapter 1, pp. 1-46: "Discipline and Practice: The 'Field' as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology."

Stocking, George, Jr. 1992. "The Ethnographers Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tyler to Malinowski." Pp.12-59 in *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Clifford, James. 1998. "Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology." Pp. 185-222 in Gupta, and Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations*.

Sociological Methods and Research, 25-4, May 1997, Special issue on the Value-Added Contributions of Ethnographic Research.

Hughes, Everett C. [1960] 1970. "The Place of Fieldwork in Social Science." Pp. 496-506 in *The Sociological Eye: Selected Papers*. New Brunswick: Transaction.