

**Sociology 501
Fall 2007
Wed 1:10-3:50**

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SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

Social research is both an art and a science, involving the craft of representation as well as the rigor of systematic investigation. In this class we will try to hold these two sides of the research endeavor – representation and rigor – in view simultaneously while exploring a wide range of methodological approaches. We will try to understand how researchers operating in different traditions and sub-fields grapple with the problem of investigating an empirical world that is always messier and more complex than our models and methods can encompass. Since I believe that method can never be detached from theory, we will discuss how methodological approaches involve theoretical assumptions about how we come to observe, understand, and explain social phenomena. We will examine what is gained – and what is sacrificed – in the various simplifying distortions that ALL research involves if it wants to penetrate beneath a surface description of social reality.

The course is organized in three main sections, borrowing from Andrew Abbott's discussion of "explanatory programs" in *Methods of Discovery*. After an introductory discussion about formulating social questions, we will first examine the "semantic" program, aimed at translating complex social reality into terms that are relatively more comprehensible. These include ethnographic, oral history, and interviewing approaches, as well as different kinds of descriptive "pattern analysis" examining the structure of discourse, relations, and sequences. We will then examine the "syntactic" program, which is aimed at supplying elegant and logical explanations of social processes and mechanisms. These include some studies of micro-interaction, along with historical narration, comparative analysis, formal modeling and simulation research. Third, we will look at the "pragmatic" program, which attempts to develop explanations that allow us to intervene in social reality, including experimental studies as well as survey research and policy analysis. While these methodologies overlap in some ways, they do provide a useful starting point for sorting through the different assumptions underlying research orientations that often see themselves in opposition to each other. We will close by examining the rhetoric of social research as well as some of the heuristic strategies researchers use in framing their questions, methods, and findings.

During the class we will pay special attention to four problems that all researchers have to deal with in some way: 1) the problem of *reflectivity*, that is, the role of the researcher in the research, and how she comes to know her object/subject of study; 2) the problem of *selection/reduction*, i.e., the simplifying distortions that all research involves; 3) the problem of *generalizability*, i.e., how the researcher draws implications from the study beyond the case(s) at hand; and 4) the problem of *contingency*, i.e., how the researcher deals with particularities of time and place, which are often resistant to prediction (really, the flip side of #3).

The requirement of the class include the following: 1) First of all come to class and **join the discussion!** I want to see your bright eyes and bright minds thinking hard about these research approaches and wrestling with their possibilities and their pitfalls. I'm teaching this class for the first time, so I'll probably stumble around a bit, which gives you all permission to stumble around a bit as well, as long as we all stumble together productively to shed light on the process of sociological investigation.

2) Second, please come to class having done ALL of the required readings. I'm giving you a lot of exemplar studies to read (including books and articles), so of course, we're not going to be focusing on the substantive details of all of the readings. I want you to train yourselves to read methodologically, that is, with an eye to *explanatory program, evidentiary strategy, theory-method assumptions, and the ways that they deal with the problems of reflectivity, selection/reduction, generalizability, and contingency*. Each week, you should write a brief (1-2 page) **informal reading memo** (to be posted on the Sakai website) exploring these questions.

3) To help us zero in on the guiding questions, we're going to experiment with **tag-team presentations**. They won't actually be formal presentations, but rather I'll assign a quarter of the class each week to focus on one of the four problems above, on a rotating basis. Then I'll ask each "team" to talk about how those problems are represented in the readings. Each team is encouraged to chat about this ahead of time so that they can come with deeper thoughts on the topic born of collective synergy. Here's how it will work: each class member will be assigned to the A, B, C, or D team. On a rotating basis, each team will be assigned to one of four problems 1) reflectivity; 2) selection/reduction; 3) generalizability; and 4) contingency. So, for example, if Week 3 is listed as A1, B2, C3, D4, then the A team will focus on reflectivity, the B team on selection/reduction, and so on. Then, the following week, the focus will shift to A2, B3, C4, and D1, and the A team will look at selection/reduction, the B team at generalizability, C team at contingency, and D team at reflectivity. Get it? Let's give it a try!

4) You will also be required to do **three research exercises**, focusing on 1) ethnography and interviewing, 2) historical analysis, and 3) experimental or survey research. Take these seriously, as the hands-on challenge will help you to understand the difficulties involved and deepen your understanding of the possibilities and limitations of different approaches. You'll have a couple of weeks to do this, and they must be handed in by Friday of the week indicated in the syllabus. There is no final paper.

There are **eight required books**, available at Livingston bookstore. While we won't be reading every page of all of these, they are all worth owning and having on your bookshelves as you begin your sociological careers:

Andrew Abbott, *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences* (Norton 2004)
 Charles Ragin, *Constructing Social Research* (Pine Forge 1994)
 Loic Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford 2006)
 Beth Roy, *Some Trouble with Cows: Making Sense of Social Conflict* (California 1994)
 Michele Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper Middle Classes* (Chicago 1994)

Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1948 to the Commune* (Chicago, 1995)

Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (California 1993)

Fischer, Claude (et al), *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton 1996)

Most of the **required articles** are available online through the Rutgers library system. The handful that are not available (marked with an *) will be Xeroxed and left in the sociology reading room and/or posted on the Sakai class website (to be explained in class).

WARNING: The readings in the syllabus may be subject to change, as I get my head into the issues and come up with new ideas based on your interests and wherever we take the discussion. I'll post any changes on the Sakai website.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Week One (9/5): Social science research as cubist art

Recommended: Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" In *From Max Weber*.

Week Two (9/12): Finding a question: puzzles, representations, and explanations

Ragin, Charles. *Constructing Social Theories*, Chaps 1-3 (pp. 2-76)

Abbott, Andrew. *Methods of Discovery*, Chaps 1-2 (pp. 1-79);

I may have you read a couple more chapters; if so, I'll let you know (through Sakai) by the end of the week.

II. THE SEMANTIC PROGRAM

Week Three (9/19): Engaging the setting: ethnography and participant observation

Wacquant, Loic, *Body and Soul*, pp. 3-149.

Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2002. "Doing the Hustle: Constructing the Ethnographer in the American Ghetto." *Ethnography*, 3:91-111.

Mische, Ann. "Simmelian Ethnography," *Political Sociology* (newsletter of the ASA section on Political Sociology)*

A1, B2, C3, D4

Recommended: Ragin, Chapter 4.

BEGIN ETHNOGRAPHIC/INTERVIEWING EXERCISE
(Due Week 6 by Friday 10/12)

Week Four (9/25): Reconstructing events: oral history as clue gathering

Roy, Beth. *Some Trouble with Cows*, pp TBA.

History Matters website: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html> (Please work through all of the pages, including reading and reflecting on the examples.)

A2, B3, C4, D1

Recommended: If possible, take a look at this article by Carlo Ginzberg, which outlines a clue-based approach to historical analysis: "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm." Pp.96-125 in Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method (Johns Hopkins University Press)*

Week Five (10/3): Asking about experience: in-depth interviewing

Lamont, Michele. *Moneys, Morals, and Manners*, pp. TBA.

Weiss, Robert S. 2004. "In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews." *Contexts* Vol. 3, Issue 4, pp. 44-51.*

Small, Mario, "Lost in Translation: How Not to Make Qualitative Research More Scientific." Working paper available here:

<http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/nsfqual/Small%20Paper.pdf>

A3, B4, C1, D2

Recommended: You may want to browse other papers from an NSF sponsored workshop on interdisciplinary standards for systematic qualitative research, especially Hoschchild, Young, Silbey, others: <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/nsfqual/>

Week Six (10/10): Locating patterns: mapping discourse, relations, and sequences

Mullaney, Jame. 2001. "Like A Virgin: Temptation, Resistance, and the Construction of Identities Based on "Not Doings." *Qualitative Sociology* 24: 3-24.

Cerulo, Karen A. 1998. "The Cognitive Order of Right and Wrong. Pp. 39-75 in *Deciphering Violence: The Cognitive Structure of Right and Wrong*, New York: Routledge.*

McLean, Paul. 1998. "A Frame Analysis of Favor Seeking in the Renaissance: Agency, Networks, and Political Culture." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 51-91.

Mohr, John W. and Vincent Duquenne. 1997. "The duality of culture and practice: Poverty relief in New York City, 1888-1917." *Theory & Society* 26: 305-356.

Abbott, Andrew and Alexandra Hrycak . 1990. "Measuring Resemblance in Sequence Data: An Optimal Matching Analysis of Musicians' Careers." *American Journal of Sociology* 96:144-185.

A4, B1, C2, D3

Recommended: For two very different general statements on pattern analysis, see Eviatar Zerubavel 2007 "Generally Speaking: The Logic and Mechanics of Social Pattern Analysis." Sociological Forum 22 (2007): 131-4, and Andrew Abbott, "From Causes to Events: Notes on Narrative Positivism." Sociological Methods and Research 20(1992): 428-55.

Ethnography/interviewing exercise due: Friday 10/12

III. THE SYNTACTIC PROGRAM

Week Seven (10/17): Dissecting interactions: conversation analysis and discursive settings

- Schegloff, Emmanuel. 1996. "Confirming Allusions: Toward an Empirical Account of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 161-216.
- Clayman, Steven E. 1992. "Footings in the Achievement of Neutrality: The Case of New-Interview Discourse," pp. 163-198 in *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*, edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.*
- Gibson, David. 2003. "Participation Shifts: Order and Differentiation in Group Conversation." *Social Forces* 81: 1135-81.
- Perrin, Andrew. 2006. "Political Microcultures: Linking Civic Life and Democratic Discourse." *Social Forces* 84: 1049-1082.
- A1, B2, C3, D4

Recommended: You may want to take a look at a few more CA articles to get a sense of the genre. Here are two good ones by Emmanuel Schegloff, "Analyzing Single Episodes of Interaction: An Exercise in Conversation Analysis." Social Psychology Quarterly 50 (1987): 101-114; and "Repair After Next Turn: The Last Structurally Provided Defense of Intersubjectivity in Conversation," American Journal of Sociology 97 (1992): 1295-1345. You might also look at other essays in the Talk at Work volume from which the Clayman article is taken (above).

Week Eight (10/24): Tracing historical change: historical narration and relational complexity

- Gould, Roger. *Insurgent Identities*, pp. TBA
- Markoff, John. 1997. "Peasants Help Destroy an Old Regime and Defy a New One: Some Lessons from (and for) the Study of Social Movements" *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 1113-1142.
- Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2007. "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:527-49.*
- A2, B3, C4, D1

BEGIN HISTORICAL EXERCISE (Due Week 10, Friday 11/16)

Week Nine (10/31): Comparing across time and place: small-n historical analysis

- Goldstone, Jack. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, pp TBA.
- Ragin, Chapter 5 (pp. 105-130).
- Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70: 307-320.
- A3, B4, C1, D2

Week Ten (11/7): Modeling social dynamics: simulation and formal analysis

- Rauch, Jonathon. 2002. "Seeing Around Corners." *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2002, pp. 35-48.*
- Granovetter, Mark. 1978. "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 1420-1443.
- Hyojoung Kim and Peter S. Bearman. 1997. "The Structure and Dynamics of Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 62: 70-93.
- Mark, Noah. 1998. "Beyond Individual Differences: Social Differentiation from First Principles." *American Sociological Review* 63: 309-330.
- Axelrod, Robert. 1997. "Advancing the Art of Simulation in the Social Sciences." Pp. 21-40 in Rosario Conte, Rainer Hegselmann and Pietro Terna (eds.), *Simulating Social Phenomena* (Berlin: Springer, 1997).*
- A4, B1, C2, D3

Historical exercise due: Friday 11/6

IV. THE PRAGMATIC PROGRAM

Week Eleven (11/14): Controlling the context: experimental research

- Lovaglia, Michael J. 2003. "From Summer Camps to Glass Ceilings: The Power of Experiments." *Contexts*, Vol. 2, Issue 4, pp. 42-49.*
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 1982. "Status in Groups: The Importance of Motivation." *American Sociological Review* 47: 76-88.
- Robinson, Dawn T and Lynn Smith-Lovin. 1992. "Selective Interaction as a Strategy for Identity Maintenance: An Affect Control Model." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55: 12-28.
- Johnson, Cathryn. 1994. "Gender, Legitimate Authority, and Leader-Subordinate Conversations." *American Sociological Review* 59:122-135.
- Lovaglia, Michael et al. 1998. "Status Processes and Mental Ability Test Scores." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 195-228.
- A1, B2, C3, D4

BEGIN EXPERIMENTAL OR SURVEY EXERCISE (due Week 14, Friday 12/14)

No Class 11/21: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!

Week Twelve (11/28): Measuring large-scale variation: survey analysis and population research

Ragin, Chapter 6 (131-153).

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Matthew E Brashears. 2006. "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades." *American Sociological Review* 71: 353-375.

Bearman, Peter S. and Hannah. 2001. "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse." *American Journal of Sociology* 106: 859-912.

Carr, Deborah. 2004. "'My Daughter Has a Career - I Just Raised Babies': Women's Intergenerational Social Comparisons." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67(2): 132-54.

Shuman, Howard. 2002. "Sense and Nonsense about Surveys." *Contexts* Spring 2002, pp. 40-47.*

A2, B3, C4, D1

Week Thirteen (12/5): Debating statistical findings: multivariate policy research

Fischer, Claude, et al. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*, pp TBA.

READ APPENDIX 1 FIRST!!!

Additional readings TBA.

A3, B4, C1, D2

V. THE RHETORIC OF RESEARCH

Week Fourteen (12/12): Making a splash: framing puzzles, methods, and findings

Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, pp. TBA.

Additional readings TBA.

Statistical exercise due, Friday 12/14.