

Qualitative Methods

Seminar in Sociology 920:615

Spring 2009

Thursday 1:10-3:50, LSH A-256

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Description

As social scientists, we often define our scholarship by our methodological approach. It is never simply the N of our study that defines our methodology, neither does the method we choose necessarily fall into one methodological category. What do we mean when we employ qualitative methodology? Of what do qualitative methods consist, and how do we choose the proper method to answer our research questions? Where do qualitative methods fit within the discipline of sociology, and, in turn, how are they disciplined by the practice of sociology? This seminar will address these basic questions, and will attempt to grapple with both the “how-to” of qualitative methods, and to provide an analysis and critique of scholarship that has been produced through the use of qualitative methodology.

This is a course on epistemology as much as on methodology, and we will explore the ways in which social science scholarship is mainly an attempt to answer pressing questions, guiding our approach to methodology. We should also recognize that the methods we choose can be products of our institutional setting, our geographical location and our historical moment; in effect, the methodology of the course will call on us to analyze the scholarship itself, while at the same time reading it carefully as scholarship that exemplifies various aspects of qualitative method. To this end, we will read texts that take up a number of methodological approaches, geographical sites and historical periods, as well as texts that look at social practices, localities, political formations and historical moments in relation to one another. You will also be asked to formulate a research question or puzzle and to then design a research proposal that engages one or more methods in order to answer your central research question.

Requirements

You will be expected to attend class, read carefully and participate actively in the weekly discussion. Attendance and participation, along with a weekly one-page discussion paper, will count for 30% of your grade. Other requirements include formulating a research question based on your scholarly interests (15%) and leading discussion for one class (15%). The final requirement is a research proposal that you design, which should be 10-15 pages long and should provide an outline of your project, a discussion of relevant literature and the proposed project's contributions to the literature, an outline of the research methods you will employ, and the cases, variables or sites you will examine, a time frame for the project and a proposed budget of \$15-20,000 with which to carry out the project (40%).

Readings

The following books are available at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore on Livingston Campus and on reserve at Kilmer Library:

Javier Auyero, *Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests and the Quest for Recognition* (Durham, 2003: Duke University Press). [HQ1236.5.A7A92 2003]

Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York, 2008: Penguin Press). [E184.A65B35 2008]

Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, 1992: University of Chicago Press). [HM24.B669 1992]

Ethel Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry* (Minneapolis, 2007: University of Minnesota Press). [HD2337.B76 2007]

Sven Eliaeson, *Max Weber's Methodologies: Interpretation and Critique* (Boston, 2002: Polity Press). [HM511.E43 2002]

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, 1995: University of Chicago Press). [GN307.7.E44 1995]

Fuyuki Kurasawa, *The Work of Global Justice: Human Rights as Practices* (New York, 2007: Cambridge University Press). [JC571.K865 2007]

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, 2008: Harvard University Press). [Q175.5.L3513 1993]

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York, 2000: Oxford University Press). [H61.M5 1959a]

Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method* (Urbana, 2003: University of Illinois Press). [HX39.5.O55 2003]

Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets* (Chicago, 2008: University of Chicago Press). [HV6439.U7C46 2008]

Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York, 1995: New Press). [HN29.W42 1994]

Robert Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley, 2006: University of California Press). [F128.9.M5S64 2006]

Class Schedule

- January 22: **Introduction**
- January 29: **The Sociological Imagination**
C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*
- February 5: **Classics and Debates**
Sven Eliaeson, *Max Weber's Methodologies: Interpretation and Critique*
Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*
- February 12: **Questions and Engagements**
Research question due today
Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day*
- February 19: **Learning from Strangers**
Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*
- February 26: **Writing Fieldnotes**
Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*
- March 5: **Reflexivity**
Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*
- March 12: **Lives I**
Robert Smith, *Mexican New York*
- March 19: **Spring Break!!!**
- March 26: **Lives II**
Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?*
- April 2: **Rethinking Comparisons**
Fuyuki Kurasawa, *The Work of Global Justice*
Ethel Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry*
- April 9: **Rethinking Evidence**
Javier Auyero, *Contentious Lives*
- April 16: **Rethinking Locations, Rethinking Methods**
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*
- April 23: **Presentations**
Research proposal is due this week.
- April 30: **Conclusions**