

Sociology 501
Fall 2009
Tues 1:10-3:50

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Office hrs: Wed 3-4pm or by appt

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 local particularities of time and place, which are often resistant to prediction (really, the flip side of #3).

The requirements of the class include the following: 1) First of all come to class and **join the discussion!** I want us all to think hard about these research approaches and wrestle with the tradeoffs that they involve. Keep in mind that all of the methods have strengths and weaknesses; they allow us to see some aspects of social life, but potentially obscure others. You may feel a natural affinity with some methods and a distaste for others; that's fine, as long as you're willing to explore some of the reasons behind your reactions and keep an open mind as to the possibilities of diverse approaches. (30% of grade)

2) Second, please come to class having done ALL of the required readings. I'm giving you a lot of exemplar studies to read (both books and articles), so of course we won't be focusing on the substantive details of the readings, but rather on their methodological contribution. Each week, you should write a brief (1-2 page) **reading memo**, which should be posted on the Sakai website under the Discussion and Private Messages/Class Discussions section. Memos should be posted by the Monday evening before class (or at least before I wake up at 5am on Tuesday). (30% of grade)

In these memos, you should do a number of things. 1) You should show me that you have done the readings and centrally understand their particular methodological contributions. You should focus on their *explanatory program* (proposed link between theory, method, and empirical world; legitimate ways of framing questions and pursuing answers) and *evidentiary strategy* (selection, organization, analysis, and representation of supporting data). 2) You should elaborate on any questions, critiques, insights, or applications that occur to you as you read the material. 3) you should choose AT LEAST ONE of the four central problems (*reflectivity, selection/reduction, generalizability, and contingency*) to reflect on in your memo ON A ROTATING BASIS.

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. Please focus on this problem someplace in your memo **and come prepared to talk about it in class** -- I will be counting on you to share your insights in the discussion.

4) You will also be required to do **four research exercises**, focusing on 1) ethnography, 2) interviewing, 3) historical analysis, and 4) 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. *On the Tuesday preceding the due date, we will do an in-class workshop about your experiences conducting the assigned research; thus your research should be completed by that Tuesday, even though the written report is due on Friday.* There is no final paper. (40% of grade)

There are **seven 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, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Harvard 2002)
 Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (California 1993)
 Claude Fischer (et al), *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton 1996)

In addition, there are a number of other supplementary texts we'll be drawing on that you should consider buying, especially if you think you will focus on this methodology. I'll put the relevant selections on line, but the entire books are helpful, and I would **highly recommend** getting them from Amazon.com or some other source:

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, 1995)
 Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (Free Press 1994).
 Michael R. Hill. *Archival Strategies and Techniques* (Sage 1993).
 Jean M. Converse and Stanley Presser. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire* (Sage 1986).

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 announce any changes on the Sakai website.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Week One (9/1): Social science research as cubist art

Recommended: Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation." In *From Max Weber*, and also:
http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/lecture/science_frame.html

NOTE: NO CLASS TUESDAY 9/8 since Rutgers will be on a Monday schedule

Week Two (9/15): Finding a question: puzzles, representations, and explanations

Ragin, Charles. *Constructing Social Theories*, Chaps 1-3 (pp. 2-76)
 Abbott, Andrew. *Methods of Discovery*, Chaps 1-3 (pp. 2-109)

NOTE: In your memo for this week, please reflect on where your own research experience and inclinations (however sketchy) fit in the scheme Abbott lays out in Chapter 1, as well as how you have dealt with some of the tensions he describes in

Chapter 2. In addition, please talk about any other reactions -- questions, excitement, confusion, reservations -- you had in relation to both the Abbott and Ragin readings.

Begin Ethnography exercise (Due Friday Oct 2). You should have your observations done by 9/29 for in-class workshopping.

II. THE SEMANTIC PROGRAM

Week Three (9/22): Engaging the setting: ethnography and participant observation

Adler, Patricia and Peter Adler. 2003. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field." *Contexts Reader* pp. 490-497.*

Emerson, Robert M. et. al.,. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 1-16.

Wacquant, Loic, *Body and Soul*, READ CAREFULLY Preface to US edition (pp. vii-xii), Prologue pp. 6-11; READ QUICKLY pp13-149 (start slowly and speed up toward the end)

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

A1, B2, C3, D4

Recommended: Ragin, Chapter 4, as well as Chapters 2-3 in Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (with the rest of the chapters as desired).

Week Four (9/29): Reconstructing events: oral history as clue gathering

***In-class workshop: your experiences doing ethnographic observations*

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.)

Roy, Beth. *Some Trouble with Cows*, READ CAREFULLY Introduction and Chaps 1-2 (pp. 1-71), READ QUICKLY Chaps 3-6 (72-136) and Chap 10 (184-194.) If you have time, the other more theoretical chapters are also interesting.

Sarkar, Mahua. "Difference in Memory," pp. 139-168.

A2, B3, C4, D1

Recommended: You may be interested in 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).*

ETHNOGRAPHY EXERCISE DUE Friday Oct 2 (on Sakai)

Week Five (10/6): Asking about experience: in-depth interviewing

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

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers*, pp. 1-37.*

Lamont, Michele. *The Dignity of Working Men. . READ CAREFULLY: Introduction, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-51), Intro to Part II (149-152); Conclusion (241-249); Appendices A and B (251-268). SKIM: Chaps 2-3 (pp 55-149), at least one of Chaps 4-6 (149-240)*

A3, B4, C1, D2

Recommended: The rest of the Weiss book, Learning from Strangers, is excellent and provides great advice on the process of interviewing. You may also want to browse papers from an NSF sponsored workshop on interdisciplinary standards for systematic qualitative research, especially Small, Hoshchild, Young, Silbey, others:

<http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/nsfqual/papers.htm>

Begin Interviewing exercise (Due Fri Oct 23). *You should have your interview done by 10/20 for in-class workshopping.*

Week Six (10/13): Locating patterns: mapping discourse, relations, and sequences

Eviatar Zerubavel 2007 "Generally Speaking: The Logic and Mechanics of Social Pattern Analysis." *Sociological Forum* 22 (2007): 131-4

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.

Mische, Ann and Philippa Pattison. 2000. "Composing a Civic Arena: Publics, Projects, and Social Settings" *Poetics* 27: 163-194.

A4, B1, C2, D3

Recommended: For a nice example of Zerubavel style social pattern analysis, see Jamie Mullaney (2001). "Like A Virgin: Temptation, Resistance, and the Construction of Identities Based on "Not Doings." Qualitative Sociology 24: 3-24 (Jamie was a Rutgers sociology Ph.D. and won a prize for this article).

For a very different general statements on pattern analysis, see Andrew Abbott, "From Causes to Events: Notes on Narrative Positivism." Sociological Methods and Research 20(1992): 428-55. For an application to temporal sequences, see 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.*

III. THE SYNTACTIC PROGRAM

Week Seven (10/20): Dissecting interactions: conversation analysis and discursive settings

- ** *In-class workshop: your experiences with interviewing*
- ** *Guest speaker: David Gibson*

- Schegloff, Emmanuel. 1996. "Confirming Allusions: Toward an Empirical Account of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 161-216.
- Lutfey, Karen and Douglas W. Maynard. 2003. "Bad News in Oncology: How Physician and Patient Talk About Death and Dying Without Using Those Words." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 61: 321-341
- 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

NOTE: These readings are somewhat unusual and can be challenging. I have some detailed suggestions on how to approach them, which I'll post on Sakai. If I haven't posted them before you start reading, please send me an email reminder.

INTERVIEWING EXERCISE DUE Friday Oct 23 (on Sakai)

Week Eight (10/27): Comparing across time and place: small-n historical analysis

- Ragin, Chapter 5 (pp. 105-130).
- Lieberson, Stanley. 1992. "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 *What is a Case?*, edited by Charles Ragin and Howard Becker (Cambridge 1992).*
- Goldstone, Jack. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. **READ CAREFULLY** Preface (pp. xxi-xxix) and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-62); **SKIM ONE** of the case studies (which we'll distribute in class) and Chapter 6 (459-497); look at Chap 5 if you're interested.
- A3, B4, C1, D2

NOTE: This week and next, don't get bogged down with the historical detail in the substantive texts. Focus on how Goldstone frames his theoretical and empirical questions, his evidentiary strategy, his use of comparisons, his use of formal models, and his theoretical generalizations.

Begin Historical exercise (Due Friday Nov 13): *You should have your research questions, archival sources, and evidentiary strategy ready by 11/10 for in-class workshopping.*

Week Nine (10/28): Uncovering past patterns and processes: archival research

** *Visit to Special Collections and University Archives, Alexander Library.*

Hill, Michael R. 1993. "Archival Strategies and Techniques," pp. 1-50.

Gould, Roger v. 2000. "Revenge as Sanction and Solidarity Display: An Analysis of Vendettas in Nineteenth-Century Corsica." *American Sociological Review* 65: 682-704.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 1993. "Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women's Groups and the Transformation of U.S. Politics, 1890-1920." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 755-798.

Sarkar, Mahua. 2001. "Muslim Women and the Politics of (In)visibility in Late Colonial Bengal." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14: 226-250.

A2, B3, C4, D1

NOTE: *While reading the three substantive articles, try to get a sense of how the authors frame the historical puzzle, their evidentiary strategy, their use of archival materials, and their theoretical generalizations, without being concerned with all of the historical details. I also HIGHLY RECOMMEND that you also read the following two articles. The first gives an overview of recent trends in historical sociology, while the second discuss feminist challenges to work in historical sociology:*

*Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2007. "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence." Annual Review of Sociology 33:527-49.**

*"Feminist Challenges," pp 45-56 in the Introduction to Remaking Modernity: Politics, History and Sociology, edited by Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff (Duke 2005).**

Week Ten (11/10): Modeling social dynamics: simulation and formal analysis

** *In-class workshop: your experiences formulating a historical research project*

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.

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).*

Macy, Michael and John Skvoretz. 1998. "The Evolution of Trust and Cooperation between Strangers: A Computational Model." *American Sociological Review*: 63: 638-660.

Mark, Noah. 1998. "Beyond Individual Differences: Social Differentiation from First Principles." *American Sociological Review* 63: 309-330.

A4, B1, C2, D3

NOTE: As always, I recommend reading in the order they are listed above. The Rausch is journalistic so should be pretty readable, and the Granovetter is a classic and quite readable as well. Axelrod is an insider's justification for the approach (just skip what you don't understand). To avoid tearing your hair out in the more technical articles (esp. the Macy and Skvoretz and the Mark articles), read the theoretical setup, the simplifying assumptions, and the operationalization of the theoretical model without worrying too much about the mathematical formalisms. Then quickly thumb through the analysis, taking a look at the graphs, and read the Discussion/Conclusion/Directions for future research.

For background on the Prisoner's Dilemma (discussed in the Macy and Skvoretz article) see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner's_dilemma/

HISTORICAL EXERCISE DUE Friday 11/13 (on Sakai)

IV. THE PRAGMATIC PROGRAM

Week Eleven (11/17): 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.*

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.

Lovaglia, Michael et al. 1998. "Status Processes and Mental Ability Test Scores." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 195-228.

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 937-75.

A1, B2, C3, D4

NOTE: Again, don't get too hung up on the statistical models, but do focus on the experimental design, especially the ways that the authors move from theory to hypotheses; the way that variables are operationalized by means of manipulation and control of the experimental conditions; and how they derive generalizations from the experimental results.

*Recommended: For another good article that combines laboratory experiments with field experiments, see Correll, Shelley J, Stephen Benard, and In Paik. 2007. "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?" *American Journal of Sociology* 112: 1297-1338*

Begin Statistical exercise (Due Friday 12/11). *We will do two workshops for this exercise. On 12/1, we will talk about locating and working with survey data. You should come with a statistical research question formulated, a publicly available survey data set you are interested in exploring, and an initial operationalization strategy. On 12/8, you should have your hypothesis, data set, sampling strategy, operationalization of variables – and if possible, some basic descriptive statistics -- ready to discuss in more detail.*

Week Twelve (11/24): Measuring large-scale variation: survey analysis and population research

** *Guest speaker: Debby Carr*

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

Converse, Jean M. and Stanley Presser. 1986. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire* (Sage 1986). Pp. 9-47.

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.

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

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

A2, B3, C4, D1

NOTE: These three substantive articles draw on three important social science surveys: the General Social Survey (McPherson et al), the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (Carr), and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Bearman and Brueckner). Focus on the relation between theory, hypotheses, and operationalization of the variables, as well as issues related to survey research: e.g., sampling, question formation, data collection techniques, etc. Don't worry too much about the statistical modeling yet, but do look at how the Discussion and Conclusions sections to see how they generalize from the statistical findings.

Week Thirteen (12/1): Debating statistical findings: multivariate policy research

** *In class workshop: locating and working with survey data (see above)*

Ragin, Chapter 6 (131-153).

Fischer, Claude, et al. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Please *read* (IN THIS ORDER!!!!): Preface, Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Chapters 1-4, Chapters 8-9. If you have time, *skim* chapters 5-7 as well, but focus most closely on 1-4, which has the core of their critique.

Additional reading on statistical modeling strategies. TBA.

A3, B4, C1, D2

V. PROFESSIONS AND PUBLICS

Week Fourteen (12/8): Puzzles, professional engagement and public sociology

*** In-class workshop: your experiences formulating a statistical research project (see above)*

Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, Chaps 4-7.

Buraway, Michael. 2005. "For Public Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 70: 4–28.

Smith-Lovin, Lynn. 2007. "Do We Need a Public Sociology? It Depends What You Mean by *Sociology*." Pp. 124-132 in *Public Sociology: Fifteen Sociologists Debate Politics and the Profession in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Dan Clawson et. al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

*Recommended: Check out this website for examples of what other Berkeley sociologists consider "public sociology": <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/index.php?page=producing>
For a contending view, check out this page in opposition to Buraway's conception of public sociology: <http://www.cas.sc.edu/socy/faculty/deflem/Savesociology/default.html>*

STATISTICAL EXERCISE DUE Friday 12/11.