

Logic of Inquiry in Case Study Methods
SOCI 50068
Winter 2010
Professor Mario L. Small

LOGISTICS

The class will meet on Tuesdays from 3:00pm to 5:50pm in HM 141. E-mail: mariosmall@uchicago.edu. Office hours are Tuesdays from 1:00pm to 2:45pm, SS 312. Please sign up outside the office door.

DESCRIPTION

This seminar covers basic techniques for interpreting and analyzing case study data, whether ethnographic or historical. Our objective is to think more clearly and logically about case study methods. The seminar will tackle head-on important questions facing case study methods in sociology today: Is case study research, whether ethnographic or historical, scientific? By what criteria does it meet or fail to meet the standards of scientific evidence? Does this matter? What are the roles of induction and deduction in qualitative research? Do case studies effectively verify hypotheses, or only generate them? Do case studies have a small-*n* problem? Is such work generalizable? Are Mill's comparative methods appropriate for social scientists?

There is no single "logic of inquiry" in case study methods, because there is no single approach to case studies. Grounded theorists, for example, approach their work differently from comparativists or from Chicago-school ethnographers. Social scientists still disagree on many of the issues covered in this course. Nevertheless, all approaches to case studies reveal an underlying logic about truth, evidence, empirical assessment, what is knowable, and generalization. At times that logic may be flawed, but no flaw is greater than the absence of any logic. This course aims to give students the foundation to develop an analytically sound approach to their work, whatever their particular approach turns out to be.

The reading list is selective. If the objective is to improve the clarity of our thinking, it is better to cover a few things well than many things poorly. A small boat casting too wide a net will sink under the weight of its catch. Thus, while the reading list for each week is robust enough to give us plenty to discuss, it is concise enough that each work may be read and studied closely. Please study each work *carefully*.

The course assumes students have taken at least two graduate-level courses in statistics for social scientists.

REQUIREMENTS

There are three requirements:

1. Participation (10 points). Read everything assigned carefully, and participate actively and constructively in class discussion.

2. Memos (64 points). Answer the question for each week in a memo of **no more than 650 words**. For each week, email the memo to me and to your classmates **no later than the Monday before class at noon**. **There are no extensions**. Please include the words “SOCI 50068” and a word count in the subject line of your email, and submit the memo directly in the text of the email, rather than as an attachment. Your memo should be (a) clear, (b) complete, and (c) convincing. Please use your memo to clarify your thinking, rather than to express your general impressions. It should not be merely a response; it should be a carefully reasoned, succinct critique.

Each memo is worth up to **8 points**. No memos are due Week 1 or Week 10. **Memos turned in after noon of the Monday before class will receive no points; memos that exceed 650 words will receive no points.**

3. Two final short papers (13 points each). Turn in two final short papers.

Paper I. Select any memo you wrote for the course between weeks 2 and 9 and re-write it. Explain what your re-written version reveals about your new or clearer or revised perspective on case study methods. The paper should be no more than 1,650 words (650 words for the re-written memo; 1,000 words for the discussion of your perspective). Please also submit a copy of the original memo.

Paper II. Choose **either** Option A or Option B.

Option A

Consider *one* of the following statements: (a) A case study that selects on the dependent variable has little hope of yielding a valid inference. (b) Case studies are effective tools for description, poor tools for causal explanation. (c) If a case study adopts an interpretive perspective, the logic of selection is not substantially important. Explain whether you agree or disagree, stating and defending your general position on the questions at issue in the statement. The paper should be no more than 2,000 words.

Option B

Write the research design section of a dissertation proposal, a grant proposal, or an empirical paper that employs case study methods. The discussion should reflect a sophisticated understanding of the issues at play in designing or defending a case study. The paper should be no more than 2,000 words. If you are choosing Option B for your second paper, you must clear the topic with me *before* Week 8.

The word counts are **firm**. Both papers are due **in class on Week 10**. **There are no extensions**. Please turn in hardcopies printed on both sides of the page or on the back of previously used paper. Please double-space the documents and include a word count in each.

READINGS

The following books are available at the Seminary Co-Op and on reserve at Regenstein library:

Michael Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method*

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*
Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*
Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*
Mario L. Small, *Unanticipated Gains*

The readings are listed in their recommended reading order.

WEEK 1

The science in case studies?

- Karl Popper. 1962. "Science: Conjectures and Refutations." In *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Harper. Selections: <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~fotoole/321.1/popper.html>
- Richard Feynman. 1974. "Cargo Cult Science." Commencement address given at the California Institute of Technology. (Feynman is a Nobel Prize winner in physics.) <http://calteches.library.caltech.edu/51/02/CargoCult.pdf>
- Gary King, Robert E. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Read Preface and Chapters 1 and 2. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- Robert R. Alford. 1994. Review of *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, by Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. Princeton: Princeton University Press. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*. 24(3):424-27. (*E-journals*)
- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. "Transcending General Linear Reality." *Sociological Theory*. 6:169-86. (*E-journals*)

No memo due this week.

WEEK 2

Description vs. explanation

- Nicole Marwell. 2004. "Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors." *American Sociological Review*. 69(2):265-91. (*E-journals*)
- Viviana Zelizer. 1981. "The Price and Value of Children: The Case of Children's Health Insurance." *American Journal of Sociology*. 86(5):1036-56. (*E-journals*)
- Mario L. Small. 2002. "Culture, Cohorts, and Social Organization Theory: Understanding Local Participation in a Latino Housing Project." *American Journal of Sociology*. 108(1):1-54. (*E-journals*)
- Karen Lutfehy and Jeremy Freese. 2005. "Toward Some Fundamentals of Fundamental Causality: Socioeconomic Status and Health in the Routine Clinic Visit for Diabetes." *American Journal of Sociology*. 110(5):1326-72. (*E-journals*)
- Gary King, Robert E. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Read Chapters 2 (again) and 3. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)

Select either Marwell or Zelizer. Does the article you selected conform to KK&V's standards for description? Why or why not? If it does not, is this a problem? If it does, would the article

have been ineffective if it had not? Explain. Now, select either Small or Lutfey and Freese. Does the article conform to KK&V's standards for explanation? Why or why not? If it does not, is this a problem? If it does, would it have been ineffective if it had not? Explain.

WEEK 3

Discovery vs. interpretation

- Eric Klinenberg. 1999. "Denaturalizing Disaster: A Social Autopsy of the 1995 Heat Wave." *Theory and Society*. 28(2): 239-95. (*E-journals*)
- Mitchell Duneier. 2004. Review of *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, by Eric Klinenberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Contemporary Sociology*. 33(2):139-50. (*E-journals*)
- Eric Klinenberg. 2004. "Overheated." *Contemporary Sociology*. 33(5):521-58. (*E-journals*)
- Lisa Wedeen. 2008. "Qualitative Methods in Political Science." Pp. 134-39 in Michele Lamont and Patricia White (eds) *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. National Science Foundation.
http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/soc/ISSQR_workshop_rpt.pdf
- Clifford Geertz. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. Read Chapters 1, 6, and 15. (*Chalk*)

Are Klinenberg and Geertz attempting to "generalize" to something? If so, to what? If not, why not? Is there a difference between discovery and interpretation? Explain.

WEEK 4

Samples vs. cases

- Gary King, Robert E. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Read Chapters 4 and 6; skip the "Formal Analysis" parenthetical sections. (*Seminary Coop and library*)
- Michèle Lamont. 1992. *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Read Chapter 1 and Appendix III. (*Chalk*)
- Annette Lareau. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Race, Class, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Read Chapter 1 and Appendices A and C. (*Chalk*)
- Robert Weiss. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Read Chapter 2. (*Chalk*)
- Mario L. Small. 2009. "'How Many Cases do I Need?' On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field Based Research." *Ethnography* 10(1):5-38 (*E-journals*)
- Jack Katz. 1983. "A Theory of Qualitative Methodology: The Social System of Analytic Fieldwork." Pp. 127-48 in Robert Emerson (ed) *Contemporary Field Research*. Boston: Little-Brown. <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/katz/current.htm>

When are case studies generalizable? If your answer is "never," explain why. Either way, your answer should define "generalizable" and cite and critique the readings.

WEEK 5

One vs. many

- Mario L. Small. 2009. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press. Read Preface; Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 8; and Appendices A and C. (You may skim Chapters 3 and 4.) (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- Elinor Ostrom. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Read Preface and Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6. (You may skim Chapter 2.) (*Seminary Co-op/Amazon/B&N and library*)

Both Small and Ostrom use case studies to generate theories about institutional processes that they explicitly argue occur in other settings. Compare and contrast the logic underlying their respective arguments. Is it convincing? Why or why not? Could a different method have served them better? Could a different approach *to their cases* have served the authors better? Why or why not?

WEEK 6

Perspectives: Mill's methods

- John Stuart Mill. 1874. *System of Logic*. New York: Harper & Brothers. Read Book III, Chapter 6 (“Of the Composition of Causes”) and Chapter 8 (“Of the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry”) (*Chalk*)
- Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Read pages xi-46. (*Chalk*)
- John Stuart Mill. 1874. *System of Logic*. New York: Harper & Brothers. Read Book VI, Chapter 7 (“Of the Chemical, or Experimental Method in the Social Science”) (*Chalk*)
- Stanley Lieberman. 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(2):307-20 (*E-journals*)
- Jukka Savolainen. 1994. “The Rationality of Drawing Big Conclusions Based on Small Samples: In Defense of Mill’s Methods.” *Social Forces*. 72(4):1217-24. (*E-journals*)

What is Skocpol’s argument about the use of Mill’s methods? Do you agree with her critics? If not, why not? If you do, then what is the proper way to conduct comparative case study research?

WEEK 7

Perspectives: Grounded theory

- Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine. Read Chapters 1-5. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- Jan J. Loubser. 1968. Review of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. Chicago: Aldine.

American Journal of Sociology. 73(6):773-74 (*E-journals*)

- Anselm L. Strauss. 1969. "Letters to the Editor." *American Journal of Sociology*. 74(4):419. (*E-journals*)
- Holly Skodol Wilson, Sally A. Hutchinson, and William L. Holzemer. 2002. "Reconciling Incompatibilities: A Grounded Theory of HIV Medication Adherence and Symptom Management." *Qualitative Health Research*. 12(10):1309-22. (*Chalk*)

How do grounded theorists know their theory or argument is right? Is this convincing? Explain.

WEEK 8

Perspectives: Extended case method (Berkeley)

- Michael Burawoy. 2009. *The Extended Case Method*. Read Prologue; Introduction; Chapters 1, 2, and 4; and Conclusion. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)

How do ECM researchers know solve the generalizability problem? Is this convincing? Explain.

WEEK 9

Perspectives: Qualitative comparative analysis

- Charles Ragin. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Skim chapters 1-4. Read chapters 6-8. Skim chapter 9. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)

How do QCA researchers know their theory or argument is right? Is this convincing? Explain.

WEEK 10

Students' choice

- Topics we did not cover that you would like to read.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/nsfqual/papers.htm>
- <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04219/nsf04219.pdf>
- <http://www.groundedtheory.com>
- Howard Becker, *Tricks of The Trade*
- Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, *Social Mechanisms*
- Richard Jessor, Ann Colby, and Richard Shweder, *Ethnography and Human Development*
- Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*
- John Stuart Mill, *System of Logic*
- Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*
- Stanley Lieberson, *Making it Count*

- Jon Van Mannen, *Tales of the Field*
- Robert Yin, *Case Study Research* (2nd edition; avoid the 4th edition)
- Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, *What is a Case?*
- Peter Hedstrom and Peter Bearman, *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*