

Sociology 63915: Designing Qualitative Research
Spring 2017
Thursday 12.30-3.15 Flanner 625
Lyn Spillman

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The goal of this course is provide you with the opportunity and resources to reflect on issues important in all qualitative research design. These issues include the formulation of research questions; classification, description, and measurement; types of explanation, interpretation, and inference; comparative design; and the logic of case study design. Our reading and discussion will focus mostly on methodological reflections and debates about qualitative research.

This class does not focus on any specific type of qualitative method. Most of the issues we will cover are important regardless of particular research techniques and type of data– documents, interviews, fieldwork, or some combination of these sources. The ultimate quality of all types of qualitative research in sociology relies on deep theoretical grounding and well-developed skills in abstract thinking about research questions and research design. Regardless of the type of research you pursue, the issues you engage in this class will strengthen the quality of your work.

This focus on very broadly usable knowledge and experience means that this class differs from other related classes in three ways you should be aware of.

*It does not offer expert grounding in advanced methodological issues and debates specifically associated with either comparative-historical sociology, interview studies, or fieldwork. I expect that you will take course offerings in the department, or develop independent study coursework, to be able to claim expertise in one of these methods. However (a) the course will familiarize you with underlying issues in each of these methodologies and (b) your research paper could investigate the advanced methodological literature in one of these areas.

*In general, it does not offer simple “recipe” skills in any specific methodology. Unlike quantitative skills– as I understand them– basic qualitative research skills like reading and listening and observing don’t require special training (although they do need conscious and systematic attention, and some people are better at them than others...). You can and should read books of recipe knowledge before you do any research, as a sensitizing device and to widen your awareness of potential pitfalls, but it is more important to devote class time to the analytic skills which will make the reading, listening and observing sociologically productive. However, your research paper can review “recipe” knowledge of one type of methodology if you wish, and relate recipe knowledge to broader design issues.

*Unlike many qualitative research classes, this class does not focus primarily on empirical studies as exemplars. This “apprenticeship” model of learning qualitative research is appropriate and important for specific methodologies: e.g., it is the dominant model of course design for comparative historical sociology. But because we are interested here in issues common to all qualitative methodologies, most of our readings are more abstract, though they do offer many examples. (It is a common misconception that good qualitative research requires less abstract thinking than quantitative research.) However, (a) we will establish and use a shared body of empirical topics you have encountered or are encountering as examples for thinking through our readings and (b) you should use class work to help think through research proposals and research projects.

Course Assessment

1. **20% class participation.** A substantial part of each class will be devoted to discussion of observations, questions, and issues you raise about readings, and the illustrations you develop. Discussions should address (1) key ideas of reading(s) (2) illustrative quotes (3) comparison and contrast to previous readings (4) applications to empirical topics or theoretical issues not included in reading (5) thinking through how the readings relate to research you might do or are doing (6) assessment and critique (7) further questions and issues raised. Please note that this is a *seminar*. Inevitably, and no matter how often I explain this, one or two members of my seminars will comment that they want to hear the gospel according to Lyn. That gospel is embedded as a hidden agenda in the design of the class, but I will do little if any lecturing. What I will do is summarize and add commentary to your discussion at the beginning of the following class. You are responsible for close reading of the material, thinking through what it means, raising questions for discussion, listening to and learning from others, admitting what puzzles you, and asking questions about what you don’t get. If you learn better from lectures and authoritative proclamation, this might not be the class for you. As a reminder:

... many define... [seminars]... by size (between five and twenty) or configuration (a circle around a central table), by focus (the centrality of a shared text) or professorial function (... facilitator or conductor). But beneath these aspects is ... a pedagogy wherein everyone has a voice and each person’s ideas are valued, a venue for exploring varied perspectives, an opportunity to experiment, a way to flesh-out skeletal ideas through the challenge of friendly critics. The seminar is a community working on the principle that if many hands make light work then many minds make deep meaning. Participation is vital, responsibility is shared, and ownership is produced.... students “take learning into their own hands and make something meaningful out of it...” (Richard Gale, Carnegie Academy of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.)

2. **20% class reading journals:** around one page due each class, based on reading. Bring one hard copy for me, and another if you want to refer to it in discussion. In your journal you will make and develop one or two points which strike you as important about that day's reading. Analysis, critique, connection to other perspectives and other scholarly work, suggested

empirical applications, and puzzles and questions are examples of productive responses. You should explain your point by saying why you think it is significant, and using examples from the text for support. I also encourage you to include reflection on how the ideas are relevant to the design of your own research. The purpose of assigning journals is to help you (although I also enjoy reading them). Taking your journals seriously as a form of learning has a big pay-off for the depth of your understanding of the readings, and your notes will be useful to you in the future in ways you don't yet realize. See further information on journals p. X.

3. **20% class presentation** on main points and key questions of our reading in relation to class topics and previous readings. You should aim to develop illustrations and applications of the authors' methodological arguments from sociological or other research you have read and/or conducted. Please circulate a handout of main points of the reading and questions to class, and post to Sakai.

4. **40% work for your 15-20 page class paper.** You can write on a general methodological topic, do a literature review, etc, or you can use this paper to investigate and review literature on a methodological issue relevant to your research interests. *The primary focus of the paper should be the methodological questions*, but if you wish you can also include brief discussion of your topic, question, or research to the extent that it *helps illustrate* the methodological topic. (For example you could explain and assess two different approaches to researching your topic). We can discuss this further as the semester progresses. You should: (a) Sign up to meet with me **Tuesday February 28** to discuss your topic ideas. (b) Turn in a progress report/ formal proposal on **Monday March 13** (c) Prepare a presentation to class **Thursday May 4**. (d) Turn in your paper **Monday May 8** by noon– hard copy and electronic copy.

Required Readings

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa Amoroso. *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*. Second edition. Thousand Oaks CA: Pine Forge Press.

Reed, Isaac. 2012. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Social Sciences*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Smelser, Neil J. 1995. *Problematics of Sociology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Other required readings are available online or will be distributed to class.

Recommended Reading

Swedberg, Richard. 2014. *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. Especially chapters 3-5.

Other recommended readings are listed for each week should they be of use for your research for your papers or in future. Please ask me to delve into my other files of references if you have further questions.

Course Outline

WEEK ONE: January 19. Introduction. Why is research design important?

*Murdock Pencil, 1976. "Salt Passage Research: The State of the Art," *Journal of Communication* 26(4): 31-36.

*Darcy Chopwhittle, "Review of *When the Cows Come Home: Barn Architecture and Changes in Bovine Public Space*," and Lars Mooson Taleglad, "Response to Review: Bovine History and the Linguistic Left Turn," *Social Science History* 25(4) Winter 2001: 609-14.

WEEK TWO: January 26. Situating sociological projects: mapping the field and its tensions

*Neil J. Smelser, 1995. *Problematics of Sociology: The Georg Simmel Lectures 1995*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

*Charles C. Ragin and Lisa Amoroso, 2011. "What is (and Is Not) Social Research?" ch. 1, pp 5-32 in *Constructing Social Research*.

Recommended: Neil J. Smelser, 2014. "Sociology as Science, Humanism, and Art," pp 148-62 in *Getting Sociology Right: A Half-Century of Reflections*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

WEEK THREE: February 2. Sociological Craft

*Max Weber, 1946 [1919]. "Science as a Vocation," pp. 129-56 in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Let me know if you need a copy.)

*C. Wright Mills 2000[1959]. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship," Appendix, pp. 195-226 in *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. To be distributed.

*Beatrice Webb, 1926. "The Art of Note-taking," pp. 364-72 in *My Apprenticeship*. Distributed.

*Michael Mann, 1981. "Socio-logic," *Sociology* 15(4): 544-50 To be distributed.

*John Gerring. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter Two, "Beginnings," pp. 25-57.

Recommended: David Hackett Fischer, 1970. "Fallacies of Question-Framing," ch. 1, pp. 3-39 in *Historians' Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York: Harper and Rowe; Fred Eidlin, "The Method of Problems vs the Method of Topics." Paper presented at the Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, 2010. (See me for a copy).

WEEK FOUR: February 9. An overview of qualitative research design

*Charles C. Ragin and Lisa Amoroso, 2011. *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Pine Forge Press. Chs. 2-6, pp. 33-161.

Recommended: Arthur L. Stinchcombe. 2005. *The Logic of Social Research*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

WEEK FIVE: February 16. How is Qualitative Research Distinctive? Part I

*Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1 (1-15); ch. 2 (18-25 only), chs. 6-8 (75-114), ch. 10 (127-38), chs. 14-17 (177-226).

Recommended: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994. "The Science in Social Science," ch. 1 pp. 3-33 in *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; and Review of King, Keohane and Verba by Robert R. Alford in *Contemporary Sociology* 24(3) May 1995: 424-27; Peter Abell, 2004. "Narrative Explanation: An Alternative to Variable Centered Explanation?" *xxxx* 30: 287-310.

WEEK SIX: February 23. How Is Qualitative Research Distinctive? Part II

*Isaac Reed, 2012. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Social Sciences*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Recommended: Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” pp. 3-30, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Paul Ricoer, 1979 [1971] “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text.” pp 73-101 in Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, eds. *Interpretive Social Science*. (Berkeley CA: University of California Press); “On Abstraction and Interpretation– The Biernacki-Evans Debate,” pp.177-277 in Isaac Reed and Jeffrey C. Alexander, eds. 2009. *Meaning and Method: The Cultural Approach to Sociology* Boulder CO and London: Paradigm Publishers.

WEEK SEVEN: March 2. Is Qualitative Research Distinctive? (Meet with me about your ideas for papers on **Tuesday February 28.**)

*John Gerring. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3-7, 13-14. (Pp. 58-193, 361-393). Read Chs. 3-7 selectively– don’t get bogged down. Pay attention to the tables, and to anything that puzzles you. Then read the concluding argument in Chs. 13-14 closely.

*Lyn Spillman, 2004. ”Causal Reasoning, Historical Logic, and Sociological Explanation” Pp. 216-34 in Jeff Alexander, Gary Marx, and Christine Williams, eds. *Self, Social Structure, and Beliefs*. Berkeley: University of California Press. To be distributed.

Recommended: John Gerring, 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. Part Three: Causation (chapters 8-12.); Howard Aldrich, 2014. “Stand up and Be Counted: Why social science should stop using the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy,” at workinprogress.oowsection.org/2014 with responses by Matt Vidal and-- (at orgtheory.net)-- Elizabeth Popp Berman.

WEEK EIGHT: March 9. History, Comparison, and Comparative Logic

*Neil J. Smelser. 1976. “Classification, Description, and Measurement,” and “Association, Cause, Explanation, and Theory,” ch. 6 and 7, pp. 151-243 in *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall (selections). To be distributed.

* Craig Calhoun. 1998. “Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory.” *American Journal of Sociology* 104(3): 846-71.

*Theda Skocpol. n.d.. "Six Rules of Thumb for Comparative Historical Analysis." Unpublished notes, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago. To be distributed.

*Anne Kane, 2000. "Reconstructing Culture in Historical Explanation: Narrative as Cultural Structure and Practice." *History and Theory* 39: 311-330.

*James Mahoney. 2004. "Comparative-Historical Methodology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 81-101.

Recommended: Theda Skocpol, 1984. "Emergent Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology, pp. 356-91 in Skocpol, ed. *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Elizabeth S. Clemens. 2007. "Towards a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes and Emergence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:527-49; Jim Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. 2015. *Advances in Comparative Historical Analysis*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

WEEK NINE: Spring Break. Progress report/formal proposal for your paper due **Monday March 13**, noon. Please put a hard copy in my mailbox, as well as sending an electronic copy.

WEEK TEN: March 23. Case Selection and Inference from Cases.

*Michael Burawoy. 1998. "The Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 16: 4-33.

*Bent Flyvbjerg, 2006. "Five Misunderstandings about Case Study Research" *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2):219-45.

*George Steinmetz. 2004. "Odious Comparisons: Incommensurability, the Case Study, and Small Ns in Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 22(3): 371-400.

*Mario Luis Small. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need? On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field Based Research." *Ethnography* 10: 5-38.

Recommended: Howard Becker. 2014. *What about Mozart? What about Murder? Reasoning from Cases*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman. 1999. "We Begin With Our Favorite Theory...' Reconstructing the Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 17: 228-34; John Stolte, Gary Alan Fine and Karen S. Cook, 2001. "Sociological Miniaturism: Seeing the Big through the Small in Social Psychology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 387-413; Carol Heimer, 2001. "Cases and Biographies: An Essay on Routinization and the Nature of Comparison." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 47-76; David Thacher, 2006. "The Normative Case Study." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(6): 1631-

1679; Lars Mjose. 2009. "The Contextualist Approach to Social Science Methodology." Pp. 39-68 in *The SAGE Handbook of Case-Based Methods*. Los Angeles and London: Sage.

WEEK ELEVEN: March 30. Thinking about Textual Evidence

*Vernon K. Dibble, 1963. "Four Types of Inference from Documents to Events," *History and Theory* 3: 203-21.

*Richard Biernacki. 2014. "Humanist Interpretation Versus Coding Text Samples," *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2014): 173-88.

*Lyn Spillman, 2012. "Appendix: Methodological Overview." Pp. 371-92 in *Solidarity in Strategy: Making Business Meaningful in American Trade Associations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press OR Nina Bandelj, 2008. "Economic Objects as Cultural Objects: Discourse on Foreign Investment in Post-Socialist Europe," *Socio-Economic Review* 6(4): 671-202.

*William G. Roy. 2006. "Document Analysis Exercise." Adapted from an assignment for "Comparative-Historical Methods in Sociology" Graduate Seminar, second quarter, UCLA Winter 2006. To be distributed.

Read the Dibble and Biernacki as background. Then read either my appendix or the Bandelj article as an example (the Bandelj article is a good example of someone who gets an important analysis and argument from basic content analysis of newspapers.).

Then review the Roy exercise. Bring an example of a document related to your research with some thoughts about it building on the Roy reading. Hopefully we will have time to work a few examples in class.

A journal is required as usual. The illustration from the Roy reading need not be developed in depth.

Recommended: John D. Milligan, 1979. "The Treatment of an Historical Source," *History and Theory* 18 (2): 177-96; "From the Archives: Innovative Use of Data in Comparative Historical Research," (Reports by Victoria Johnson, Melissa Wilde, Simone Pollilo, and Amy Kate Bailey, Nathan Cermak and Steward Tolnay), *Trajectories: Newsletter of the ASA Comparative and Historical Sociology Section* 19(2) 2008: 1-11. (Available online at <http://www2.asanet.org/sectionchs/newsletter/>. Take this opportunity to browse other issues of the newsletter and become familiar with the work of this lively ASA section); Richard Biernacki. 2012. *Reinventing Evidence in Social Inquiry*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan; Marc J. Ventresca and John W. Mohr, "Archival Research Methods." Ch. 35, pp. 805-28 in Joel C. Baum, 2002. *The Blackwell Companion to Organizations*. Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell.

WEEK TWELVE: April 6: No Class. Work on final paper.

WEEK THIRTEEN: April 13. Thinking about Interviews as Evidence

*Robert Merton, Marjorie Fiske and Patricia L. Kendall. 1990 [1956]. *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*. 2nd ed. New York: The Free Press. Ch. 1, “Purposes and Criteria”, 3-20.

*Allison Pugh, 2012. “What Good are Interviews for Thinking About Culture? Demystifying Interpretive Analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1(1): 1-27.

*Colin Jerolmack and Shamus Khan. 2014. “Toward an Understanding of the Relationship between Accounts and Action.” *Sociological Methods and Research* 43(1): 1-12.

*Michele Lamont and Ann Swidler. 2014. “Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing.” *Qualitative Sociology* 37: 153-171.

Recommended: Naomi Quinn, (ed.) *Finding Culture in Talk: A Collection of Methods*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

WEEK FOURTEEN: April 20: Thinking about Fieldwork as Evidence

*Paul Lichterman. 2002. “Seeing Structure Happen: Theory-Driven Participant Observation.” Pp. 118-46 in Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, eds. *Social Movement Research*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. To be distributed.

*Michell Duneier. 2011. “How Not to Lie with Ethnography,” *Sociological Methodology* 41(1): 1-11.

*Frederick Wherry. 2014. “Fragments from an ethnographer’s field guide: Skepticism, thick minimalism, and big theory.” *Ethnography X(x): x-xx*

*Paul Lichterman and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2014. “Theory and Constrastive Explanation in Ethnography.” *Sociological Methods and Research X(xx): ?1-51*. DOI 10.1177/0049124114554458.

Recommended: Jack Katz. 2001. "From How to Why: Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography." *Ethnography* 2:443-73 and 3: 63-90; Dana R. Fisher, Alexandra Murphy, Colin Jerolmack, Kimberly Kay Hoang, and Rhacel Salazar Parrenhas. 2016. "Viewpoints: How to do ethnography right," *Contexts* 18(2): 10-19; *Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans. 2013. "A Pragmatist Approach to Causality in Ethnography." *American Journal of Sociology* 119(3): 682-714.

WEEK FIFTEEN: April 27: Contemporary Standards and New Directions.

*Michele Lamont and Patricia White. 2005. "Report of the Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research." National Science Foundation. Introduction (8-14) and Appendix 6, "Sociology," Introduction and essays by Blee, Griswold, Hochschild, Lamont, Nagel, Small, and Young (141-80). To be distributed.

*Lyn Spillman. 2014. "Mixed Methods and the Logic of Qualitative Inference." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(1): 189-205.

*Christopher A. Bail. 2014. "The Cultural Environment: Measuring Culture with Big Data." *Theory and Society* 43 (3-4): 465-82.

*Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory, 2012. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30(3): 167-86.

*Daniel Hirschman and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2014. "Formation Stories and Causality in Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 32(4): 259-82.

Recommended: Richard Biernacki, 2012. "Rationalization Processes Inside Cultural Sociology," pp. 46-69; John Mohr and Craig Rawlings, "Four Ways to Measure Culture: Social Science, Hermeneutics, and the Cultural Turn," pp. 70-113; Isaac Ariail Reed. 2012. "Cultural Sociology as Research Program: Post-Positivism, Meaning, and Causality." Pp. 27-45 (all in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ronald N. Jacobs, and Philip Smith, eds. 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press); Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive Analysis*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. "Measuring Culture," Special issue of *Theory and Society* 43(3-4) July 2014; Richard Swedberg, ed. 2014, *Theorizing in Social Science: The Context of Discovery*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press; Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds. 2008. *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York and London: Guilford Press; Lyn Spillman. 2015. "Ghosts of Straw Men: A Reply to Lee and Martin," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3(2015): 36-79. DOI: 10.1057/ajcs.2015.5; Lyn Spillman. 2016. "'Two Cultures' or 'A Unified Framework'?" Old Debates and New Ideas in Cultures of Historical Inquiry," Paper presented at SSHA Annual Meeting, Chicago, November.

WEEK 16: May 4: Review and presentations on your papers.

About Class Journals
Lyn Spillman

You should write a one-page journal in response to each day's reading assignment in this class. Turn I one paper copy in to me at the beginning of class: keep another copy to use in class discussion if you wish. (If you have a printing glitch, email me a copy ASAP, but please try to turn in hard copy if possible). Keep a file of the journals as a record and reminder of the topics and issues you have thought about: later this will help you compare readings and put together what you have learnt in a cumulative way. No journal is due when you are doing a class presentation.

As you know, you can't say very much in only one page. Rather than adopting a scatter-shot approach and throwing different thoughts together somewhat randomly, you should choose one or two points which strike you as important about that day's reading, and develop them in a paragraph or two.

To develop and expand the point you want to explore, you can explain it by saying why you think it is significant, and use examples or quotations from the reading to demonstrate. Other good strategies to adopt include relating concepts and arguments in the reading to previous readings, using your own assumptions, observations, or experiences to support or challenge the reading, and suggesting a good question for class discussion. (A good question does not necessarily have one right answer, and is not a matter of yes or no: rather, it will direct us to an important issue in our readings.)

The point(s) you write about can be on any topic related to the reading: writing is a good way of clarifying your responses, and this is an opportunity to think through some of your own ideas. However, if you are having trouble getting started you could use the following sorts of questions for brainstorming. What is the author's main point? How does the author support their argument in this reading? What general concepts are important in this reading? How does this reading relate to your own observations and experiences? Are there any points of comparison or contrast with other class readings or other things you have read? Does this reading explore a common viewpoint in more depth, does it open a new topic we don't usually think about, or does it challenge a commonly held assumption? What questions does this reading raise for you?