

Designs of Social Research

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Version 1.0
G4097

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This course considers research designs and methods in sociology that are at the center of the way in which we do our work as sociologists. There are quite a lot of such ways as it turns out and this course considers many of them with the general idea of identifying what helps make our work better – even if there is much disagreement about what is better. The underlying assumption is that sociologists are involved in a creative activity in which we provide descriptions and accounts of the social world. That is an enormously broad definition that allows us to range freely over and discuss problems of measurement, representation, conceptualization, inference, causality, sampling, as well as identification of mechanisms, structures, grammars for action, and the like.

The goal of the class is to explore how sociologists handle these problems, and the strategy is to consider these problems by direct encounter with substantive work in the discipline that highlights one or more of the themes we consider. This means that the reading is frequently substantive in focus, and that our task in class is to consider explicitly how the papers that we read were shaped by decisions about design, sampling, measurement, conceptualization, approach, and so on and whether this was for better or for ill. The idea is to get to a point where we can evaluate designs, propose our own designs, and thereby gain confidence in the decisions we make with respect to strategy for research.

Schedule:

The class is scheduled to meet Monday 11:00 until 12:50 and Wednesday, from 11:00 until 11:50. Our plan is to meet regularly on Monday and to use the Wednesday period for continuation of discussion when necessary. Students should treat their schedules as if we were regularly meeting on Wednesday, even if we do not routinely use this time.

Requirements:

This is a seminar. That means that the class collectively discusses the materials that we are reading. Discussion requires that the reading be done and that everyone comes to class prepared to participate. To facilitate this, students need to write a short memo on the reading in advance of the class on Monday. In addition, students are responsible for producing a proposal for research that looks in spirit, sophistication, and length appropriate for an NSF grant application. This will call for serious engagement with substantive issues and design issues and should provide a template for a research project that you can imagine conducting. Pie in the sky proposals that require vast amounts of human labor, money, or years to conduct are interesting intellectual experiments not appropriate for this course.

Memos:

Memos sound frightening but are not. They should be 1-3 pages single space, no longer. The idea is to identify one thing from one or more of the readings that interests you and to discuss it: why

it is interesting, what it lead you to think, how it could be improved, utilized, developed, etc. In general, over the course of the semester, the memos become a vehicle for your discovery of identity as a sociologist. E.g. you develop a line of focus. Memos will need to be uploaded to *courseworks* once we learn how to accomplish this. One implication is that students in the class are expected to read each other's memos and think about them for the discussion. Since this is the case, memos should arrive on *courseworks* no later than 4 in the afternoon, on Sunday.

Weekly Schedule

9.12 *Introduction and introductions*

No reading.

9.19 *Basics:*

Weber, Max: Economy and Society, pp 3-38; The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, pp 13-31

Leifer, Eric. Denying the Data: Learning from the Accomplished Sciences
Sociological Forum, Vol. 7, No. 2. (Jun., 1992), pp. 283-299.

Liebertson, Stanley. 1992. "Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Some Thoughts About Evidence in Sociology." *American Sociological Review*. 57:1-15.

Platt, J. (1964). Strong Inference. *Science* 146 (3642): 347-353. (pdf)

9.26 *Data, Theory Construction and Testing Evidence (2)*

Hedstrom, Peter. Analytical Sociology. Chaps 2-3. (pdf)

Martin, John Levi. 2000. "What do animals do all day? The Division of labor, class bodies, and totemic thinking in the popular imagination" *Poetics* 27: 195-231. Online through Clio.

Sorensen, Aage. 1996. "The Structural Basis of Social Inequality." *American Journal of Sociology* 101: 1333-1365

10.03 *Reliability, validity, measurement, etc*

Singleton, Royce and Bruce Straits. *Approaches to Social Research*. Chapter 5. New York. Oxford University Press. 2004. At Labyrinth.

DiPrete, Thomas. *How many people di you know?* NSF Proposal (pdf)

Burt, Ronald S. "Structural Holes and Good Ideas." *American Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 110(2), pp. 349-99.

10.10 *Sampling*

Singleton, Royce and Bruce Straits. 2004. *Approaches to Social Research*. Chapter 6. New York. Oxford University Press. At Labyrinth.

Bearman, Peter S. "Army Unit Solidarity, Group Norms and Desertion: Desertion as Localism in the U.S. Civil War." *Social Forces*. 70:2-91.

Devon D. Brewer, John J. Potterat, et. al. "Prostitution and the sex discrepancy in reported number of sexual partners", PNAS, 2000. (pdf)

10.17 *Selectivity*

Lieberman, Stanley. "Selectivity". *Making it Count*. Berkeley. University of California Press. 1985

Petersen, Trond. Saporta, Ishak, and Mark-David Seidel. 2001. "Meritocracy and Social Networks." *American Journal of Sociology* 106: 763-816.

Dechter, Aimee and Glen Elder. "World War II Mobilization in Men's Work Lives: Continuity or Disruption for the Middle Class?" *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 110, N3, Nov 2004 pp 761-793.

10.24 *Surveys: Questionnaire construction, life-calendar, respondent accuracy, etc.*

Bernard, H.R., P.D. Killworth, D. Kronenfeld, and L. Sailer. 1985. The Problem of Informant Accuracy: The Validity of Retrospective Data. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13: 495-517

2nd Substantive Reading TBA

10.31 *Ethnography:*

Schull, Natasha. Digital Gambling: the Coincidence of Design and Desire: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 597, No. 1, 65-81 (2005).

Katz, Jack. "Sneaky Thrills" Chap 2, *Seductions of Crime* (pdf)

Timmermans, Stefan. Suicide Determination and Medical Professional Authority. *American Sociological Review*. Vol 70. N2, April 2005.

11.07 *Holiday*

11.14 *Experiments and Quasi Experiments*

Singleton, Royce and Bruce Straits *Approaches to Social Research*. Chapter 7. New York. Oxford University Press. 2004. At Labyrinth.

Pager, Devah and Quillian, Lincoln Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do. *American Sociological Review*, Volume 70, Number 3, June 2005, pp. 355-380(26)

Podolny, Joel and Amanda Merryman. "Markets, Measures, and Meaning", 2004 (IT.MS)

Erickson, Emily and Peter S. Bearman. "Malfeasance and Markets: The Structure of English East Indian Trade, 1600-1831.", *American Journal of Sociology*. (PDF)

11.21 *Mathematical Models*

White, Harrison. 1963. "Uses of Mathematics in Sociology." *Mathematics and the Social Sciences: The Utility and Inutility of Mathematics in the Study of Economics, Political Science, and Sociology*; Charlesworth, J.C, eds. Lancaster, PA: American Academy of Political and Social Science.

Watts, Duncan. *The Accidental Influentials*. (PDF)

Liebersohn, Stanley; "Modeling Social Processes: Some Lessons from Sports" *Sociological Forum*, 12. March 1997. Online: JSTOR.

11.28 *Simulation*

Schelling, Thomas. "Thermostats, Lemons, and other Families of Models" *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*. Pp. 83-133.

Bearman, Peter S., Moody, James, Stovel, Katherine. 2004. "Chains of Affection: The Structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks" *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 110, No. 1 (July, 2004): 44-92. Available through Clio.

3rd Substantive Paper TBA

12.05 *Comparative Historical (1): Cases and Contexts*

Stovel, Katherine. 2001. Local Sequential patterns: The Structure of Lynching in the Deep South, 1882-1930. *Social Forces*, Vol. 79, No. 3. (Mar., 2001), pp. 843-880. Available through Clio.

Larry J. Griffin. 1993. Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98, No. 5. (Mar., 1993), pp. 1094-1133. Available through JSTOR.

E. M. Beck; Stewart E. Tolnay. 1990. The Killing Fields of the Deep South: The Market for Cotton and the Lynching of Blacks, 1882-1930; *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4. (Aug., 1990), pp. 526-539. Available JSTOR.

12.12 *Comparative Historical (2): Time and Narrative*

Marx, Karl. 1990. *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers.

Danto, Arthur. 1990. *Narration and Knowledge*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter 8, "Narrative Sentences"