

Sociology 476: Research Methods for Cultural Sociology

Winter quarter 2019 Tuesday 9:00 – 11:50, 1812 Chicago Ave. seminar room

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In this seminar we will consider how one formulates a research question and puts evidence together in order to investigate specific instances of the culture-society interaction and, from doing so, to assess cultural theory. The course is for students who (1) have a background in cultural sociology (usually by having taken SOC 420), and (2) have a research project involving culture, one that is either already underway or in the planning stages. All participants must be actively engaged in cultural research (dissertation proposal, second-year paper, pilot study, etc.), at least for the duration of the course itself. The goal is to create a productive interplay between research activities and methodological awareness.

Our emphasis will be on designing research that meets the standards of science while maintaining sensitivity to the peculiar characteristics of culture. We shall be comparing sociological methods with those from the history and cultural studies in terms of the relationship between evidence and argument. We'll look at the steps of research from topic to question formation to hypotheses to data collection to analysis of findings to issues of reliability and validity to publication. Along the way we shall consider such issues as specifying cultural objects, making appropriate comparisons, assessing evidence, and analyzing social and aesthetic texts. Our emphasis is on research design and logic; we will not cover specific techniques of data analysis or measurement, though you might want to pursue these areas.

Every meeting of the seminar consists of three parts. First, we discuss a common reading. Second, we discuss one or more cases – i.e., articles in cultural sociology – focusing on the methods. Third, we discuss participants' individual research projects, based on the memos that students will write in advance of each class. (Note: There will not necessarily be any relationship among the three items on any day's agenda—the common reading, the case, and the memo you write on your research—so don't worry about looking for an obscure connection.) Many of the memos will draw on elements from the “Methodological Framework” article.

Please be aware that this seminar entails a lot of work on a week-to-week basis. In addition to reading several articles, every class requires writing, so the time commitment for each week will be considerable. On the other hand, you will not have a big burst of work at the end, for your final paper will have emerged from the weekly memos.

Readings: Most weekly readings are articles and thus available online. You might want to acquire copies of Becker and/or Booth et al., because they are useful in general. I've put these three books on reserve at the library.

Becker, Howard S. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*, second edition. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Becker, Howard S. 2017. *Evidence*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, & Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*, third edition. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Papers: On the first day of the seminar, each seminar member will present a research project (potential or already underway) in cultural sociology. You will work on this project throughout the quarter. The final paper will emerge from synthesizing, editing, and improving the memos you've written for each week. It will typically take the form of a research proposal, and it should be no longer than 10 pages, single-spaced.

Day 1 (January 8) Introduction to research topics and research questions [Note that you have reading and writing to do ahead of class, as always]

Common reading:

Case study: Each seminar member will read Barnes, Sandra L. 2005. "Black Church Culture and Community Action." *Social Forces* 84: 967 – 994. Pay particular attention to the research design. We will use this for class discussion, so bring a copy with you.

Memo: A single-spaced, short (no more than one page) description of your research topic. Bring **15 copies** to class.

Day 2 (January 15) Working with cultural objects

Common reading: Griswold, Wendy. 1987. "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture." *Sociological Methodology* 17: 1-35.

Case study: Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2014. "Coached for the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities." *American Sociological Review* 79: 1015 – 1037.

Memo: Your cultural object and genre, in relation to other genres ("Comprehension"). One page and again (always) 15 copies.

Day 3 (January 22) Levels of cultural analysis

Common reading: Jepperson, Ronald L. & Ann Swidler. 1994. "What Properties of Culture Should We Measure?" *Poetics* 22: 359-371.

Case study: Kaufman, Jason and Orlando Patterson. 2005. "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket." *American Sociological Review* 70: 82 – 110.

Memo: Your general research question, including a sketch of the background (why you are asking the question, why it is significant), and your specific questions, those that can be addressed with data. One page, 15 copies.

Day 4 (January 29) Analyzing written and social texts--questions of evidence

Common reading: Geertz, Clifford. 1980. "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought." *American Scholar* 49: 165-179 and selections from Becker, *Evidence*.

Case study: Brown-Saracino, Japonica. 2015. "How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities." *American Journal of Sociology* 121: 1 – 63.

Memo: The brief (Baxandall) for the producing agents of your cultural object ("Intention"). This may need to be longer than a single page, but shouldn't be more than two pages.

Day 5 (February 5) Questions of evidence 2

Common reading: Milligan, John D. 1979. "The Treatment of an Historical Source." *History and Theory* 18: 177-196

Common reading: Goldthorpe, John H. 1991. "The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies." *The British Journal of Sociology* 42: 211-230.

Case study: Alexander, Victoria; Grant Blank; and Scott Hale. 2018. "Digital traces of distinction? Popular orientation and user-engagement with status hierarchies in TripAdvisor reviews of cultural organizations." *New Media and Society* 1 – 19.

Memo: The horizon of expectations (Jauss) for receiving agents ("Reception"). Again, no more than two pages.

Day 6 (February 12) The debate over interpretation

Common reading: Taylor, Charles. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." In Rabinow, Paul & William M. Sullivan, eds. 1987. *Interpretive Social Science: a Second Look*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Common reading: Wuthnow, Robert. 1987. *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California. Ch. 2.

Case study: Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Suzanna M. Crage. 2006. "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth" *American Sociological Review*, 2006, VOL. 71 (October:724–751).

Memo: Hypotheses. Here you will suggest your hypotheses related to the specific research question(s), based on the linkages among the elements in the "Explanation" section, indicating briefly the theoretical grounding for your hypotheses. Indicate the alternative hypotheses and how you will know if yours are supported or not supported. One-two pages.

Day 7 (February 19) Fields

Common reading: Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford University Press. Part II, I “The Question of Method,” 175 – 208.

Case study: Article from grab bag

Memo: Data. Discuss your data sources—be very specific—and how you will go about analyzing the data. If possible, bring in a sample of the data source. One-two pages.

Day 8 (February 26) Structural issues: Literature reviews, arguments, abstracts

Common reading: Becker, Howard S. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*, second edition. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press. Ch. 8 (135 – 149)

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, & Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*, third edition. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press. Part III, all (105 – 170); Part IV, 208 – 210. Section 13.2

Case study: Book from grab bag

Memo: Literature review, structured to relate to your research question. No more than three pages.

Day 9 (March 5) Publication: Why should I publish? Where should I publish? Articles or books?

Common reading: Clemens, Elisabeth, Walter W. Powell, Kris McIlwaine, & Dina Okamoto. 1995. “Careers in Print: Books, Journals, and Scholarly Reputations.” *American Journal of Sociology* 101: 433-494.

Common reading: Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*, ch. 1 (1 – 25)

No case study

Memo: Abstract. One paragraph only.

Day 10 (March 12) Paper presentation and discussion

Final papers are due Thursday, March 14.