

SOCIOLOGY 523: QUALITATIVE METHODS

Professor Jennifer Sherman
Spring 2016
Wednesdays, 2:50-5:20pm, Wilson-Short 201
Email: jennifer_sherman@wsu.edu
Office: 215 Wilson-Short
Office Phone: 509-335-4163
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-2:00 or by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course will explore two qualitative methods in depth; ethnographic observation and in-depth interviewing. The focus will be on thinking critically about the strengths and weaknesses of the methods themselves and your own execution of them. The goal of this course is to provide you with the tools you need to do qualitative research competently and reflexively.

READING LIST

Books

- Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. University of Chicago Press.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011 (1995). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (2nd edition)*. University of Chicago Press.
- Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sherman, Jennifer. 2009. *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Weiss, Robert S. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. The Free Press.

Articles (Available on Blackboard)

- Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack. 1991. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses." Pp. 11-26 in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge.
- ASA Code of Ethics. Accessible through ASA website at:
<http://asanet.org/images/asa/docs/pdf/Ethics%20Code.pdf>
- Borland, Katherine. 1991. "That's Not What I Said: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research." Pp. 63-76 in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory*. 16(1): 4-33.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. "Appendix: A Statement on Method." Pp. 333-357 in *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- LaRossa, Ralph. 2005. "Grounded Theory Methods and Qualitative Family Research." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(4):837-57.
- LaRossa, Ralph, Linda A. Bennett, and Richard J. Gelles. 1981. "Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Family Research." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (May, 1981), pp. 303-313.

- Lofland, John and Lyn H. Lofland. 2005. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Analysis, 4th Edition*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. Chapters 1-2.
- Oliver, Daniel G., Julianne M. Serovich, and Tina L. Mason. 2005. "Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research." *Social Forces* 84(2): 1273-1289
- Small, Mario. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need? On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography*. 10(1): 5-38.
- Tolich, Martin. 2004. "Internal Confidentiality: When Confidentiality Assurances Fail Relational Informants." *Qualitative Sociology* 27(1): 101-106.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Seminar Participation (10%)

This is a seminar and its success depends on your commitment. Attendance and participation are mandatory, and are an important part of your grade. Participation includes discussion, but also being prepared with questions and ideas that can help stimulate others' thoughts. For each class you should have read the assigned reading, and be prepared to discuss it in detail. Later in the semester you will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss your own research project and issues that you are facing.

Leading Class Discussion (10%)

Students are required to lead discussion twice during the semester (exact details may change, depending on final enrollment). As leader, your job is to briefly summarize the week's reading, providing an overview of important themes and issues, as well as criticism and concerns about the content, arguments, or methodology. Class leaders will also be responsible for stimulating the week's discussion, and will present the class with discussion questions to this end.

Interviews, Participant Observation, and Field Notes (30%)

Over the course of the semester, students are required to begin preliminary work on their proposed research project, including at least three hours (or more) of participant observation and the resulting field note write-up, as well as the design of an interview schedule that should be pre-tested on at least three volunteer participants (and preferably recorded for later use in analysis). Participants do not have to fit with your target sample population, although the closer they are, the more useful the exercise will be. The same goes for observations; the more relevant they are to your research interests, the more helpful the exercise. These pre-test interviews and ethnographic observations will form the basis for self-reflection and critique of the interview schedule and research design, which will be discussed in the Project Proposal.

During the semester, each student is required to submit three separate sets of field notes for the class to read and comment on in order to help identify both pitfalls and effective strategies for describing ethnographic data and settings. Field notes can be based on either participant observation or interview observations, but should be at least a page in length. It is fine to submit a truncated excerpt from a larger set of field notes. Field notes should be uploaded to the Blackboard site by Sunday afternoon at 4pm ahead of each Wednesday's class, and must be completed by the three due dates during the semester, but can be submitted at any time prior to the due dates. I encourage you to get them in before the due dates in order to stagger the reading

load for you and your classmates, as well as to give us different issues to add to our discussions each week. Submitting field notes early will also allow you more time to maximize the usefulness of the feedback you receive in advance of your final proposal.

Project Proposal (50%)

The final product for this course will be a detailed research proposal in which you describe your research project and discuss the methodology in depth. The proposal should include your research question, grounded in a brief review of the relevant literature(s), as well as an explanation of your proposed methodology and why these qualitative methods are the best approach for your research question. The preference is for projects that include some amount of both interviews and participant observations, but students may choose to focus on one aspect more than the other. You may use your experience with the completed interviews and observations to explain and justify why one or the other method will NOT work for your project as well, if this seems to be the case. In your proposal, describe your proposed sampling and recruitment strategies, and state what you expect to learn from your interviews and ethnography. The proposal must include an appendix of your interview questions, as well as a detailed discussion regarding your choice of specific topics and questions, which is informed by your positive and negative experiences during your pre-test interviews. A similar discussion of participant observation techniques and expectations is also required, even if your final design does not include significant amounts of PO. You may want to discuss changes you have made to your original interview design based on your experiences, explaining what worked and didn't work in the pre-test, and what you learned about the interview process. Similarly, your experiences in participant observations should also inform your final research design. You should also describe any issues that arose in the context of your research, your approach to data analysis, and central concepts and claims that you hope to make with your research. You will also be required to submit an appendix with completed (but not submitted) IRB forms.

Late Work Policy

Work handed in late – this includes project proposal and field notes – will be graded down. For each day late assignments will be graded down by one-third of a letter grade (i.e. from an A to an A-, from a B+ to a B).

OTHER CLASS ISSUES

Cheating and Plagiarism

Cheating and plagiarism are forbidden. All work you turn in *must* be your own. No copying will be accepted. Students who violate WSU's Policy on Academic Integrity will receive an F as a final grade in this course. This means no borrowing wording from friends' work, other authors' work, the Internet, etc. Any time another person's work is used, it absolutely must be properly cited. For more information on plagiarism, see the University policies at:

<http://www.conduct.wsu.edu/default.asp?pageid=343>.

Also, please review student conduct expectations at:

<http://www.conduct.wsu.edu/default.asp?PageID=109>.

Accommodations for Disabled Students

We are committed to providing assistance to help you succeed in this course. Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center. For more information about the Access Center please refer to: <http://accesscenter.wsu.edu/>, email the center at: Access.Center@wsu.edu, or call them at: 509-335-3417.

Emergencies and Safety

Washington State University is committed to enhancing the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It is highly recommended that you review the Campus Safety Plan (<http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/>) and visit the Office of Emergency Management web site (<http://oem.wsu.edu/>) for a comprehensive listing of university policies, procedures, statistics, and information related to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community. An emergency alert system is also available. You can sign up for emergency alerts (see <http://alert.wsu.edu>) through the my.wsu site (<http://portal.wsu.edu/>).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, January 13: Introduction to the Course

Week 2, January 20: Thinking About Qualitative Research

Readings:

Becker, Ch. 1-2, pp. 1-66.

Week 3, January 27: Theoretical Stances

Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method." Pp. 4-33.

LaRossa, "Grounded Theory Methods and Qualitative Family Research." Pp. 837-857

Week 4, February 3: Choosing a Site, Sampling, and Recruiting

Lofland and Lofland, Ch. 1-2, pp. 11-30.

Weiss, Ch. 2, pp. 15-38.

Mario Small, "How Many Cases Do I Need?"

Week 5, February 10: Getting Started

Weiss Ch. 3-4, pp. 39-120

Emerson: Ch. 1-2. Pp. 1-44

****First set of Field notes must be submitted before this class****

Week 6, February 17: More Getting Started

Becker, Ch. 3, pp. 67-108

Emerson, Ch. 3, pp. 45-85

Sherman, Preface and Introduction, pp.vii-viii and 1-24

Week 7, February 24: Getting Started and Gathering Data

Becker, Ch. 4, pp. 109-145

Goffman, Prologue, Preface, Introduction and Appendix A, pp. vii-8, 211-261

Week 8, March 2: Ethics

ASA Code of Ethics

Tolich, "Internal Confidentiality"

LaRossa et al, "Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Family Research"

Duneier, Appendix, pp. 333-357

Week 9, March 9: Issues in Interviewing

Weiss, Ch. 5, pp. 121-150

Anderson and Jack, "Learning to Listen," pp. 11-26

Borland, "That's Not What I Said," pp. 63-76

Week 10, March 23: Analyzing Interview Data

Weiss, Ch. 6, p. 151-182

Oliver et al, "Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription"

****Second set of Field notes must be submitted before this class****

Week 11, March 30: Analyzing Ethnographic Field Notes

Emerson et. al., Ch. 5-8, pp. 129-248

Week 12, April 6: Doing Qualitative Projects

Sherman, rest of book

Week 13, April 13: Doing Qualitative Projects

Goffman, rest of book

Weeks 14-15 April 20 and 27: Issues in Research

The last two weeks of class will be dedicated to your projects and other issues you'd like to explore. This may mean additional reading on subjects we'd like to discuss in more depth, or structured discussions on particular dilemmas that have arisen as you've started doing research.

****Final set of Field notes must be submitted before the last day of class****

*****Final papers due in class on April 27, 2016*****