

Logic of Inquiry in Case Study Methods
SOCI 40151
Spring 2008
Professor Mario L. Small

LOGISTICS

The class will meet on Wednesdays from 3:00pm to 5:50pm (with a break) in SS 105. E-mail: mariosmall@uchicago.edu. Office hours are 3:00pm to 5:00pm Mondays, SS 408. 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 carefully. 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 four requirements:

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

2. Memos (72 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 **Tuesday at 5pm** (that is, one day before class). There are no extensions. Please include the words “SOCI 40151” 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 **9 points**. No memos are due either Week 1 or Week 10. **Memos turned in after 5pm Tuesday will receive no points; memos that exceed 650 words will receive no points.**

3. Discussion (8 points). With a partner, lead class discussion at least once during the quarter.

4. Short paper (10 points). Turn in a finished short paper in class on Week 10. Details of the final short paper will be discussed in class. **There are no extensions.**

READINGS

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

Michael Burawoy et al, *Ethnography Unbound*

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*

Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*

Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, *What is a Case?*

Robert Yin, *Case Study Research*

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*. Preface, 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

Samples vs. cases

- Robert K. Yin. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Foreword, Preface, Chapters 1 and 2. (*Third Edition is OK*). (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- Robert Weiss. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Chapter 2. (*Chalk*)
- Michèle Lamont. 1992. *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1, Appendix III. (*Chalk*)
- Annette Lareau. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Race, Class, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1, Appendices A, C. (*Chalk*)
- Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker. 1992. *What Is a Case?* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. *Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- Mario L. Small. Forthcoming. "Lost in Translation." Pp. 175-82 in Michele Lamont and Patricia White (eds) *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. National Science Foundation. (*Chalk*)

Question: 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 3

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*)
- Daniel McFarland. 2004. "Resistance as a Social Drama: A Study of Change-Oriented Encounters." *American Journal of Sociology*. 109(6):1249-1318. (*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*. Chapters 2 (again) and 3. (*Seminary Co-op and library*.)

Select either Marwell or McFarland. 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 it 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 4

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. Forthcoming. "Qualitative Methods in Political Science." Pp. 142-48 in Michele Lamont and Patricia White (eds) *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. National Science Foundation. (*Chalk*)
- Clifford Geertz. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. 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 5

Events, critical time points, change

- William Sewell. 1996. "Historical Events as Structural Transformations: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille." *Theory and Society*. 25:261-79. (*E-journals*)
- Jeffrey Haydu. 1998. "Making Use of the Past: Time Periods as Cases to Compare and as Sequences of Problem Solving." *American Journal of Sociology*. 104(2):339-71. (*E-journals*)
- Larry J. Griffin. 1993. "Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology*. 98(5):1094-133. (*E-journals*)
- Mario L. Small. 1999. "Departmental Conditions and the Emergence of New Disciplines: Two Cases in the Legitimation of African American Studies." *Theory and Society*. 28:659-707. (*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*)

Select any three of the articles. Compare and contrast their use of events, critical time points, or historical change. Where are they effective? Where do they fail? Why?

WEEK 6

Perspectives: Mill's methods

- John Stuart Mill. 1874. *System of Logic*. New York: Harper & Brothers. 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. Pages xi-46. (*Chalk*)
- John Stuart Mill. 1874. *System of Logic*. New York: Harper & Brothers. Book VI, Chapter 7 (“Of the Chemical, or Experimental Method in the Social Science”) (*Chalk*)
- Stanley Lieberman. 1992. “Small N’s and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases.” In Ragin and Becker. (*Seminary Co-op and library*)
- 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. 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

- Michael Burawoy et al. 1991. *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 1-3, 6, 13.
- Laura Nader. 1993. “Review: Paradigm Busting and Vertical Lineage.” *Contemporary Sociology*. 22(1):6-7. (*E-journals*)

How do ECM researchers know their theory or argument is right? 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.