

# Qualitative methodology: connecting data and arguments

University of Amsterdam  
Amsterdam Instituut voor Maatschappijwetenschappen

MA Methods in Sociology

1<sup>st</sup> semester 2010-2011, 2<sup>nd</sup> block

## Workgroup 1

**Instructor:** Dr. Francois Bonnet ([f.c.a.bonnet@uva.nl](mailto:f.c.a.bonnet@uva.nl), Spinhuis 1.18)

**Location:** Tuesday, 16h-18h, SPH 2.04

## Workgroup 2 and 3

**Instructor:** Dr. Sjoukje Botman ([s.j.botman@uva.nl](mailto:s.j.botman@uva.nl))

**Location:** Tuesday 14:00-16:00 BG5 2.13 (wg 2) and 12:00-14:00 BG5 2.13 (wg 3)

**Credits:** 5 EC

## Course Description

The aim of the course is to provide students with the basic tools needed to connect qualitative methods and theory into a valid sociological argument. It consists in reading notable sociology articles and discussing how published authors connect data and arguments in their writings.

The course is reading intensive and aims at developing the students' critical mind and ability to link fieldwork and theory. Each week, we will read two sociology articles and analyze how recent authors manage to get published while using diverse types of qualitative methods. For each text, we will ask the following questions:

- What are the author's research questions?
- What is the author's theoretical/thematic environment?
- What is the author's empirical protocol? How does the author's protocol relate to the research question? What substantive argument is the author able to make with his empirical protocol?
- What is the endgame? How is the research non-trivial? How could things be different?

The expected benefits from the course are:

- Extend one's sociological culture by reading important papers in various fields
- Learn how to read closely sociology articles and to discuss sociological arguments
- Be attentive to concrete methodological questions
- Always think of methods of a means to an end – the end being the ability to construct a sociological argument by connecting data and theory

The course is not an introduction to qualitative methods and is aimed at students who understand the basic concepts of qualitative research.

## Course Structure

The weekly sessions are centered on readings and practical discussions of how to link theory and data in qualitative research. Students are required to actively participate in the discussions. Class attendance is mandatory.

## Course Objectives

- Develop the ability to discern the relevance of qualitative data

- Be familiar with (some of) the different styles of qualitative research and develop an openness to the diversity of the social sciences
- Identify the articulation of theory and methods in contemporary research.

## **Readings**

All readings will be made available electronically, through blackboard or emails.

## **Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all lectures. Students who miss more than 2 meetings will lose 2 points on their final grade.

## **Assignments and assessment**

Every week (6 weeks), students will write a 400-word paper about the readings, basically responding to the questions outlined *supra*, plus addressing each week's theme. Students are allowed to skip 1 paper, but will receive a bonus for the additional assignment that they write. There are therefore 5 mandatory papers to complete to receive a grade for this course. The final grade of the course will consist in an assessment of the average quality of said 5 papers, plus bonus for completing additional papers. An extra bonus on the final grade will be awarded for participation in class.

WG1 (F. Bonnet) Papers will have to be posted on blackboard each week on Tuesday before 12.00.

WG2 and WG3 (S. Botman) Papers will have to be posted on blackboard each week on Monday before 12.00.

The retake of this course will consist of writing the full 6 papers on the mandatory readings and an additional added 400-word paper on connecting data to theory in general using some (at least two different authors) of the suggested readings.

## **Plagiarism and fraud**

All exams and papers will be checked for plagiarism and fraud (and when found out, consequences will be serious). For university regulations and procedures in case of plagiarism and fraud see:

[http://www.ishss.uva.nl/Rules\\_Regulations\\_Procedures/plagiarism.htm](http://www.ishss.uva.nl/Rules_Regulations_Procedures/plagiarism.htm)

## **Meeting 1: What is a qualitative-based sociological argument?**

Intro; what we will do; tools to do what we will do

Reason about methods, epistemology, theory, argument, empirical protocol, etc

How to read a text

Types of ethnography by types of methods

## **Meeting 2: Ethnography and the question of access**

Goffman, Alice 2009, "On the Run. Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 74, 2009

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy 2004, "Parts unknown. Undercover ethnography of the organs-trafficking underworld", *Ethnography*, 5(1), pp. 29–73

### **Meeting 3: Interviewing samples of respondents**

Lee, Jennifer 2002, "From Civil Relations to Racial Conflict: Merchant-Customer Interactions in Urban America", *American Sociological Review*, 67 (1), pp. 77-98

Kirschenman, Joleen and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "'We'd love to hire them but...': The Meaning of Race for Employers", in Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (ed.), *The Urban Underclass*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1991, pp. 203-234

### **Meeting 4: Contrasting positivist and non-positivist qualitative articles**

Callon, Michel 1986, "Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay", in J. Law (ed.), *Power, action and belief: a new sociology of knowledge?*, London, Routledge, 1986, pp.196-223

Uzzi, Brian 1997, "Social structure and competition in interfirm networks: the paradox of embeddedness", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42 (1)

### **Meeting 5: Issues in theorizing: linking specific cases and larger social processes**

Bernstein, Elizabeth 2001, "The meaning of the purchase", *Ethnography*, 2 (3), pp. 389-420

Marwell, Nicole P. 2004, "Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community Based Organizations as Political Actors", *American Sociological Review*, 69 (2), pp. 265-291

### **Meeting 6: Issues in theorizing: morality and culture**

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. 1998. "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community". *American Sociological Review*, vol. 63, December, pp. 767-784

Abramson, Corey M. and Darren Modzelewski 2011, "Caged Morality: Moral Worlds, Subculture, and Stratification Among Middle-Class Cage-Fighters", *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 34, pp. 143-175

### **Meeting 7: Making an argument in absence of meaningful data**

Eliasoph, Nina 1990, "Political Culture and the Presentation of a Political Self. A Study in the Spirit of Erving Goffman", *Theory and Society*, vol. 19, pp. 465-494

Wieder, D. Lawrence, "Telling the Convict Code", in Robert M. Emerson, *Contemporary Field Research*