

Research Design

Epistemology, Methodology, Method

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Course Description

The aim of this course is to clarify the distinction between epistemology (determining what is knowable), methodology (determining what constitutes relevant data) and method (determining appropriate instruments for data collection). While students are often quite clear on what kind of methods they want to employ, they are just as often vague on the reasons behind that choice – what data do they want to garner from the method they have chosen? Why is that data relevant? The course reviews some of the major epistemological schools in social science, explores the kinds of methodological questions that these schools espouse, and considers the relevance of these debates towards their own research projects. By the end of the course students should have a grasp of the intimate relationship between epistemology, methodology and method as well as how to explicate and justify the rationale behind their own methodological decisions.

Learning Outcomes

- A familiarity with the major schools of epistemology in social science
- An understanding of the relationship between epistemology, methodology and method.
- The ability to write a coherent research design justified through methodological arguments

Learning Format

This module is a 10 week module that is seminar and discussion driven. Students are asked to come to class having the readings prepared and ready to discuss them in depth. You should feel free to consider how the readings impact and influence the way you are imagining your own work. As always I expect students to bring to the module an ethic of patience and generosity. By this I mean the following:

An ethic of patience means an expectation that students will grapple with texts in a diligent and intentional manner. Many of the texts we encounter in theoretical modules will be unfamiliar, they will use difficult and arcane language and they will be describing concepts that are necessarily abstract. The learning format is designed to work through difficult texts *as a group* so as to try and understand their meaning collectively. Many of the authors listed are ones I have read and re-read several times and still find ambiguous, murky and strange. The key is not to be intimidated by them but to engage them as a group so as to try and get a better sense of their meaning and intention.

An ethic of generosity means a willingness to be generous to the text, that is, a willingness to read *with* the author and their specific project. While each of us as individuals may have already settled on a theoretical position for our work, it is important to not use that position to dismiss or pick-holes at other perspectives and their concomitant forms of research. Engaging generously means endeavoring to understand what an author is trying to achieve even if you personally think that ambition is misguided. Through this process my hope is that we will come to appreciate the necessary limitations of all positions and the need to keep an open-mind in our various academic projects and engagements.

During the course of the semester two students will be asked each week to take responsibility for leading the discussion. This means coming to class prepared with a series of discussion questions on the readings.

Assessment Strategies

A 5000 word Research Design. The aim of this assessment is for you to provide a research proposal for a do-able research project. While you may want to develop a proposal for a project you are currently working on, the assessment does not need to refer to an actual project. The purpose of the proposal is not to illustrate what you do or don't know about course material. It is to use course material to develop a coherent and methodologically viable research design.

Seminar Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Methods and Methodology

- Hoggart, K., L. Lees, et al. (2002). Researching human geography. London, Arnold. Chapter 1

Week 2: The Scientific Method I: empiricism and descriptive science

- Doyal, L. and R. Harris (1990). Empiricism, explanation and rationality : an introduction to the philosophy of the social sciences. London, Routledge.
- Hartshorne, R. (1939). The nature of geography: a critical survey of current thought in the light of the past. Lancaster, Association of American Geographers.
- O'Connor, D. J. and B. Carr (1982). Introduction to the theory of knowledge. Brighton, Harvester.
- Taylor, R. (1974). The Empiricists. Garden City, Anchor Press.

Week 3: The Scientific Method II: positivism and the role of explanation

- Gregory, D. (1978). Ideology, science and human geography. London, Hutchinson.
- Harvey, D. (1969). Explanation in geography. London, Edward Arnold.
- Lakatos, I. (1974). The methodology of scientific research programmes. Criticism and the growth of knowledge : proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965. I. Lakatos, A. Musgrave and S. International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, K. R. (1980). The logic of scientific discovery. London, Hutchinson. Chapters 1 & 2

Week 4: Critical Realism

- Sayer, A. (1992). Method in social science : a realistic approach. London, Routledge.

Week 5: Feminist Methods

- Haraway, D. (1991). Simians, cyborgs and women: the reinvention of nature. London, Routledge. Last Chapter (page 190)
- Harding, S. (1987). Introduction: is there a feminist method? Feminism and Methodology. S. Harding. Bloomington, Indiana University Press: 1-14.
- Hartsock, N. (1987). The feminist standpoint: developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. Feminism and methodology : social science issues. S. Harding. Bloomington, Milton Keynes : Indiana University Press ; Open University Press: 157-180.
- Wolf, D. (1996). Situating feminist dilemmas in fieldwork. Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork. D. Wolf. Boulder, Westview Press: 1-55.

Week 6: Hermeneutics

- Bernstein, R. J. (1983). Beyond objectivism and relativism: science, hermeneutics and praxis. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Sociology of Science

- Gould, S. J. (1978). "Morton's ranking of races by cranial capacity." Science 200: 503-509.
- Latour, B. and S. Woolgar (1986). Laboratory life : the construction of scientific facts. Princeton, N.J. ; Chichester, Princeton University Press.

Week 9: Textual Sources

- Duncan, J. (1992). Introduction: writing worlds. Writing worlds : discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape. T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan. London, Routledge: 1-17.
- Ginzburg, C. (1994). Checking the evidence: the judge and the historian. Questions of evidence: proof, practice and persuasion across the disciplines. J. Chandler, A. Davidson and H. Harootunian. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 290-303. Also see by Davidson 'Carlo Ginzburg and the renewal of historiography' and Ginzburg's rejoinder
- Hoggart, K., L. Lees, et al. (2002). Researching human geography. London, Arnold. Chapter 4
- Pickles, J. (1992). Texts, hermeneutics and propaganda maps. Writing Worlds. T. Barnes and J. Duncan. New York, Routledge: 193-230.
- Scott, J. (1990). A matter of record : documentary sources in social research. Cambridge, Polity.

Week 10: Survey Methods

- Hacking, I. (1990). The taming of chance. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hoggart, K., L. Lees, et al. (2002). Researching human geography. London, Arnold. Chapter 5
- Sieber, S. (1973). "The integration of fieldwork and survey methods." American Journal of Sociology **78**: 1335-1359.
- Tonkiss, F. (2004). The history of the social survey. Researching society and culture. C. Seale. London, Sage: 245-260.

Week 11: Interviews and Focus Groups

- England, K. (2002). Interviewing elites: cautionary tales about researching women managers in Canada's banking industry. Feminist geography in practice : research and methods. P. Moss. Oxford, Blackwell: 200-213.
- Herod, A. (1993). "Gender issues in the use of interviewing as a research method." Professional Geographer **45**: 305-317.
- Hoggart, K., L. Lees, et al. (2002). Researching human geography. London, Arnold. Chapter 6
- McCracken, G. D. (1988). The long interview. Newbury Park, Sage. Introduction.
- McDowell, L. (1992). "Valid games? a response to Erica Schoenberger." Professional Geographer **44**: 212-215.
- Schoenberger, E. (1991). "The corporate interview as a research method in economic geography." Professional Geographer **43**: 180-89.

Week 12 Ethnography and Lived Experience

- Clifford, J. and G. E. Marcus (1986). Writing culture : the poetics and politics of ethnography. Berkeley, University of California Press. Introduction
- Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures: selected essays. New York, Basic Books.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). What is wrong with ethnography? : methodological explorations. London, Routledge.
- Hoggart, K., L. Lees, et al. (2002). Researching human geography. London, Arnold. Chapter 7
- Ortner, S. B. (1995). "Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal." Comparative Studies in Society and History **37**(1): 173-193.
- Scott, J. W. (1994). The evidence of experience. Questions of evidence: proof, practice and persuasion across the disciplines. J. Chandler, A. Davidson and H. Harootunian. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 363-387. Also see by Holt 'Experience and the politics of intellectual inquiry' and Scott's rejoinder.