Suggested Readings on Social Research
by
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(with advice from students and colleagues)
(* = especially recommended)
1 March, 2010

General Books:

On Research and Research Design
  [A former student suggested this. He writes: “I found it very easy to read, and explains things which probably are intuitive to you but were a puzzle to me, e.g., the use of standard deviation and how they work with bell curves, the relationship between hypotheses and measurement, conducting literature searches and their importance: basically how to conduct a quantitative study.”)
Creswell, John: Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2nd edition, Sage, 2002. [An overview, with an emphasis on how to write research designs. I used to star it, but am now more ambivalent.]
  [I have double-starred this book, because it is the clearest, most philosophically accurate account of research methodology I have yet encountered. Sprague is a quantitative feminist researcher. She gets her epistemology right, and makes an especially clear distinction between post-positivist, social constructionist, critical realist, and standpoint epistemologies. She favors the last of these in a very sensible way. I lean toward the critical realist point-of-view, but find her analysis compelling. (I also think that modifying critical realism with some aspects of standpoint theory, then viewing the result through an eschatological lens, is the best of all worlds, but no one has yet written this up in any detail. I guess I’ll have to.) She provides lots of examples of good research – including quantitative research -- that seek to bridge the differences in standpoint that are so often ignored. This book is tops!]

On Reading and Writing Academic Work
Qualitative Research:

**General Issues and Qualitative Design**


(Reprinted as a 3-volume set: *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues; TLOQI: Strategies of Inquiry; and TLOQI: Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Data.* Sage, 2003.)

[NOTE: This is not a true handbook, by Sage’s own guidelines for such works. It is much more programmatic than summative – i.e., it tells you where it wants the scholarly consensus to go rather than telling you where the consensus is (and it fails to note the difference). Some of the pieces are excellent—e.g.: Vidich & Lyman: “Qualitative Methods: Their History in Sociology and Anthropology”; Kathy Charmaz: “Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Approaches”. Others, including the editors’ introduction, are useful reading but so disorganized philosophically that they mislead as much as they lead. Some—e.g.: Greenwood and Levin: “Reconstructing the Relationships between Universities and Society through Action Research”—are tendentious junk. All, however, provide very useful bibliographies.

All students should read in this book, as their interests lead them. They should not, however, read it cover to cover (who could?) and should definitely not cite it as gospel truth. Use it as a one-sided introduction to scholarly controversies rather than as a real guide to them.]


*Richards, Lyn & Janice M. Morse: *Readme First for a User’s Guide to Qualitative Methods,* 2nd edition. Sage, 2007. [A wise, integrated guide to all aspects of doing a qualitative research project, from first glimmer of an idea to write-up. My only quib is that readers must not treat its 3 methodological examples -- phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory -- as a cookbook. Yes, the authors warn against this, and they also describe several different traditions of each. But they do not always make clear which of the subtraditions they are talking about. For example, they refer to hermeneutic phenomenology’s quest for meaning as typical of phenomenology generally, even though transcendental and existential phenomenologies explicitly separate meaning from lived experience and seek the latter. The good by far outweighs the bad, however. The section on coding is as good as it gets.]


**Various Methods for Gathering Data** (be sure to read exemplars as well)

**Case Studies**


Yin, Robert: *Case Study Research: Design and Methods.* Sage, 1984
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**Ethnography & Naturalistic Observation**
*Spickard, James V.: “Micro/Qualitative Approaches to the Sociology of Religion: Phenomenologies, Interviews, Narratives, and Ethnographies.” (citation above)
*Van Maanen, John: Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago, 1988

**Grounded Theory**
Clarke, Adele E.: *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*. Sage, 2005

**Interviewing**
*Spickard, James V.: “Micro/Qualitative Approaches to the Sociology of Religion: Phenomenologies, Interviews, Narratives, and Ethnographies.” (citation above)

**Narratives and Text Analysis**

**Phenomenology**

[Much nonsense hides behind this well-respected name, including Moustakas's book, which I've crossed out below. The distinguishing mark of good phenomenology is its research object: to describe experience as it presents itself to subjective consciousness. This is specifically different from interpretations of that experience, which must be bracketed away.]


[This is only one form of phenomenology, but it is well thought out.]


[NOTE: I recommend against using this approach, as it is philosophically vacuous.]

*Spickard, James V.: “Micro/Qualitative Approaches to the Sociology of Religion: Phenomenologies, Interviews, Narratives, and Ethnographies.” (citation above)


[A bit dense in spots, but philosophically acute. A needed corrective to much so-called "phenomenological" research. Focuses on Schutz, Gurwitsch, Natanson, Luckmann, and their successors.]

**Phenomenography**

[This "method" seems to me to match the intentions of the early phenomenologists, in that it seeks to describe people’s subjective experiences without attempting to interpret those experiences as ‘really’ something else. Perhaps, following C.S. Peirce, who invented first "pragmatism", then "pragmaticism", the inventors of this method got so tired of reading bad accounts of the phenomenological approach that they gave it a new name, "ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers". At any rate, these authors seem to be pursuing the same research object as does true phenomenology: experience as it presents itself to subjective consciousness.]


**Other Methods**


[Not exactly a methods book, this slim volume ably lays out the philosophical underpinnings of analytic, critical, and existential hermeneutics.]

**Interpreting Qualitative Data**

*Foss, Sonja K.: Rhetorical Criticism. 3rd edition. Waveland, 2004. on various kinds of textual analysis

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*________: Local Knowledge. Basic Books, 1983. Especially “Found in Translation” (pp36-54) and “From the Native’s Point of View” (pp 55-70).

*Richards, Lyn: Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide. Sage, 2005 [On coding, software, etc.]

Writing Qualitative Dissertations


Exemplars: Qualitative Research

Exemplars of Various Types of Ethnography

*Bender, Courtney: Heaven’s Kitchen: Living Religion and God’s Love We Deliver. Chicago, 2003. [ethnography focused on life-situated narrative analysis]


Exemplars of Various Types of Phenomenology & Phenomenography

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Exemplars of Various Kinds of Discourse Analysis


Exemplars of Other Qualitative Methods


*Davidman, Lynn: Motherloss. California, 2001. [interview research]


Quantitative Research:

Overview


Comparative Method


Content Analysis

*Krippendorf, Klaus: Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology. 2nd ed. Sage, 2004. [Lita Furby highly recommends this second edition.]
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**Survey Research**


**Survey Research**

Henry, Gary: *Practical Sampling*. Sage, 1990

**Statistics**


**Exemplars: Quantitative Research**

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**Action Research:**


Reason, P., & E. Bradbury, eds: Handbook of Action Research: Participatory Inquiry and Practice. Sage, 2001. [NOTE: The comments about the Denzin & Lincoln handbook (above) apply to this one as well. Some of these articles, including the editors’ introduction, make some extremely questionable philosophic claims. Peter Park’s chapter is excellent, however.]

**Exemplars: Action Research**

Fine, Michelle et al (a list of 10 co-authors): “Participatory Action Research: From Within and Beyond Prison Bars”. Pp. 173-198 in Paul Camic, et al, eds, Qualitative Research in Psychology. American Psychological Association, 2003. [This is a bit sketchy to be a true exemplar, especially of action research -- it seems more evaluative -- but it is certainly participatory and it raises some important issues in a concrete way.]


**Evaluation Research:**


**On Internet Research:**

On Research for Organizational Practice:

On Writing Dissertations & Proposals:
See the website, with some interesting links (especially "A Writer's Online Resources"): http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/writersref/
*Van Maanen, John: Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography. Chicago, 1988

Methodologically Exemplary Dissertations from Fielding Graduate University (all *):

Software: (all prices are with educational discounts)
SPSS (now in version 17). (www.spss.com: $519 + expensive modules)
The gold standard in statistical software, SPSS does everything (if you buy the right modules). Its relative user-unfriendliness has spawned a cottage industry of how-to books. Powerful enough to automate repeated tasks. Graduate students (but not faculty) can buy a cheaper but complete version that includes several useful modules. I recommend the Graduate Student Pack to everyone who is allowed to buy it – about $200.
MicroCase (www.microcase.com: $450)
This program is full-featured and much easier to use than SPSS. It is not quite as powerful, but one doesn’t have to purchase as many add-ons to get basic functionality. Available with massive amounts of sociological data. Also not currently being updated, or (perhaps) even supported.
Sociological Insights (www.mcguire-spickard.com/software/software.htm: free)
This program does not actually analyze your own data. It does, however, help you learn how to analyze both ecological and survey data, easing your transition to a full-featured program. Use with my Thinking Through Statistics: Exploring Quantitative Sociology (see above).
Methodologist's Toolchest, (www.idealworks.com: $149)
Though somewhat buggy and hard to use, this program helps you determine the proper sample size, the right statistical techniques, what graphs to use, and so on, for your project. You need to know a lot about statistics to make it work. The developers (IdeaWorks) tell me that they are working on a new, clearer version with a better interface.
There are better free sample-size calculators available for Palm handhelds: e.g. Robert Wheeler’s SSize (for complex calculations; www.bobwheeler.com/stat/SSize/ssize.html) and my StatCalc (for simple ones; requires HotPaw Basic; jim_spickard@redlands.edu).

Sample Power (http://www.spss.com/samplepower/: $499)
This program does a much better job of figuring samples than Methodologist’s Toolchest, and is easy to use, to boot. It is criminally overpriced, however. Find someone who owns a copy.

Qualitative Data Analysis Software:
An electronic sorting system for text, the computer-based equivalent to a bunch of 3x5 cards and a large livingroom floor. One codes text bits based on one’s research questions, then gets instant access to all the items so coded. Very useful for data access; not at all a substitute for thinking.
- Atlas TI, version 6 (http://www.atlasti.com: $585; student price $99)
- NVivo currently in version 8 (www.qsrinternational.com: $545 educational price; $240 student price (expires after 12 months)

NOTE: Used properly, Atlas TI, NVivo, N6/NUDIST, and the like help one see patterns in the data. But they can just as easily “help” one see one’s projections – i.e., what one would like to have the data say. Therefore, they must be used with caution. This is no different from the caution with which one must approach statistics programs, which will give “averages” and “standard deviations” of such categorical variables as “gender” and “race” – rather unreal results, when you think about it.

Above all, one cannot just “see what categories emerge” from one’s data. Think about it: Would one say “I’m going to throw all my data into SPSS and see what emerges”? It makes no more sense to let NVivo or N6 do one’s thinking than to let SPSS do it.


For current reviews of qualitative data analysis software, visit CAQDAS – Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis network project: www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/caqdas

* See “The Two Faces of the Literature Review” (in my “Useful Ideas for Doctoral Research” packet) for ways to use this software to facilitate good literature reviews