

## Research exercise in qualitative communication research ("Kommunikationsforschung I")

“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

(W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas)

Instructor: Rasmus Kleis Nielsen  
Seminars: Tuesdays, 4pm-6pm  
Office hours: Tuesdays 3pm-4pm

### Overview

The purpose of this course is to offer students an opportunity to develop their research skills in qualitative methodology. The empirical focus of the course will be “folk theories of journalism”, that is, the beliefs that ordinary people who do not work professionally in or in connection with journalism have about the profession and how it is practiced. Researchers have long known that people’s preconceptions shape how they make sense of journalistic output. In this course, we will pursue a new, related question—people’s preconceptions of journalism itself. We will use in-depth semi-structured individual interviews and discuss underlying methodological questions concerning case selection, validity, reliability, and analytical generalization. The course will prepare students to use qualitative methods to analyze media use in a rigorous fashion for professional and/or academic purposes.

### The course

The course begins with a brief introduction to interviews as a social science method and to folk theories of journalism as an example of what the sociologist Ann Swidler has called “culture in action”. From there on, the rest of the course is dedicated to a combination of practical, applied qualitative research, classroom discussion, and short presentations based on students’ hands-on experience preparing and conducting in-depth interviews. Most of the seminars will involve a combination of discussion, short lectures, and applied exercises. Students will be required to conduct, transcribe, and analyze two interviews and to write three short papers during the course, the first outlining their research questions and how they will approach them (1 page), the second describing their proposed sample and their interview guide (1 page), and the third presenting their empirical findings and offering their own reflection on their experience of doing interviews and what they would have done differently in hindsight (2 pages). Students will be graded on the basis of their participation in discussion in seminars, their participation in practical assignments and exercises along the way, as well as the three short papers written during the course.

### Recommended reading

For general discussions of qualitative methods and interviews in social science I recommend—

- Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.  
Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press.  
Weiss, Robert Stuart. 1994. *Learning from Strangers*. New York: Free Press.

### **Seminar 1 (04.14.15) Introduction to in-depth interviewing and folk theories of journalism**

This seminar sets the scene for the course in terms of the qualitative method in focus—in-depth individual interviews—and the object of analysis that the course is built around—folk theories of journalism (drawing on Ann Swidler’s theory of culture in action).

#### Required readings

Bryman, Alan. 2004. Chapter 15 “Interviewing in qualitative research” in *Social Research Methods*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press (pp. 318-344).

Swidler, Ann. 1986. ‘Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies’. *American Sociological Review* 51 (2): 273–86. doi:10.2307/2095521.

### **Seminar 2 (04.21.2015) Developing research problems and research questions**

This seminar is dedicated to developing specific research problems and research questions amenable to interview-based research.

#### **No class (04.28.2015)**

Students have time to prepare their one-page paper on their research questions and methodological approach, due 05.04.2015.

### **Seminar 3 (05.05.2015) Sampling interviewees**

This seminar draws on discussions in sociology on how to sample for in-depth interviews. Students will give short in-class presentations on their research questions based on the paper submitted.

### **Seminar 4 (05.12.2015) Writing interview guides**

This seminar focuses on how to write interview guides. On the basis of seminars 3 and 4, students prepare their one-page paper presenting their sample and interview guide, due 05.18.2015.

### **Seminar 5 (05.19.2015) Conducting interviews**

This seminar is focused on the interview situation itself. Students will give short in-class presentations based on the interview guides submitted.

### **Seminar 6 (05.26.2015) Coding interview material**

This seminar deals with how to code interview material. Students are expected to conduct their first in-depth interview of their own outside class during this week and begin transcribing it.

### **Seminar 7 (06.02.2015) Analyzing interview material**

This seminar connects coding with analysis of interview material. We will discuss students' experience of doing their first interview. Students are expected to conduct their second in-depth interview of their own outside class during this week and begin transcribing it.

### **Seminar 8 (06.09.2015) Ethics of interviewing**

This seminar is dedicated to the ethical issues involved in doing interviews, in analyzing interview data, and in publishing the results. We will discuss students' experience of doing the second interview. Students will finish transcription of their interviews.

### **No class (06.16.2015)**

Students have time to work on their final two-page paper presenting their empirical findings and their reflections on the experience of having conducted an interview based research project.

### **No class (06.23.2015)**

As above.

### **Seminar 9 (06.30.2015) Different kinds of interviews**

This seminar goes beyond in-person individual face-to-face interviews to discuss different kinds of qualitative interviews. Final two-page papers are finished and due 06.07.2015.

### **Seminar 10 (07.07.2015) Discuss research papers**

Students give short presentations based on their final papers, and we discuss what we have learned in the course.

## Further reading

Methods are a mean to an end. For exemplary monographs drawing in whole or in large part on individual in-depth qualitative interviews as one of their means, see for example—

- Bird, S. Elizabeth. 2003. *The Audience in Everyday Life : Living in a Media World*. New York ; London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1999. *The Weight of the World : Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Translated by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. Cambridge: Polity.
- Coleman, Stephen. 2012. *How Voters Feel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- Herbst, Susan. 1998. *Reading Public Opinion : How Political Actors View the Democratic Process*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Perrin, Andrew J. 2006. *Citizen Speak : The Democratic Imagination in American Life*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Radway, Janice A. 1984. *Reading the Romance : Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2004. *Talking About Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

For some of the most prominent—and very different—overall discussions of social science research and the role of qualitative methods (including interviews), see—

- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton ; Chichester: Princeton University Press.
- Brady, Henry E, and David Collier, eds. 2004. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press.

On the perennial question “how many interviews are enough?”, see various responses here—

- Baker, Sarah Elsie, and Rosalind Edwards. 2012. *How Many Qualitative Interviews Is Enough*. Working Paper. NCRM.  
[http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/?utm\\_content=bufferb8c0e&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/?utm_content=bufferb8c0e&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer).

There are many textbooks/handbooks dedicated to interviewing specifically and qualitative methodology more broadly. Two popular choices are—

- Kvale, Steinar, and Svend Brinkmann. 2009. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 2nd edition. Los Angeles ; London: SAGE.
- Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*. Fourth edition. London: Sage.