WSSR
WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Working with Concepts in the Social Sciences
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May 8-9, 2017
9:00am – 4:30pm

Concepts are foundational to the social-science enterprise. This two-day workshop introduces you to two distinct ways to think about and work with them. One is the positivist approach to what is called concept "formation" or "reconstruction" – the formulation of a technical, neutral vocabulary for measuring, comparing, and generalizing. This approach focuses attention on operationalization, measurement validity, and the dangers of conceptual stretching. The other is an interpretivist approach that focuses on what I call "elucidation." Elucidation includes both an investigation into the language of daily life and a reflexive examination of social-science technical language. It is intended to illuminate both the worldviews of the people that social scientists wish to understand and the ways in which social scientists' embeddedness in particular languages, historical eras, and power structures shapes the concepts with which they do their work.

The Purpose:

1. For you to understand the difference between reconstructing and elucidating concepts and to see what is at stake in choosing to do one or the other.
2. For you to learn the basics of conceptual reconstruction: how to construct concepts by manipulating the intension and extension of a term, how to build complex family resemblance and radial categories, how to assess the goodness of term using criteria such as measurement validity, differentiation, coherence, and theoretical utility.
3. For you to learn basic elucidative strategies derived from ordinary language philosophy and Foucauldian genealogy and how to assess the goodness of social-science concepts by recognizing problems of one-sidedness, universalism, and objectivism.
4. For you to gain practice reconstructing and elucidating concepts by doing in-class exercises with concepts that you yourself have chosen.

Note that I will also be available during the lunch breaks for one-on-one consultations about your individual research needs and how the insights of this course might be adapted to meet those needs.

Requirements:

You will need to bring a Wi-Fi enabled laptop as well as Adobe Acrobat or other pdf-viewing software to do in-class exercises. You will also need to identify one or two concepts of interest to you. It would be helpful if

you could do that in advance of the workshop. Please email me if you would like help thinking about what concepts you might choose. All readings are optional.

Schedule:
(Morning sessions run from 9 to 12; afternoon sessions run from 1:30 to 4:30)

Session	Topic	Details
Monday morning (May 8)	Methodologies and concepts	In this introductory part of the workshop, you will learn what it means to adopt a positivist or interpretivist methodology and their respective approaches to concepts. You will also contemplate the value that each approach might hold for your own research interests.
	The basics of positivist reconstruction	In this part of the session you will learn a fundamental tool of concept reconstruction: manipulating the intension (properties) and extension (referents) of a concept.
Monday afternoon (May 8)	Advanced reconstruction	We add to our reconstructive repertoire in this part of the workshop by learning how to reconstruct more complicated concepts: family resemblance and radial categories. You will then use the various reconstructive strategies we have learned to reconstruct a concept of your own choosing.
	Assessing reconstructed concepts	In this part of the session, you will learn to assess, using both positivist and interpretivist metrics, the goodness of a reconstructed concept. Operating within a positivist framework, you will learn to apply criteria such as measurement validity, differentiation, coherence, and theoretical utility. Operating within an interpretivist framework you will learn to recognize problems of one-sidedness, universalism, and objectivism.
Tuesday morning (May 9)	Introduction to interpretivist elucidation	In this part of the session, you will learn about the basic aims of concept elucidation as well as two key elucidative strategies: "grounding" (examining how concepts are used in everyday language) and "exposing" (identifying how concepts are embedded in webs of power).
Tuesday afternoon (May 9)	The elucidative strategy of grounding (using the tools of ordinary language interviewing)	Ordinary language interviewing is a tool for uncovering the meaning of words in everyday talk. By studying the meaning of words (in English or other languages), the promise is to gain insight into the various social realities these words name, evoke, or realize. First we will cover some basic questions about ordinary language interviewing: what it is and what can be discovered through it. Next you will learn how to conduct an ordinary language interview and gain practice doing one.
	The elucidative strategy of grounding (using the tools of Foucauldian genealogy)	The language of social science contains many concepts that have become stabilized, naturalized, or neutralized in ways that obscure from view their histories of contingency and contestation. In this part of the workshop, you will first learn to use Foucauldian genealogy to denaturalize the natural, destabilize the stable, and thus make space for new ways of conceptualizing the world. You will then use the tools of Foucauldian genealogy to practice exposing a concept of your own choosing.

Recommended Readings :

Session	Readings
Monday morning (May 8)	Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. 2012. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge): 4-7. Sartori, Giovanni. 1970. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64,4: 1033-46. _____.2009. "An Illustration." In *Concepts and Method in Social Science: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori* edited by David Collier and John Gerring. New York: Routledge; 72-74.
Monday afternoon (May 8)	Collier, David, and James E. Mahon, Jr. 1993. "Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 87,4: 845-55. Gerring, John. 1999. "What Makes a Concept Good? A Critical Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences." *Polity* 31,3: 358-93. Bevir, Mark, and Asaf Kedar. 2008. "Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology." *Perspectives on Politics* 6,3: 503-17.
Tuesday morning (May 9)	Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1972. "Context, Sense, and Concepts." In *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 71-98.
Tuesday afternoon (May 9)	Schaffer, Frederic Charles. 2014. "Thin Descriptions: The Limits of Survey Research on the Meaning of Democracy." *Polity* 46,3: 303-30. Foucault, Michel. 1977. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* edited by D. F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 139-64. Mitchell, Timothy. 1998. "Fixing the Economy." *Cultural Studies* 12,1: 82-101. Oren, Ido. 1995. "The Subjectivity of the 'Democratic' Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany. *International Security* 20,2: 147-84.