

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN QUALITATIVE METHODS
AUGUST 23-28**

You are required to answer THREE (3) QUESTIONS (ONE QUESTION FROM EACH OF PARTS A, B & C). Each answer should be 10-12 pages (12-point font and double-spaced) in length. The complete exam should not total more than 36 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font), not including references. THE COMMITTEE WILL NOT READ PAST THE 36TH PAGE.

Part A

1. Discussions of ethics in qualitative research are broad and pluralistic. Identify three ethical considerations in qualitative research and discuss the various ways in which researchers included on the comprehensive exam list have wrestled with and addressed these three issues in their scholarship. Be sure to address the ways these issues are implicated in one another. That is, where do the three issues overlap? How do they complicate one another?

2. Holstein and Gubrium argue for an “active interview” approach to qualitative interview research. Outline this approach, comparing it to more traditional approaches to qualitative interviewing. For example, how does the active approach understand the production of knowledge and the relationship between researcher and researched? Next identify an interview study from the comprehensive exam list whose findings would be enriched by active interviewing methodology. That is, how does the active interviewing approach help you rethink or better understand the study’s findings?

Part B

3. In his critique of Mitchell Duneier’s *Sidewalk* and Elijah Anderson’s *Code of the Street*, Loïc Wacquant foregrounds “the deeply problematic relationship between theory and observation” and “the politics of publishing” in the US today as two perils stalking ethnography as a method and a practice. Critically reflect on these points drawing on

a. Loïc’s discussion of *Sidewalk* and *Code of the Street*, adding your own reading of these texts.

b. In light of the foregoing discussion, evaluate Phillip Bourgeois’ ethnographic work, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* as a cognate example of ethnographic research.

4. Two recurrent themes in feminist critiques of conventional methodologies in the social sciences centre on i) the separation of subject and object; and ii) the practice of positivism as a form of social dominance. Discuss, drawing on as many relevant readings as possible.

Part C

5. Ethnographers and field researchers often employ 'tricks of the trade' when interacting or observing participants or informants in order to acquire thick and empirically accurate data. This may involve the self-presentation of the ethnographer, how questions are asked, or in some cases deception. At the same time, ethnographers are charged with an ethical obligation to do 'no harm' and to work in a framework of informed consent. The tension between these two goals is often heightened when research subjects are vulnerable and have been victimised.

Drawing on as many of the readings as possible discuss a) how this tension is present in different types of ethnographic work, b) how or if researchers recognize this tension and how they grapple with it.

6. The issue of *causality* often vexes researchers who use qualitative approaches. Drawing on as many readings as possible, discuss the very different ways causality is viewed and considered by qualitative researchers.