

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN QUALITATIVE METHODS
FEBRUARY 6-10, 2023**

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.

A

1. Has – and, if so, in what ways – sociology as a discipline or field historically undervalued the craft of teaching? What can qualitative methods as a subfield, area of inquiry, and set of political and intellectual commitments offer in terms of a path forward? How might we intertwine pedagogy, qualitative knowledge production, and ongoing conversations about decolonizing and democratizing the academy?
2. In “‘You Still Takin’ Notes?’ Fieldwork and Problems of Informed Consent” (1980), Barrie Thorne explores multiple ethical and methodological challenges in qualitative research, including ensuring informed consent, gaining and maintaining access, studying groups of which we are members, and conducting research on politically charged topics and settings. Choose two of these ethical and methodological challenge and then, first, outline Thorne’s discussion of each challenge and, second, use readings from the comp list to critically explore how discussions of those challenges have shifted and developed over the last forty years.

B

3. What counts – or ought to count – as data? Develop your argument by drawing on two or three case studies from the Exemplary Ethnographies section – you may wish to choose examples that have different approaches to what constitutes data in order to flesh out your own position. As a thought experiment, imagine what would have occurred had an external, perhaps more rigid and intellectually conservative, notion of what counts as data been imposed on the authors of these examples. How would that have changed and/or weakened the value of the study? Close with your vision for what qualitative methods as an area can contribute to debates over “data” and knowledge moving forward.
4. Researchers committed to decolonizing and democratizing the academy have often contended that minority group scholars are best equipped to conduct research in minority communities. Critically evaluate this statement drawing on relevant readings from the collection *Racing Research, Researching Race*, as well as those from the Representation, Reflexivity and Subjectivity section. Now imagine yourself in two fieldwork contexts: i) among a group of people with similar racialized subject locations/identification as you and ii) among a second group of people with different and oppositional racialized subject locations/identification than you. Based on what you have learned about what it means to be conscious of “race” in the research process, and drawing on readings across the reading list, critically reflect on what you think would be your biggest challenge in each situation, and why.

C

5. 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.

6. Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman argues for qualitative researchers “bringing [their] whole self to research” – a task that “is as much about being reflexive about our bodies and emotions in the field, as it is about embracing the power of our multidimensional identities.” Drawing on readings from across the reading list, describe the stakes, challenges, and affordances of bringing one’s whole self – bodies, emotions, and multidimensional identities – to qualitative research.