Understanding the Everyday Life of Translational Science Research: Basic and Applied Dimensions
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What do these famous social theorists have in common?

- Robert E. Park
- Herbert Blumer
- Erving Goffman
- Peter Hall
“applied sociologists”

- Robert E. Park -- journalist and public relations
- Herbert Blumer – “Movies and Conduct” study
- Erving Goffman – NIMH
- Peter Hall – social and educational policy
A False Distinction

• Many social scientists believe that basic research is more intellectual, more theoretical, and more politically and economically “pure.”

• One does applied social science for the money, not for the knowledge.
My Argument

• The holistic orientation and appreciation of symbolic interaction and qualitative methods encourages the researcher to do both simultaneously.

• Applied research can provide the social scientist with ideas, resources, respondents, “proving grounds,” and the satisfaction of practical use of one’s good work.
• Qualitative methods are complementary to the growing movement in science towards translation.
My Laboratory
The Center for Social Inquiry
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Goals and Objectives

• Provide a home for external grants and contracts

• Facilitate efforts by department faculty to assemble grant and contract proposals

• Facilitate the assembly of multidisciplinary research teams comprised of faculty from across the university
• Integrate graduate and undergraduate students into high-quality research projects

• Establish a departmental reputation for scholarly and instructional excellence across the broader discipline of sociology

• Prepare the scientific, organizational, scholarly, and intellectual platform for the anticipated establishment of a Ph.D. program in sociology at Texas State University
CSI Projects—since 2011

• “Diversity Among Health Care Trustees,” a Policy White Paper for the Texas Healthcare Trustees (Dr. Debarun Majumdar and Dr. Bob Price, P.I.s)

• “A Needs Assessment of Human Services Delivery,” for the City of San Marcos, Texas (Dr. Joseph A. Kotarba, P.I.)

• Evaluation Research for Integrated Behavioral Health Care Phase II,” for the George Foundation (Dr. Toni Watt, P.I.)
• “Head Start Program Community Needs Assessment” (Dr. Kyong Hee Chee, P.I.)

• “Music as a Feature of Community Development” (Dr. Joseph A. Kotarba, P.I.)

• “Evaluation of Translational Science Research” for the Institute for Translational Science/UT Medical Branch-Galveston (Dr. Joseph A. Kotarba, P.I.)
Translational Science

Translational science research (TSR) is a growing scientific movement that aims to facilitate the efficient application of bio-medical research to clinical services design and delivery (i.e., improving the “bench-to-bedside” process).
• The University of Texas Medical Branch-Galveston (UTMB) is the recipient of a Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) from the National Institutes on Health.

• Qualitative component in project evaluation.

• My focus: changes in the culture of research at UTMB since CTSA.
Methodology

- 64 individual interviews with M.D. and Ph.D. scientists and clinicians; postdoc and graduate students; and administrators

- 8 focus group interviews with these groups.

- 30+ hours of observations
• Interviews and observations were spread out over the course of two years to actualize...

• The logic of grounded theory and...

• Participants’ stories
Making Sense of TSR

• Significant symbols
  – “The meeting”
  – “Inflammation”
  – “My lab”
• Dilemmas

  – Routine and tradition vs. experiment and innovation

  – Commitment vs. time constraints

  – Mentoring vs. freedom

  – P.I. vs. team
– Foundation vs. NIH-funded research

– Organizational vs. scientific expertise

– Vision vs. design
Basic/theoretical/conceptual/writing

• “Seeing things” as a symbolic interactionist

• Ideal type: the new scientist

• Conceptual platform: self-identity

• Methods refinement: from interview to conversation
Traditional Scientist
Translational Scientist
New Vocabulary

– technology transfer
– commercialization
– patents
– licensing
– start up
– venture capital
– equity
– one-page pitch
Additional Dilemmas

– Publication vs. secrecy

– Equity vs. royalty

– Patents vs. copyrights

– Biological vs. molecular research
- Device vs. drug
- Linear vs. non-linear translational science
- Inventorship vs. authorship
- "druggability of a molecule"
Self-Identity

– Scientist, inventor, businessman??

– Inventor should have flair to help with marketing

– Do not write a patent like you write a scholarly paper
— “Company people are as smart as you are.”

— “value inflection“ How much money it takes to move an idea along

— Elevator pitch
Who is He/She?

– Confused

– Discovery as a goal not a means

– intellectual
Suggestions for Qualitative Success

– Negotiate access to data early on.

– Apply for IRB/human subjects approval for the entire study.

– Use university resources to publicize the study, relationship with agency, and products.
- Interdisciplinary/multi-method

- Be in charge if possible

- Make qualitative methods the primary but not sole strategy

- Conceptualize, conceptualize, conceptualize
Resources


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