Exercise: Critical reading of a research

Instructions for group assignment

**The group assignment consists** of 1) reading a research article, 2) discussing about it in a study group, 3) preparing collectively a Power Point presentation based on the discussions, and 3) performing it on Monday 28th November session. The deliverables are the electronic copy of your group’s Power Point slides and the oral presentation.

**The purpose of the assignment** is to learn, how to read research critically and to analyse methodological decisions the researcher has made at different stages of research process and how s/he introduces them to the reader. In addition to reading results of the research, it is also important to analyse how the researcher has gained these results, what kind of decisions and definitions s/he has done, and how s/he reports this process.

**Process:**

**Step 1**: Form three study groups of 3-6 students. Make sure you have all participants’ contact information. Agree upon a time to meet and discuss the reading material.

**Step 2**: Prior to the first meeting with your study group, read carefully the article by Lauren A. Rivera (2010): “Status Distinctions in Interaction: Social Selection and Exclusion at an Elite Nightclub.” *Qualitative Sociology* 33:229–255.

Analyze the article using the following questions (you don’t need to strictly follow this list of questions but you can use them to help your analysis):

1. What are the research questions that the researcher wants to answer?
2. What are the theoretical approaches and the main concepts used in this piece of research?
3. What are the methods used in data collection? Why this method? How much and what kind of data were collected?
4. Do you find the data chosen relevant to answer the research question?
5. How were the data analysed? Is it possible to follow the researcher’s argumentation from data to results?
6. What are the main results and conclusions? How are they presented?
7. How is the structure of the article? Is it logical and easy to follow?
8. Is this piece of research and researcher’s argumentation convincing?

As the time for the assignment is rather short (three weeks), you should start reading the article as soon as possible!

**Step 3:** Talk about the article in your study group meetings. There is a specific set of questions for each group to be answered.

Group 1: Objectives, theoretical framework and central concepts

1. What is the objective of this study? Is it clearly defined and articulated? How is it motivated?
2. What are the research questions that the researcher wants to answer? Are they clearly defined and articulated? How are they motivated? What kind of specifications and definitions has the researcher done?
3. What are the theoretical approaches and the main concepts used in this piece of research? Are they clearly defined and articulated? How are they motivated?

Group 2: Data and analysis

1. How much and what kind of data were collected? How was the data collected? What are the methods used in data collection? How are the methods motivated? Do you find the data relevant to answer the research questions?
2. How is the data analysed? How does the researcher present her methodological decisions and the use of methods? How are they motivated? Does she discuss any alternative methods? Do you find the methods relevant?
3. Does the researcher discuss the relationship between researcher and participants of the study? How does the researcher discuss ethical issues of her study?

Group 3: Research process, writing and results

1. What are the main results and conclusions of this study? How are the findings and the implications of them discussed? What is the role of the previous research in presenting and reflecting the findings?
2. How is the structure of the article? How is the researcher reporting the study? Is it logical and easy to follow? Is it possible to follow the process and argumentation from the data to results? Is this piece of research and the researcher’s argumentation convincing? How are the limitations of this study discussed?

**Step 4**: Each study group should prepare a Power Point presentation based on their discussions and answers to their own group’s questions. The Power Point presentation should be about 20-25 minutes long and it should include an overview into your study groups’ analysis of the article and the more specific answers to your group’s questions. When you prepare the presentation, assume that you will be talking to a group who might not remember all details of the article. You may use direct quotations from the article. However, do not exceed the time limit. Figure that you probably can cover about 10-15 slides in 20 minutes. In addition, it would be a good idea to leave some extra time for questions and answers.

**Step 5**: One of your study group members should send an electronic copy of the group’s Power Point presentation no later than **Monday 28th November, 9.00** to Tuija Virkki (tuija.virkki@jyu.fi).

**Step 6**: The article and your group’s part of the analysis of it will be discussed on Monday 28th November. Please be prepared to present your group’s analysis with Power Point and discuss about the article on whole. In case you are absent from this session, you should write appr. three pages long paper based on the answers to the questions, and send it via e-mail to Tuija Virkki. This should be done by Thursday 10th November.