

# Orientation to the Senior Honors Thesis Seminar

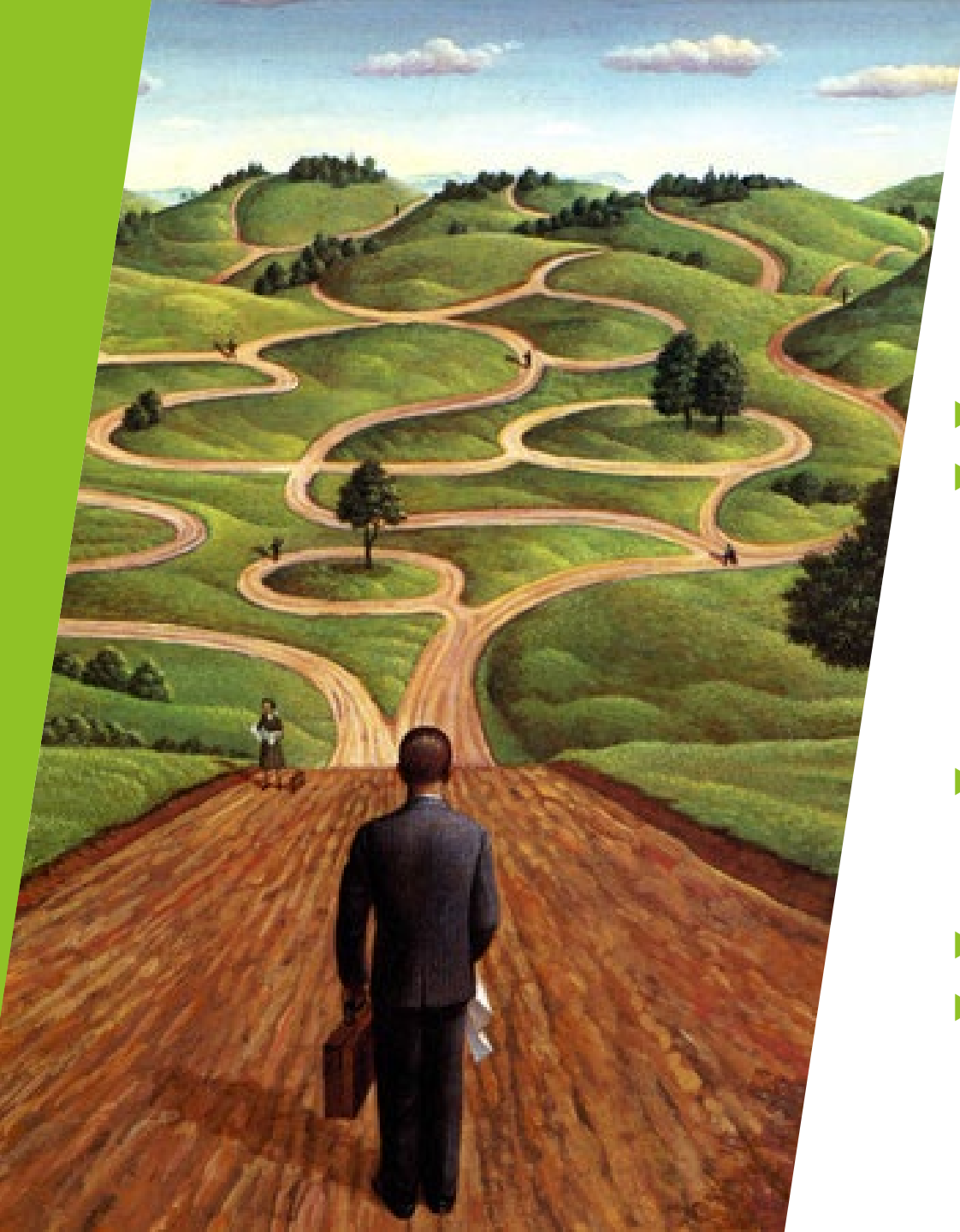
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# Overview of Topics

- ▶ What do we do in the senior thesis class?
- ▶ What does a strong research proposal look like?
  - ❖ Viable Research Question
  - ❖ Academic Literature and the Sociological Conversation
  - ❖ Methods: Access to Research Sites, Interviewees, Data
- ▶ Your Questions
  - ▶ What topic is of interest to you?
  - ▶ Preliminary research question?



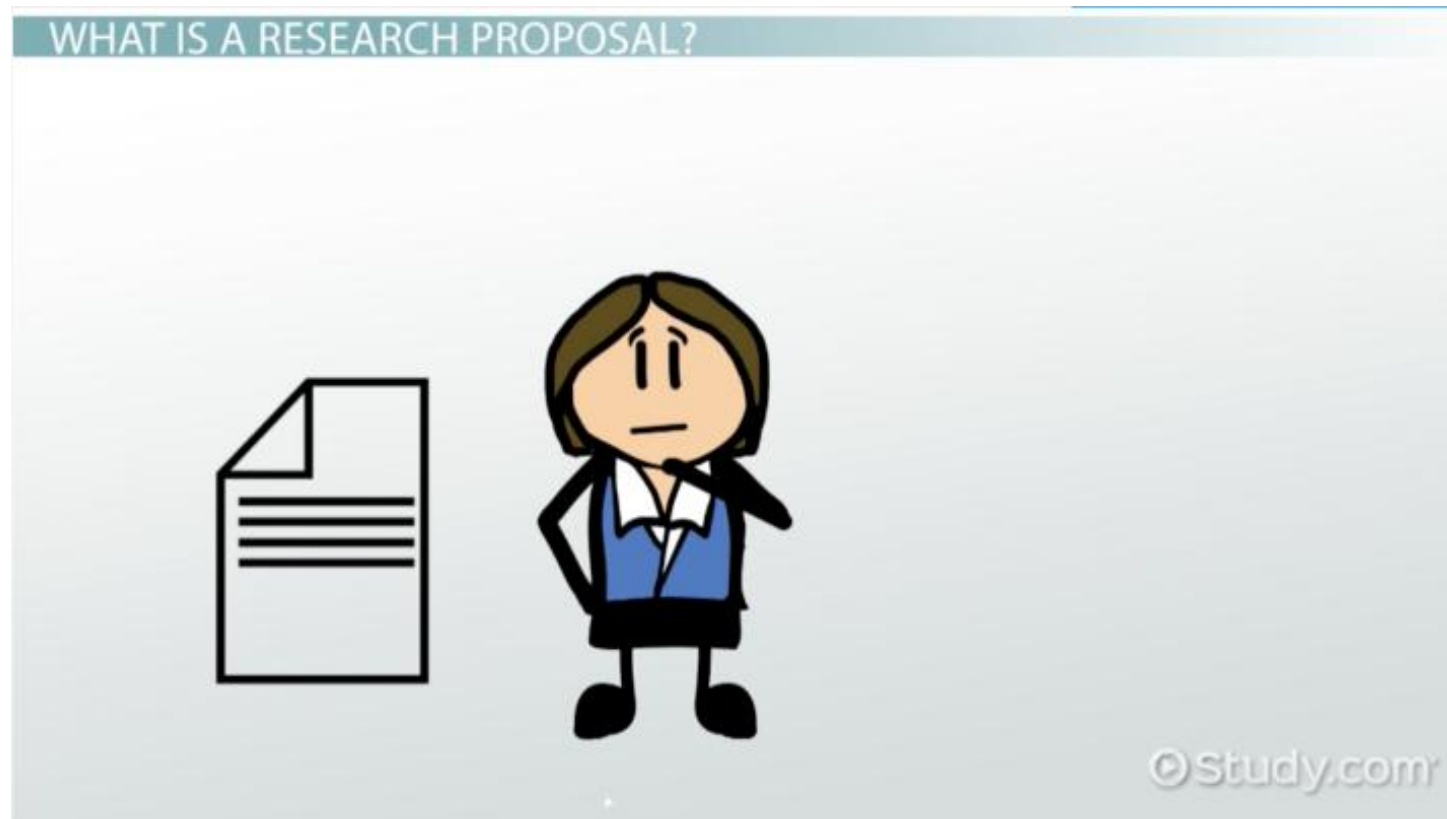
# What Do We Do in the Thesis Class?

- ▶ Our Expectations
- ▶ We understand that for most, this is your first lengthy research project
  - ▶ The path of research is not straight and narrow, but a winding road, with many ups, down and unexpected turns
- ▶ Class is designed to structure/guide your journey
- ▶ Intellectually intense experience
- ▶ The research is your own project

# Organization of Class

- ▶ Research process broken down into smaller steps
  - ▶ Assignments due every 3 weeks
- ▶ First semester:
  - ▶ Research statement
    - ▶ What is your question
    - ▶ Why is it important
  - ▶ Annotated bibliography (continuing)
  - ▶ Literature review
  - ▶ Research methods (what, how, where)
  - ▶ Research prospectus

# Elements of a Strong Research Proposal



# Initial Research Question


- ▶ Most students begin with an interest in a topic
- ▶ Initial question may be very broad
- ▶ Read! READ!! READ!!!

As you learn more about your topic

- ❖ Ask yourself questions about the topic
- ❖ Look for gaps in the literature
  - No satisfactory answers
  - Different time frame
  - Different context
- ▶ It takes time to narrow an interest in a topic into feasible research question

# Viabile Research Questions

- ▶ Sociologically significant
  - ▶ Beware the siren calls of psychology
- ▶ Project needs to be empirically grounded
- ▶ Make sure you can find the resources/data to answer your question
- ▶ Project can be completed in 9 months
- ▶ Project needs 30 - 50 pages to be fully explored
  - ▶ Not 10 pages, not 300 pages
- ▶ How, Why, What questions are more promising than Do questions
- ▶ **If you think you already know the answer to your research question, find another question**



## The Role of Literature In Shaping Your Question

Research question should enter a larger sociological conversation

- ▶ What do other people say about your topic?
- ▶ What *don't* other people say about your topic?
- ▶ What is your topic a case of?
  - ▶ May frame your research as a case study of a larger issue
- ▶ What are the sociological implications of your topic?
- ▶ Narrow your question by looking for gaps, silences, inconsistencies/disagreements in the literature



# Ideally,

The answer to your research question should

- ▶ Add to our knowledge of the topic
- ▶ Advance sociological understanding
  - ▶ e.g., what case study X tells us about social issue Y
- ▶ Read broadly to figure out what interests you specifically



# Methods



- ▶ You have some idea how you will gather the data you need to answer your question
  - ▶ Different methods best address different questions
- ▶ Can you get access
  - ▶ To an appropriate site
  - ▶ People to interview
    - ▶ Precautions for Vulnerable Groups
  - ▶ Archival material
  - ▶ Data bases

# Will you enjoy this journey?

- ▶ Submit a preliminary proposal for comment and advice
- ▶ Follow the advice given on your preliminary proposal
- ▶ Make an appointment with a librarian
- ▶ Sociology liaison Ann Glusker
- ▶ [glusker@Berkeley.edu](mailto:glusker@Berkeley.edu)

