

# Dissertation Examples: Sociology

## About this document

This PDF lists 6 **sociology dissertation examples** and thesis examples (2019–2026), each a complete, openly licensed document you can read in full, with a note on what it does well and who it is useful for. Use them to see how a finished dissertation is structured and argued at your level before you write your own.

By [Derek Jansen](#) (MBA) · Reviewed by [Eunice Rautenbach](#) (DTech) · Grad Coach · October 2026

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## Sociology dissertations

### 1. Demographics, operational resources, and grants: Exploring urban forest management program outcomes at the municipal level in New York State

J. Rebecca Hargrave · Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) · University of Massachusetts Amherst · 2026 · 191 pages

**APPROACH** Survey, Systematic review, Secondary data, Three-essay format

#### WHY WE PICKED IT

**The clearest three-article dissertation in the collection**, and the one to open if you have been told to write one and have never seen the shape: three self-contained studies, each with its own introduction, methods, results and discussion, bound by a common question. The first article is a systematic review conducted to **PRISMA** (section 1.2, page 10), with the search strategy, the search results and the coding scheme written out: study structure variables (year, authors, sample size, methods, geography) separated from review data variables (comparators, program components, barriers, intentions).

Students are routinely asked for a "systematic" review and produce a narrative one; this shows the difference, and shows a review used as a first paper that establishes the gap the next two fill rather than as background. The second and third articles are both municipal surveys, the third combining its responses with community characteristics data, so the three together also show a review used to set up two rounds of primary data collection.

[Read the full dissertation](#) · [Original record](#)

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## 2. Between Hegemony and Enlightenment: Unthinking the Global North-South Divide in Sociological Knowledge Production

Xuewen Yan · Ph. D., Sociology · Cornell University · 2024 · 181 pages

**APPROACH** Bibliometrics, Web scraping

### WHY WE PICKED IT

Read the Methods section (page 47) if your data does not exist in a form anybody has released, and you are trying to work out whether assembling it yourself counts as method. Yan needed the reference lists of forty years of Chinese sociology. CNKI, unlike Web of Science, does not supply reference text, so she **downloaded and OCR'd the articles**, then scraped download and citation counts off the result pages because those are displayed but not downloadable, then merged that with the official metadata.

What makes it a model rather than a war story is what follows: she states the sample of 9,250 articles, then every inclusion and exclusion with its reason. Conference summaries out, because they are not substantive. Book reviews in, because in Chinese sociology a book review is a long essay comparable to a research article. Zero-reference articles out, because citation counts jump discontinuously at one reference. Final analytic sample: 3,746. That is what "justify your sample" means.

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## 3. Property and Indigenous State Formation in the Honduran Moskitia

Fernando Galeana Rodriguez · Ph. D., Development Sociology · Cornell University · 2021 · 430 pages

**APPROACH** Ethnography, Archival

### WHY WE PICKED IT

The longest document in the collection and not one to read end to end. Read "**Analysis and Positionality**" (**page 48**) and stop. Galeana Rodriguez had previously worked with the World Bank and expected that to make Miskitu communities distrust him.

It did not. Instead people assumed he worked for an NGO and kept steering him into normative arguments about the property regime, so his actual difficulty was the opposite of the one he had prepared for. That alone is worth reading, because positionality is usually taught as a fixed thing you declare rather than something that behaves unpredictably in the field. Then he does the part almost nobody does: he says his positionality **set limits on the study**, and names two specific lines of inquiry he decided not to pursue because of it. Positionality connected to scope, rather than self-disclosure that changes nothing about the research.

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#### 4. Beekeeping in the Anthropocene: Theorizing Conflicts over Honey Bee Health

Eleanor Andrews · Ph. D., Development Sociology · Cornell University · 2020 · 198 pages

**APPROACH** Ethnography

##### WHY WE PICKED IT

Two conventions here that confuse students, both worth seeing done. First, **the methods are in an appendix**, "Appendix I: Plan Bee (Methods)" on page 157, not in chapter three. That is normal in a theory-led ethnography and it is not disorganization; the argument runs on theory and the methods are supporting evidence.

Second, the positionality. Andrews is not observing beekeepers, she is one: bee club officer, mentor, educator, and the writer of the curriculum for the state's Master Beekeeping program. She sets out what that access bought: beekeepers, research scientists and extension agents; a real sense of how discouraging the work is; research questions that came from the community rather than the literature. Then, without softening it, what it cost: "it has been difficult. I have had to repeatedly confront and articulate my own stance(s)" while mentoring the people she was studying. Insider research is common, and this is the honest version of writing it up.

[Read the full dissertation](#) · [Original record](#)

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#### 5. Refining the Telescope: Addressing Two Challenges to Sociological Research in Online Social Networks

George Edward Berry · Ph. D., Sociology · Cornell University · 2020 · 201 pages

**APPROACH** Computational, Simulation

##### WHY WE PICKED IT

The best model here if your work is statistical. Go to **section 3.6, "Limitations" (page 61)**.

Berry opens by naming the assumption the whole chapter rests on, that the classifier's error rate is known, then explains why it cannot be fully resolved (cross-validation estimates it but uncertainty remains; a calibrated model just moves the problem to estimating calibration accuracy), then adds the threats specific to his data: bots and inactive accounts that look like real members of a demographic group and bias the estimate. Two short paragraphs, and a reader knows exactly how far to trust the result. No apology, no "further research is needed" filler. It is also a clean example of the three-paper dissertation with per-chapter appendices, where mathematical derivations sit at the end of each chapter rather than interrupting the argument. Useful if you have been told to "put that in an appendix" and are unsure what survives in the main text.

[Read the full dissertation](#) · [Original record](#)

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## 6. Re-examining pathways to smallholder food security and the transformative potential of agroecology: A case study from Malawi

Sidney Madsen · M.S., Development Sociology · Cornell University · 2019 · 139 pages

**APPROACH** Case study, Interviews, Participatory

### WHY WE PICKED IT

The Master's-length sociology example, and a model of **writing up fieldwork you did not design alone**. Madsen's study sits inside a three-year, pre-post delayed-intervention project run with a Malawian NGO, and chapter 2 says exactly where her work stops and the project's begins: 537 farmers across ten village areas, eight receiving the intervention immediately and two held back to 2019, with half the intervention villages trained through farmer discussion groups and half through participatory theater.

She then names her own slice, the second round of interviews in June and July 2018, and the team who collected it, down to one undergraduate, two graduate students, five farmer promoters and one project field officer. If you are joining an existing project, inheriting a dataset, or working inside someone else's trial, this is how you describe the design honestly without claiming it.

**Read the full dissertation · Original record**

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## How to use an example dissertation

An example is a map of how one study was put together, not a template to copy. These four steps get the most out of one.

- 1. Read the abstract and the contents first.** They show the shape of the whole document before you spend an hour in it.  
Recommended reading: [Dissertation and thesis structure](#)
- 2. Read the chapter you are writing next.** Look at how it opens, how it is organized under headings, and how it ends.  
Recommended reading: [How to write the methodology chapter](#)
- 3. Check the level and the field.** A doctoral thesis goes further than a master's dissertation, and fields differ in what they expect.  
Recommended reading: [What is a dissertation?](#)
- 4. Follow your own handbook over any example.** Where an example and your program disagree, your program wins.  
Recommended reading: [Every example in the collection](#)

Used this way, two or three good examples teach you more than any amount of general advice.