

**Sociology 203b. Field Methods**  
**Brandeis University**  
**Fall 2017**

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*“Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedown; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesque. In short, gentlemen [sic], go get the seats of your pants dirty in real research.”*

*-Robert Park*

### **Course Description**

This graduate level course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to conducting sociological fieldwork. We focus on ways of asking research questions and designing field studies, situating those studies in existing literature and scholarly conversations, negotiating ethical issues, gathering data through participant observation and interviews, coding and analyzing those data, and bringing new perspectives and insights from the field into related scholarship.

The assigned readings offer guidance and examples of how to do fieldwork. To learn how to do fieldwork you have to, in the words of Robert Park. “get the seat of your pants dirty.” In addition to completing weekly reading and participating in class discussions, this class is built around a project you will design and begin to conduct during the semester. Your topic must be feasible (we will talk about this in the first and second weeks) and ethical (we will discuss this in the fourth week) and must be approved by me before you get started. I encourage you to continue with your project in subsequent semesters through MA theses, QPDs, dissertations, etc. with formal approval from the IRB (which we will discuss).

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Describe the epistemological assumptions that underlie qualitative research
- Gain insight into the debates within qualitative sociology, including those related to research ethics and the evaluation of evidence
- Ask clear research questions, situate them in appropriate literatures and make clear what your project adds to those literatures and why those contributions are important
- Do the basics of qualitative research including participant observation, interviews, coding and analysis of data using one of several approaches
- Design a qualitative research project suitable for an MA thesis, qualifying portfolio or similar independent project

- Submit a formal application to the Institutional Review Board at Brandeis for your project.

## Course Readings

The following books are available in the university bookstore.

- Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McRoberts, Omar. M. 2003. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weiss, Robert. 1994. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press.

These books are also on reserve in the university library. All other required course readings are available on Latte.

## Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for all of us. This is a seminar-based class and will only work if everyone is present and engaged. I will take attendance in each class and will email you if you are not in class. Your class attendance is part of your final grade. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance and those due to serious illness.
2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for each week, though I encourage you to practice digesting an article or book without reading every word. Start with the contents and read for the main argument (skimming some sections and reading others – especially the introduction and the conclusion – carefully).
3. **Class Participation** is important. I hope this will be a relatively small class in which each participant will speak in every class session. We have all been in classes dominated by one or two voices (sometimes that of the professor!). Please work with me to make sure that does not happen.
4. **Written Assignments**. This course is built around a project you will work on – in stages – over the course of the semester. Each assignment is due in class on the date indicated and we will often work with your text in class. Please do not get behind on the writing assignments as each one builds on the one before. If you are having trouble keeping up, please let me know asap so we can figure out how to proceed.
  - a. **Topic Memo**. Please write a 1-2 page single-spaced overview of your proposed research topic including the broad topic, a publicly accessible site or sites where you might do observations, a list of people or types of people connected to the topic you might interview, some ideas of the kinds

of research questions these data will help you address, and any questions or concerns you have for me. This is due in class on September 12.

- b. Literature review and research question memo. Please write a 7-10 page double-spaced review of the research literature relevant to your research questions and topic memo. Make sure you are clear about the kinds of questions people writing in this area are asking and *put in italics what the gaps are in sociological knowledge that your project will fill*. Please also **put in bold the specific research questions your project will address**. This is due in class on October 3.
- c. Study design memo. Please write a 5-7 page double-spaced memo in which you compare and contrast different study designs you could use to address your research questions. The designs you compare and contrast might use different methodologies or might be based on different epistemological assumptions about the uses of qualitative research. Explicitly consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and any relevant ethical issues and state which design you prefer and why. This is due in class on October 17.
- d. Participant observation field notes and memo. Please submit full field notes (typed up with jottings, drawings, etc. attached) from 2-3 hours of participant observation you conduct related to your project. Please include in front of your field notes a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting participant observation in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment on your notes. This is due in class on November 7.
- e. Interview notes and memo. Please submit the full transcript (typed up with any notes attached) from one of the two interviews you conduct related to your project. Please include in front of the transcript a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting the interview in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment on your interview transcript. This is due in class on November 28.
- f. Memo on coding and concept development. Please submit a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you outline what codes and concepts are emerging from your analysis. What is grabbing your attention? Why? How? How might it connect with ideas in your literature review? Be creative and have fun with this. Be sure to include any questions you specifically want me to address as I read. This is due in class on December 5.
- g. Final paper or proposal. This 10-20 page double-spaced paper can take many forms depending on where you are with your project. The overarching goal is that you synthesize what you have learned in your reading and assignments thus far and think about how you will proceed, if at all, with your project. Regardless of whether you write this up as a

summary of what you have learned or a proposal for a research project you will do based on the pilot data you have gathered you must:

- i. State your research question and motivate it theoretically and/or empirically.
- ii. Situate your question in the relevant sociological literatures. This includes making clear what gap your question fills in relevant literatures and why this gap is important to fill.
- iii. Describe your research design and plan for data collection. Specify how the sample will be drawn, what the relevant variables are, and how key concepts will be operationalized and measured.
- iv. Describe how you did or will analyze your data and why your approach is the best one
- v. Make clear why sociologists should care about your question and study – what is at stake in addressing this issue
- vi. Please also make clear whether you plan to continue with this project. If you will continue, you must submit an IRB protocol to Brandeis University signed by your faculty advisory. You may not continue to practice field observations or conduct interviews after the end of the semester until you have received formal notification from the IRB that your protocol was accepted. If you will be submitting an IRB protocol, please specify who your faculty advisor is and when you will submit the protocol. If you are not going to continue with this research, please also make that clear in your final paper.

Your final paper is due by noon on Friday December 15<sup>th</sup>. Please put leave it in my mailbox in Pearlman Hall.

**Late Assignments:** I anticipate a full semester as, I know, do many of you. I plan time into my schedule when your assignments are due to read and comment on them. I will try to return all assignments handed in on time within a week. Please make every effort to submit your work on time. Do not assume that you can turn in all your assignments at the end of the semester without penalty and without first making arrangements with me. If you are having trouble, please let me know sooner rather than later so we can figure something out.

**Final Grades** will be based on:

- a. Class attendance and participation (20%)
- b. Topic Memo (10%)
- c. Literature review and research question memo (10%)
- d. Study design memo (10%)
- e. Participant observation notes and memo (10%)
- f. Interview notes and memo (10%)
- g. Memo on coding and concept development (10%)
- h. Final paper or proposal (20%)

**\*\*All written exercises must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class\*\***

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please be in touch with me. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Jessica Basile ([basile@brandeis.edu](mailto:basile@brandeis.edu), x63547). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

**Academic Integrity:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policy on academic integrity:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/academicintegrity/index.html>

If anything is unclear, please ask.

## Course Outline

### I. Getting Started

#### Week 1. September 5. Introductions

##### Reading:

- Lofland, Jon and Lyn Lofland. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (c. 1 “Starting Where You Are,” c. 2 “Evaluating Data Sites,” c.3 “Getting In”)
- Reinharz, Shulamit. 1995. “The Chicago School of Sociology and the Founding of the Brandeis University Graduate Program in Sociology: A Case Study of Cultural Diffusion.” In *A Second Chicago School? The Development of a Postwar American Sociology*. Edited by Gary Alan Fine. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 273-321.

##### Writing:

- No writing this week

#### Week 2. September 12. Getting Oriented and Getting Started

##### Reading:

- Abbott, Andrew. 1997. “Of Time and Space: The Contemporary Relevance of the Chicago School.” *Social Forces* 75: 1149-1182.
- Cresswell, John W. 2006. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA. SAGE. Chapter 4, “Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry” (pp. 53-81).
- McRoberts, Omar. M. 2003. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Author’s Note)
- Hoang, Kimberly. 2015. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex*. Berkeley: University of California Press (Appendix: The Empirical Puzzle and the Embodied Cost of Ethnography)
- Katz, Jack. 1997. “Ethnography's Warrants.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 25: 391-423.

##### Writing:

- Topic Memo due. Please write a 1-2 page single spaced overview of your proposed research topic including the broad topic, a publicly accessible site or sites where you could do observation, a list of people or types of people connected to the topic you might interview, some ideas of the kinds of research questions these data will help you address, and any questions or concerns for me. Please bring two copies of your memo to class.

### Week 3: September 19. Considering Ethical Issues

#### Reading:

- Brandeis IRB: <http://www.brandeis.edu/ora/compliance/irb/>
- Code of Ethics: American Sociological Association
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1994. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas in Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22: 267-92.
- Tolich, Martin. 2004. "Internal confidentiality: When confidentiality assurances fail relational informants." *Qualitative Sociology*. 27(1): 101-106.

#### Please read one of the following:

- Goode, Erich. 2002. "Sexual Involvement and Social Research in a Fat Civil Rights Organization." *Qualitative Sociology* 25:501- 534, and responses by Susan Bell, Peter Manning, Abigail Saguy, and Christine Williams, pp. 535-60.
- Humphries, Laud. 1970. *The Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company. (c. 2 "Methods: the sociologist as voyeur" and Postscript "A Question of Ethics")
- <http://cte.rice.edu/blogarchive/2015/07/16/teachingthestorm>

#### Writing:

- no writing this week

Guest Speaker: Marissa Hamilton, Brandeis IRB

### Week 4. September 26. Reviewing the Literature

#### Reading:

- Babbie, Earl. 2012. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. Chapter 17, excerpts from "Reading and Writing Social Research" (pp. 508-513).
- Literature Reviews in Sociology Library Guide: <http://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=344865>

#### And please read one of the following:

- Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 8, "Terrorized by the Literature" (pp.135-149).
- Hart, Chris. 1999. *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*. Sage. (c. 6 "Mapping and Analysing Ideas").
- Thomson, Pat and Barbara Kamler. 2012. *Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals: Strategies for Getting Published*. Abingdon: Routledge. (c. 3 "What's the Contribution?")

#### Writing:

- As you read, please think about how you will conduct the literature review for your project. Please answer the questions on the excel sheet on the Late site

before coming to class so we can work together on these literature reviews in class.

Guest Speaker: Maric Kramer, LTS

#### Week 5. October 3. No class – Brandeis Thursday

- If you have extra time this week, I would encourage you to complete the CITI Ethics Training Brandeis University requires for everyone submitting an IRB to the Office of Research Administration. This will save you time when you submit your first IRB to the university: <http://www.brandeis.edu/ora/RCR/index.html>
- Literature review and Research question memo. Please write a 7-10 page double-spaced review of the research relevant to your research interest. Make sure you are clear about the kinds of questions people writing in this area are asking and *put in italics what the gaps are in sociological knowledge that your project will fill*. Please also **put in bold the specific research questions your project will address**.

## II. Study Design

#### Week 6. October 10. Study Design and Case Selection

Our goal this week is to think about – and chart out – five different ways of designing qualitative research projects and selecting cases. We will divide into groups and each group will read only a few of the articles below. As you read, please start to fill in for yourself the chart on the Latte site that we will work through in class to try to make sense of these approaches and their assumptions. The goal here is for you to figure out which approaches make sense to you in general and what kinds of design seem best suited to the project you are working on.

Reading:

#### Extended Case Method

- Burawoy, Michael. 1999. “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory*, 16(1): 4-33.

#### Grounded Theory

- Tavory, Iddo and Stefan Timmermans. 2007. “Advancing Ethnographic Research through Grounded Theory,” in Antiny Bryant and Kathy Charmaz Ed. *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications. P. 493-512.

#### Institutional Ethnography

- DeVault, Marjorie, and L. McCoy. 2002. “Institutional ethnography: Using interviews to investigate ruling relations.” In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Edited by J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Pp. 751-776.



- Kamini, Maraj Grahame. 1998. "Asian Women, Job Training and the Social Organization of Immigrant Labor Markets." *Qualitative Sociology* 21(1): 75-90. (recommended)

#### Multi-sited Ethnography

- Marcus, George. 1998. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton University Press. Pp. 79-104.
- Rapp, Rayna. 1999. *Testing Women/Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*. NY: Routledge. Pp. 1-22, 165-190 (c.1 and 7, recommended)

#### Embodied Ethnography

- Wacquant, Loic. 2005. "Carnal Connections: On Embodiment, Apprenticeship, and Membership." *Qualitative Sociology* 28(4): 445-474.

Note: this article is Wacquant's response to a *Qualitative Sociology* symposium on his ethnography, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. If you are interested in "carnal" or "embodied" ethnography, you should read *Body and Soul* and the many responses it has engendered, including those in the symposia in *Qualitative Sociology* (2005; Volume 28, #2) and *Symbolic Interaction* (2005; Volume 28, #3)

#### Please also read

- Small, Mario Luis. 2013. "Casual Thinking and Ethnographic Research." *American Journal of Sociology*. 119(3):597-601

#### Writing:

- No writing this week

#### Week 7. October 17. Working through an Example

#### Reading:

- Please read through a recent dissertation – either one written by a recent Sociology PhD at Brandeis or one that won the ASA's annual dissertation award. Lists are here:  
<https://www.brandeis.edu/departments/sociology/grad/phdrecipientsandpositions%20.html>  
<http://www.asanet.org/news-events/member-awards/dissertation-asa-award>  
 You should be able to find these through ProQuest Dissertation Abstracts. Let me know if you are having trouble. Ask yourself as you read how the author dealt with the research design, data collection, analysis and ethical issues we have been talking about to date. Please come to class prepared to summarize the approaches to your colleagues and with a list of questions / concerns / surprises you gathered as you read.

#### Writing:

- Study design memo. Please write a 5-7 page double-spaced memo in which you compare and contrast different study designs you could use to address your research questions. These designs might use different methodologies or might be based on different epistemological assumptions about the uses of qualitative research (think about our conversation in class last week). Explicitly consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and any relevant ethical issues and state which design you prefer and why.

### **III. Participant Observation and Interviewing**

#### Week 8. October 24. Participant Observation

##### Reading:

- Atkinson, Paul and Martyn Hammersley. 1994. "Ethnography and Participant Observation," in Norma Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln Eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McRoberts, Omar. M. 2003. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 1 "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research," c. 2 "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes," c.3 "Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk"

##### Writing:

No writing for today.

#### Week 9. October 31. Selves and Reflexivity

##### Reading:

- Pattillo-McCoy, Mary and Rueben Buford May. 2000. "Do You See What I See? Examining a Collaborative Ethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry*. 6:1 (65-87)
- Poland, Blake and Ann Pederson. 1998. Reading Between the Lines: Interpreting Silences in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 4(2): 293-313.
- Hanson, Rebecca and Patricia Richards. 2017. "Sexual Harassment and the Construction of Ethnographic Knowledge." *Sociological Forum*.

##### Writing:

No writing for today

Guest Speaker: Gowri Vijayakumar

#### Week 10. November 7. Interviewing

##### Reading:

- Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press (“Appendix B”)
- Hermanowicz, Hoseph. 2002. “The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed.” *Qualitative Sociology*. 25(4): 479-499.
- Lamont, Michele and Ann Swidler. 2014. “Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing.” *Qualitative Sociology*
- Warren, Carl A.B. et al. 2003. “After the interview.” *Qualitative Sociology*. 26(1): 93-110
- Weiss, Robert. 1994. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press. (c. 1 “Introduction,” c. 2 “Respondents: Choosing Them and Recruiting Them,” c. 3 “Preparation for Interviewing,” c. 4 “Interviewing” and c. 5 “Issues in Interviewing”)

Writing:

- For today please submit full field notes (typed up with jottings, drawings, etc. attached) from 2-3 hours of participant observation you conducted related to your project. Please include in front of your field notes a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting participant observation in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment in your notes.

Week 11. November 14. Interviewing continued

Reading:

- No new reading

Writing:

- Please bring a draft of your interview guide – a list of questions you will ask people in interviews. Please bring two copies.

**IV. Working with Data: From Ideas to Concepts to Representations**

Week 12. November 21. Coding, Concepts, Narratives...Analyzing Qualitative Data

Reading:

- Cadge, Wendy and Emily Sigalow. 2013. “Negotiating Religious Differences: The Strategies of Interfaith Chaplains in Healthcare.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 51(3): 84-98. (skim except for the findings section)
- Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c.6 “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing”)
- Weiss, Robert. 1994. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press. (c. 6 “Analysis of Data”) – again!

- Bearman, Peter, 2005. *Doormen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 2 “A Foot in the Door.”)
- Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 4 “Concepts”)
- Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c.7 “Writing an Ethnography”)
- Weiss, Robert. 1994. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press. (c. 7 “Writing the Report”)

Recommended for the future:

- Katz, Jack. 1991. Analytic Induction Revisited. In *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Edited by Robert M. Emerson. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press. Pp. 331-334.
- Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Katz, Jack. 2001. From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part 1). *Ethnography* 2(4): 443-473 AND (Part 2). *Ethnography* 3(1): 63-90.

Note: This is a long, two part article. Use it as a guide to working with data; it contains many examples of how, by focusing on what in a gut sense strikes you as your "best" data (fieldnotes, interview excerpts), you can find a logic for moving from describing how social life proceeds to an explanation of why it takes the form it does.

Writing:

No writing for today

Week 13. November 28. Evaluating Evidence and Re-engaging with Literatures

Reading

- Literature Reviews in Sociology Library Guide:  
<http://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=344865>

And please read at least one of the following:

- Duneier, Mitchell. 2012. “How Not to Lie With Ethnography.” *Sociological Methodology* 41(1): 1-11.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 2006. “Ethnography, the Ecological Fallacy, and the 1995 Chicago Heat Wave.” *American Sociological Review* 71: 679–688.
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2006. “Blaming the Victims: Hearsay, Labeling, and the Hazards of Quick-Hit Disaster Ethnography.” *American Sociological Review* 71: 689–698.

Writing

- For today please submit the full transcript (typed up with any notes attached) from one of the two interviews you conducted related to your project. Please include in front of the transcript a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting the interview in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment in your interview transcript.

#### Week 14. December 5. Wrapping Up and Engaging with Publics

- Wilson, William Julius. 1998. "Engaging publics in sociological dialogue." *Contemporary Sociology* 27(5): 435-38 .
- Brooks, David. "Both Sides of Inequality." *New York Times*, March 9, 2006.
- Cohen, Patricia. "'Culture of Poverty' Makes a Comeback." *New York Times*, October 17, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/us/18poverty.html>

#### Writing:

- For today please submit a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you outline what codes and concepts are emerging from your analysis. What is grabbing your attention? Why? How? How might it connect with ideas in your literature review? Be creative and have fun with this. Be sure to include any questions you specifically want me to address as I read.

Your final paper is due by noon on Friday December 15<sup>th</sup>. Please put leave it in my mailbox in Pearlman Hall.