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Qualitative Methods (Soc 2210)

Monday 2-5

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Course Objectives:

Ethnography and other qualitative methods are often a social scientist’s best bet for creating truly emergent knowledge, because one’s ability to study something is restricted only by one’s ability to conceptualize a good project, find a suitable field site, convince people to participate, and interpret observations in light of existing theories. At the same time, qualitative methods are tricky to deploy effectively because -- relative to quantitative methods -- there is less academic consensus on how qualitative researchers should formulate arguments, establish external validity, and generally use qualitative findings to intervene in scholarly debates. Because of this, qualitative researchers must necessarily be reflexive about the generalizability of their findings and the types of things that they are able to conclude based on their data. In this light, our aim in this course will be twofold: to introduce you to basic qualitative research methods and to reflect upon the types of arguments that one can make based on qualitative data. Because of the latter aim, I envision that this course will be useful to you even if you never do another ethnography, because it should give you a better appreciation of how qualitative analysis contributes to knowledge production – a useful skill to have as a scholar, reviewer and colleague.

As part of the course, you will conduct an ethnographic research project. Your fieldwork should be guided by an analytical question and we will work together to hone this question and identify an appropriate field site for answering it. Think big. Ask a question that you yourself would be interested to know the answer to, and – ideally – one that is in some way related to the kind of research that you want to do in graduate school. You may then answer this question via ethnographic participant observation, qualitative interviews, or – if you locate suitable data – archival analysis. The course will focus largely on helping you to complete this project and that should be your focus too; the real course is your fieldwork.

Specifically, class time will facilitate your fieldwork in three ways. First, we will read methodological papers and monographs on issues like gaining access to a field site, asking a good question, and taking field notes. Second, we will read ethnographic classics that handle particular methodological issues well or are simply interesting and may help you to think differently about your own project. Third, we will spend at least half of class time in a research seminar format where we help one another with our research projects.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Field notes: 30%

Research Proposal: 15%

Final Presentation: 15%

Final Research Report: 30%

The Assignments:

You will be expect to do four things for the course.

1. Beginning in the third week of classes, you will be expected to turn in one set of field notes a week that detail your research experiences (turn these in by email on Sunday by 5pm to pacewicz@brown.edu). We will spend much time before then discussing what field notes are, what purpose they serve, and what they should look like. These should help you to do the final assignment and I will also distribute them to other members of the course before you present your research in class.
2. About two thirds of the way through the course, you will turn in a research proposal (5-7 pages), which should include descriptions of a) your field site b) the fieldwork you have done c) your research question and d) how your research question fits into existing research on your topic and e) how you intend to go about answering this question.
3. At the end of the course, you should prepare to present your research findings. The presentation should detail a research question, how you went about investigating it, and your answer to the question. Be prepared to answer questions about your research during and after the presentation. Incorporate the feedback that you receive and produce a 12-20 page final report, which should include ethnographic vignettes, quotes, or other pieces of ethnographic data from your research.
4. Participate in class discussion. We will do roughly one half the course in a research seminar format, which means that you should expect to spend about 20 minutes answering questions about your project 3-4 times over the course of the semester. Conversely, you should read people’s field notes before they present in class and be prepared to ask critical and constructive questions about their research.

Bibliography:

All of the books for the course are available in the bookstore or, in cases of shorter selections, are scanned and available online. The required books include widely-read ethnographic case studies and several texts that are often used in qualitative methods courses. This means that you can likely find many of these books at a bargain on amazon or elsewhere. **Important**: as of right now, only the books marked with an asterisk (\*\*\*) are required for the course, which means that you should not buy all the books available at the bookstore. I’ve decided to leave the last three course sessions as open special topic days, which means that we’ll decide as a class what topics we want to investigate and seek out appropriate ethnographies accordingly.

\*\*\*Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. WW Norton and Company

\*\*\*Robert Emerson. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Waveland Pr. Inc.

\*\*\*Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes.*The University of Chicago Press.

\*\*\*Patillo-McCoy, Mary. 2000. Black Picket Fences: Privilege and peril Among the Black Middle Class. University of Chicago Press.

Lloyd, Richard. 2010. Neobohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City. Routledge.

\*\*\*Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg. 2009. *Righteous Dopefiend*. University of California Press.

Nina Eliasoph. 2011. Making Volunteers: Civic Life at Welfare’s End. Princeton University Press.

Howard Becker. 1984. Art Worlds. The University of California Press.

\*\*\*Mitchell Stevens. 2007. *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Harvard University Press.

\*\*\*Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung. 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. Penguin Press.

Abolafia, Mitchel. 2001. Making Markets: Opportunism and Restraint on Wall Street. Harvard University Press.

Diane Vaughn. 1997. The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA. University of Chicago Press.

Schedule of Classes:

Week 1:

**September 1st: No Class.**

Week 2: Reflections on what makes qualitative studies good.

**Sept 8th**: Read Desmond’s Disposable Ties and Espeland and Sauders’ Rankings and Reactivity

Week 3: Getting into the field and writing field notes.

**Sept 15th:** Duneier’s *Sidewalk*. Read Appendix on Method the “The Book Vendor,” “Sidewalk Sleeping.”

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chapters 1,2&3. (online)

Week 4: Using cases to make arguments.

**Sept 22nd**: Macrus on Multi-Sited Ethnography (online)

Emigh on Negative Thinking (online)

Somers and Skocpol on what cases can do (online)

Week 5: Constructing the Argument

**Sept 29th:**

Charmaz’s Grounded Theory (in Emerson)

Buroway on extended case method (online)

Tavory and Timmermans Analytical Abduction (online)

Week 6: Ethnographic Tone.

**Oct 6th:** Bourgeois and Schonberg’s *Righteous Dopefiend.* Read Introduction and Chapters 1 and 3.

Re-skim Duniers’ Sidewalk readings.

Week 7: Some tips for what to do if you get stuck.

**Oct 13th**: read *Howard Becker*, Tricks of the Trade (Section on *Imagery*)

Abbott xi-xii; 3-12; Chapter 3 and 4

Week 8: The Qualitative Interview Study

**Oct 20th**: Hoschild and Machung’s *Second Shift* Read Chapters 2,3, 4, 5 and 8.

Week 9: The Neighborhood Study

**Oct 27th**: Patillo-McCoy’s Black Picket Fences p.44-57. Chapters 4, 5 & 6.

**Research proposal due Nov 1st at 5pm (turn in by email at pacewicz@brown.edu)**

Week 10: The Organizational Ethnography

**Nov 3rd:** Steven’s Creating a Class. Read Introduction and Chapters 2,3,4 & 6.

Week 11: Special Topics

**Nov 10th**: Readings TBD

Week 12: Special Topics

**Nov 17th**: Readings TBD

Week 13: Special Topics

**Nov 24th**: Readings TBD

Week 14: Final Presentations

**Dec 1st**: Final Presentations

**Final Report due Dec 15th at 5pm (turn in by email to pacewicz@brown.edu)**