

Sociology 273E: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
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Spring 2024

If this course were given in Anthropology it would undoubtedly be called Ethnography, but given that a good deal of what has been included under the term will be purposely avoided in the present course we should feel lucky that it is called participant observation. The problem with the term ethnography is that it has been employed to describe the general study of people through a process of interacting with them. Here in lies the problem because it is quite possible to interact with people who are dead by interacting with their relatives or various texts that have been about the lives of people when they were living. However, interacting with relatives of the dead or texts about the dead is substantively different from interacting with the living breathing animals, most especially humans, of a given period. Thus, the present course will be focused on studying living-breathing individuals, not their relatives with indirect reference to them, by observing them while they are in fact living and breathing with the possibility of seeing them dying (i.e. having difficulty breathing and living) and/or dead. With this focus we will look at the various forms of conducting participant observation (positivism, symbolic interaction, and ethnomethodology) and their epistemological foundations, to be followed by the practical concerns of using this methodology: research design, tactics and logistics of data gathering, combining methodologies, organizing data, analysis, and presentation. Finally, students will engage in exercises designed to introduce them to the experience of conducting research using participant-observation methodology.

Requirements:

Because training will be going on each student will be required to attend all the course sessions during the semester. Each student will be required to have read all the required material before class sessions, and be ready to participate in the course discussions. Each student will be required to choose a topic they would like to research using an ethnographic method and construct a formal research design. The contents of the design will be provided to each student as the course progresses. The formal research design will be basis for the final grade in the course. **Each student's formal research design will be due on May 6.**

Books and Reader:

There are a number of books that will be used in this course. They are: (1) Corey Abramson and Neil Gong, *Beyond the Case: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021); (2) Martín Sánchez-Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); (3) Michael Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Sandstrom, et. al., *Symbols, Selves, and Sociality*; Liberman, *More Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

Readings

Week 1 on January 22: Overview of Course.

Week 2 on January 29: Positivism

READINGS: Corey Abramson and Neil Gong, eds., *Beyond the Case*: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2.

Week 3 on February 5: Positivism: Example

READINGS: Sánchez-Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, Portions, TBA.

Week 4 on February 12: Extended Case Method

READINGS: Michael Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method*, Chapters TBA;

Week 5 on February 19: Holiday

READINGS: Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1967), Chapters TBA.

Week 6 on February 26: Symbolic Interaction Method and Grounded Theory

READINGS Sandstrom, et. al., *Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality*, Chs. 1-6.

Week 7 on March 4: Symbolic Interaction and Ethnomethodology

READINGS: Sandstrom, et. al., *Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality*, Chs. 7, 8.
Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Chs. 1,2,3.

Week 8 on March 11: Ethnomethodology

READINGS: Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Ch. 4; Libermann, *More Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Introduction, Ch. 2, 4.

Week 9 on March 18: Questions, Sample, Access

READINGS: *Abramson and Gong, Beyond the Case*, Ch. 1, 2;
Libermann, *More Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Ch. 1
Abramson, *The End Game*, Appendix

Week 10 on April 1: Observation # 1

READINGS: In Class Exercise

Week 11 on April 8: Observation # 2

READINGS: In Class Exercise

READINGS: In Class Exercise Abramson and Gong, *Beyond the Case*, Chapters 2 and 9; Sánchez-Jankowski, “Representation, Responsibility and Reliability in Participant-Observation,” in Tim May, ed., *Qualitative Research in Action* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

Week 12 on April 15: Analyzing Data, Writing Up Results, and Presenting Evidence

READINGS:

READINGS: Daniel Dohan and Martín Sánchez-Jankowski, “Using Computers to Analyze Ethnographic Field Data: Theoretical and Practical Considerations.” Handout.

Week 13 on April 22: Consultation

Week May 6: Final Drafts of Individual Research Proposals Due