

Sociology 915: Spring 2012
Tuesdays 3-5 PM
Classroom: 4314 Sewell Social Science
Office Hours: Thursdays 11 AM

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Ethnography and Theory, Ethnography as Theory

It is customary to associate sociological ethnography with sociological methodology. Most works of ethnography include methodological appendices (some quite famous in their own right), and ethnography itself is typically defined as a method of sociological inquiry. And yet ethnography is as much about theory as it is about methods. As far back as the era of the original Chicago School of Sociology (1920s-30s), ethnographers were advancing important theoretical ideas and insights, and present-day commentators have argued that Chicago sociology's very way of doing ethnography itself amounted to a significant theoretical contribution.

Today it is more important than ever to ponder the relation of ethnography to theory, since we are witnessing in recent years, among the younger generation of American sociologists, a remarkable upsurge of interest in participant observation-style ethnographic research.

What this Course Covers

In this seminar, we explore the many linkages between ethnography and theory, surveying along the way a number of classic writings from the Chicago School; later Chicago-influenced ethnographies; important mid-twentieth century works; more recent classics; and a selection of newly published works by up-and-coming ethnographers.

We not only read portions of these substantive works, but we also discuss in tandem with them a wide range of theoretical issues and challenges. Along the way, we explore practical questions as well, such as how theoretical reflection might be incorporated into substantive, data-rich ethnographic writing.

Theory can learn from ethnography and vice-versa. This seminar attempts to create a context in which that might happen. Along the way, it engages with such theoretical and ethnographic traditions as classical American pragmatism; ethnomethodology; symbolic interactionism; Marxism; and Bourdieuan sociology. It also examines ethnographies that incorporate into their analyses social network theory; conversation analysis; cultural sociology; intersectional analysis; and still other present-day approaches. A wide range of substantive fields of sociology is covered.

What this Course Does Not Cover

With only one or two exceptions, we do not venture into the closely related world of anthropological ethnography. This is a serious omission, since the sociological tradition of ethnography has a great deal to learn from its older and (in many ways) more developed relative.

All I can say is that one cannot do everything in a single semester-long course, and difficult choices had to be made.

We also refrain from venturing deeply into non-social science varieties of ethnographic writing, although I do devote one week to that genre.

Important Traditions We Leave Out

Sociological ethnography often is said to have begun with the Chicago School. Yet it is important to distinguish between the celebrated Chicago School tradition of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (and their many gifted students and colleagues), on the one hand, and the Chicago tradition represented by Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull-House, on the other. The divide that arose between these two alternative Chicago sociologies—and, in general, between the social survey tradition (as represented by Addams) and the social-science tradition (as represented by Park and Burgess)—came to have profound consequences for American sociology. In this course, we focus on the disciplinary tradition extending from Park and Burgess. Yet we also keep in mind the alternative road not taken—and consider how it has continued to be advocated right down to the present day, in ongoing debates regarding public sociology and participatory action research.

In more recent years, a different sort of divide has emerged within the disciplinary ethnographic tradition. This is a divide between predominantly interview-based and predominantly fieldwork-based ethnography. As my labels indicate, in the one case, research draws most heavily on interview material; in the other case, it is grounded in participant observation. In this course, we recognize that, to some extent, the very distinction between these two approaches is misleading and artificial, since interview-based researchers frequently rely on extensive fieldwork to contextualize and cross-check their material and even to determine whom to interview in the first place, while fieldwork-based researchers often—nearly always—rely heavily on interviews to supplement and enrich their participant observation-derived insights. These caveats notwithstanding, however, we direct our attention in this course exclusively toward the fieldwork-based variant. Yet we also keep squarely in mind the question of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

One striking feature of the aforementioned divides is how deeply gendered they are. As has frequently been noted, the Hull-House vs. Chicago Sociology Department divide was gendered through and through. And, in fractal fashion, the gender divide now has been reproduced from within the ethnographic tradition, with women researchers at the center of interview-based work while male researchers dominate (or have until recent years, with only occasional but important exceptions) in the fieldwork side of the tradition. In this course, we consider why these gender divides might have occurred and keep occurring, and we ask what implications they have had for sociological ethnography more generally.

How the Syllabus is Organized

When putting together this syllabus, I had the choice of organizing our readings along either

logical or chronological lines. That is, I could have set up the syllabus in terms of theoretical issues, perhaps by conceptualizing ethnographic research as an arc of theory-building and then providing readings for each stage of the trajectory. Or else I could have presented the material in more historical fashion, beginning with ethnographic research in the early twentieth century and working my way up to the present (or backwards, from the present to the past), highlighting in each week a set of classic studies but also pairing them with various kinds of theoretical selections. In the end, I chose the latter variant. It struck me as cleaner and simpler. I even chose to present the different items in each week in chronological order. However, as a brief perusal of the syllabus will indicate, I also inserted, exactly halfway through, an excursus on theory construction in sociological ethnography. Hence the syllabus is now divided in four chronological sections of three weeks each but with a two-week theoretical excursus in the middle, one that separates the early and mid-twentieth centuries from the late-twentieth century and the contemporary period.

Course Organization

Readings: Because of the open-endedness of the syllabus, no books are on order at the bookstore. Students are expected to procure their own copies of books they wish to own. A number of books (dozens) are on reserve at the Social Science Reference Library (8th floor of Sewell Social Science Building). In addition, many selections are available as pdf files through Learn@UW. For future reference, this syllabus also will be available through Learn@UW.

Grading Format: Students' grades for this course will be based on two different assessments, each of which will contribute 50% to the final grade. First, students will be evaluated on their final term paper. Second, they will be graded on class attendance and participation. More on each below.

Final Paper: One week after the final class meeting of the semester, a final term paper will be due. This paper can be either (1) a work of original empirical research; (2) a theoretical essay; or (3) an empirical research proposal. Students must clear their topic with me in person by the end of Week 10. An unusual requirement: I ask that each student submit his or her paper to me in two formats simultaneously: electronic and hardcopy, the same paper in both formats. Upon receiving the paper, I shall go to MS Word and check that it is within the specified word count range. Papers must be between 5,750 and 6,250 words in length, according to MS Word's word count function. Even one word less or more, and the paper will be returned to the student—with an Incomplete for the course. Please note that 5,750-6,250 words is around 10 single-spaced pages. Caring so much about the word count may be idiosyncratic, but working under such constraints will help to make students' work more tightly focused and better edited. If there are going to be constraints, they might as well be clear and unequivocal. Here is yet another set of requirements for the paper: I ask that its format be the one I happen to prefer for reading papers (since I will be the one reading them): single spaced, normal margins, 12-point font, skipped lines between paragraphs. Students should be sure to follow these formatting requirements. I have been known to return improperly formatted term papers to students and to give them an Incomplete for the course. Extensive reviews of the secondary literature are discouraged for this assignment, since I am looking for ideas and research,

not for a demonstration of library skills. This is the case even for empirical research proposals, for which I want a “think piece” that specifies the empirical object of study and that indicates, with as much specificity as possible, how the student would go about studying it, the kinds of sources s/he would use, the kinds of cases s/he would select, and, in general, how s/he would deploy ideas derived from this course in addressing that empirical problem.

Class Attendance and Participation: The other 50% of the final grade will be determined—subjectively, by me—on the basis of students’ overall contributions to weekly class meetings. Regarding attendance: Attendance all the way through each class meeting is required. I do not like it when students get up and leave early. Missing more than a couple of class meetings during the semester is okay only in cases of extended, sustained, and several-weeks-long illness or family emergency. No need to contact me about the occasional missed class. Regarding participation: I expect that each student will do substantial reading each and every week for this course. Students will not be tested on that reading, but I do want to see evidence that they have read carefully, thoughtfully, and thoroughly—and on a consistent basis—throughout the semester. This does not mean they must know and understand everything when they walk in the door to start the class meeting. It does not mean their judgments as to what is most important in the readings must always be the same as my own judgments. What it does mean is that, if a student gives me a sense that s/he is not doing extensive and consistent reading for this course, that s/he is not putting in a serious effort, then it will bode poorly for (this portion of) their final grade. I expect students to take part actively in class discussions. If I ask a student a question at a moment when he or she seems not to be paying attention, and the student answers, “Can you repeat the question?,” then this will be taken into account. If a student’s comments do not reflect serious preparation for class discussion, then this too will be noted. And if a student takes the class discussion onto irrelevant tangents, raises issues of interest only to him or her, deflects attention from important issues raised by me or by the readings, then this also will be taken into consideration. I do not ask for frequent interventions. Some students are talkative; others are quiet. All I ask for are a few—just a few—substantive, thoughtful, and well-informed contributions per class meeting. There is no court of higher appeal for this portion of the final grade. It is based entirely on my subjective evaluation.

Why Do I Insist on Attendance All the Way Through Class Meetings? I insist on this policy because I have found that, whenever I do not require it, students trickle out of the classroom one by one during the final several minutes, and they do so in a way that destroys our collective focus. I wish to discourage that as much as possible.

On the Use of Laptops in Class: Unless approved by me beforehand, laptops and other electronic devices may not be used during class discussions, no matter how much more convenient it may be for students to type notes directly into their computers. I am implementing this policy because, in the past, abuse of laptops by some students has proven extremely distracting to others in the classroom. It also has detracted from the overall quality of our class discussions. Notes can always be typed into the computer later.

Weekly Reading Assignments: As students can see from the course readings listed below, there are

no specific reading assignments for any given week. I provide some orientation to each week's readings at the end of the preceding week, but in general, students are asked to do their best, by themselves, to become familiar with the material, sometimes skimming rapidly, other times honing in on specific chapters, sections, or passages. It is important to learn how to do this on one's own. It is a crucial, even indispensable, scholarly skill. Please think of the readings indicated in the syllabus below as recommended only—none of them required. A garden of delights. No obligations or responsibilities. What could be better? The very essence of *skholè*, the leisured life of the mind. I cannot say definitively how many hours I expect you to spend on each assigned item or how many pages per week I expect you to read. Sometimes lengthy works can be “read” rather quickly, while shorter, more intellectually challenging and demanding works must be “read” more slowly. Some works of hundreds of pages can be “read” in a few hours, with a clear sense gained of their key themes, contributions, innovations, methods, data, shortcomings, unexplored angles, unexploited possibilities, connections with other works, and so forth. Still other works need more time, even works relatively brief in terms of page length. As many students well know, I do not construct all my course syllabi in this fashion. In fact, I much more often specify the exact pages to be read. But each course is different, and I believe this course can benefit most from an open-ended and flexible reading schedule. Books have been placed on reserve at the Social Science Reference Library (8th floor of the Sewell Social Science Building) so that access to them can be as convenient as possible for sociology graduate students. Please note that, in a few cases, I also will recommend (the preceding week) that students review certain materials covered in Sociology 773, the sociological theory course required of all graduate students in our program. This recommendation perhaps makes the course slightly more difficult for students in other programs. But this is, after all, an advanced 900-level seminar in sociology. Plus only a few such readings will be recommended.

The Emirbayer Rules

(1) When you speak in class, please refer exclusively to authors and texts we happen to be reading that day (or read earlier in the semester). Do not attempt to show off your intellectuality by dropping names or titles such as Wittgenstein, Althusser, or Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Let's stay focused.

(2) Please try whenever possible to respond to the person who spoke right before you, rather than offering something entirely disconnected. Let's have a genuine conversation. If you aren't able to maintain this continuity, then temporarily cede your place in line; we'll return to you a bit later.

(3) Please be relatively succinct and to-the-point in your remarks. Let's be dialogic. It's okay to be confused when confronting such challenging material, but I've found that confusion can most effectively be addressed when your comments are kept fairly brief, so that others can respond.

One further comment: Sometimes a student has a point to make that's so urgent, so necessary, so compelling, that he or she can't bear to wait in line. If and when this happens, raise *both* your hands at once, and I'll (probably) call on you. Don't overuse this privilege. Let's limit it to (at most) one time per student per class meeting. (By the way, I say I'll “probably” call on you because sometimes, in the interest solely of moving the discussion along, I'll ignore upraised hands. Nothing personal!)

Course Syllabus

Please Note: All the Readings Below are Recommended Only
There are No Required Readings for this Course

1 — Course organization, review of syllabus.

Online: Daniel Chambliss, "The Mundanity of Excellence," *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989): 70-86.

I

2 — Social Space and Social Time

Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *The City*: chs. I-III.

Online: Andrew Abbott, "Transcending General Linear Reality," *Sociological Theory* 6 (1988): 169-86.

Online: Andrew Abbott, "Of Time and Space," *Social Forces* 75 (1997): 1149-82.

Harvey Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*: chs. I-III, VII, XI-XII.

St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis*: Introduction by Richard Wright; Introduction; chs. 6, 8, 10, 14, 18, 20; "A Methodological Note" by W. Lloyd Warner.

3 — Social Worlds and Institutions

Paul Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall*: chs. I, II (p. bottom half of p. 27), III, V, VII, X, XII.

Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, chs. I, V-VI, VIII-X, XIV, XVI, XVIII.

Learn@UW: Everett Hughes, "Going Concerns."

Learn@UW: Anselm Strauss, "A Social World Perspective."

Learn@UW: Adele Clarke, "Social Worlds/Arenas Theory as Organizational Theory."

Terry Williams, *Crackhouse*: Introduction; chs. 2-4, 7, 12.

David Grazian, *Blue Chicago*, TBA.

4 — Social and Personal Organization, Disorganization, Reorganization

Learn@UW: W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, "Social Disorganization and Reorganization."

Learn@UW: E. Franklin Frazier, "Problems and Needs of Negro Children and Youth Resulting from Family Disorganization."

Online: Ernest Mowrer, "Methodological Problems in Social Disorganization," *American*

Sociological Review 6 (1941): 839-52.

William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*: Introduction; chs. I-III; Conclusion; Appendix:
“On the Evolution of *Street Corner Society*.”

Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers*: Preface; chs. 1-4.

Gerald Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum*: chs. 1-2, 5, 12.

II

5 — Social Relations, Talk, and Accounts

Online: C. Wright Mills, “Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive,” *American Sociological Review* 5 (1940): 904-13.

Elliot Liebow, *Tally’s Corner*: entire. (It’s a very short book.)

Carol Stack, *All Our Kin*: chs. 2-5, 8.

Online: Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action,” *American Sociological Review* (51): 273-86.

Online: Mitchell Duneier, “On the Legacy of Elliot Liebow and Carol Stack,” *Focus* 25 (2007): 33-38.

Online: Stephen Vaisey, “Motivation and Justification,” *American Journal of Sociology* (2009): 1675-1715.

Learn@UW: Matthew Desmond, “Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor,” *American Journal of Sociology* (forthcoming, March 2012).

6 — Rules, Improvisation, and Action

Learn@UW: Harold Garfinkel, “What is Ethnomethodology?”

Learn@UW: Don Zimmerman, “The Practicalities of Rule Use.”

D. Lawrence Wieder, *Language and Social Reality*: Preface by Don Zimmerman; ch. 1, Part II.

Learn@UW: Harold Garfinkel and Eric Livingston, “Phenomenal Field Properties of Order in Formatted Queues and their Neglected Standing in the Current Situation of Inquiry.”

Learn@UW: Melvin Pollner and Robert Emerson, “Ethnomethodology and Ethnography.”

Online: Mustafa Emirbayer and Douglas Maynard, “Pragmatism and Ethnomethodology,” *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2010): 221-61.

7 — Power, Negotiation, and Order

Learn@UW: Everett Hughes, “Mistakes at Work.”

Erving Goffman, *Asylums*: Preface; Introduction; “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions.”

Online: Erving Goffman, "The Interaction Order," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 1-17.

Learn@UW: Anselm Strauss, et al., "The Hospital and its Negotiated Order."

Calvin Morrill, *The Executive Way*, TBA.

Gary Alan Fine, *Kitchens*: Preface: Introduction; chs. 1, 6.

Excursus on Theory Construction

8 — Theory Construction in Social-Science Ethnography

Learn@UW: Florian Znaniecki, "Analytic Induction."

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*: Preface; chs. I-IV; Epilogue.

Howard Becker, *Outsiders*: chs. 1, 5-6.

Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor*: chs. 1-4.

Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*: Preface; chs. Two (p. 30); Three; Four; Five.

Learn@UW: Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method." (In connection with this, you may also wish to read ahead to Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*, pp. 344-45.)

Learn@UW: Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans, "Two Cases of Ethnography."

9 — First-Rate Non-Social Scientific Ethnographic Writing

Tracy Kidder, *The Soul of a New Machine* (about a computer engineering team).

Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs* (about soccer hooliganism in the U.K.).

Daniel Duane, *Caught Inside* (about the California surfing culture).

Ted Conover, *Jewjack* (about life inside a prison).

Learn@UW: Philippe Bourgois, "Just Another Night . . ." (about drug users).

Online: David Foster Wallace, "Shipping Out" (about cruise ships). This can be found at <http://www.harpers.org/media/pdf/dfw/HarpersMagazine-1996-01-0007859.pdf>.

Anthony Bourdin, *Kitchen Confidential* (about restaurant culture).

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (about the lives of the working poor).

Neil Strauss, *The Game* (about picking up women).

Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (about the contemporary art scene).

III

10 — Ethnographers and their Subjects

Learn@UW: Pierre Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*: "The Disenchantment of the World."

Learn@UW: Pierre Bourdieu, "Algerian Landing."
Learn@UW: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Peasant and his Body."
Learn@UW: Loic Wacquant, "Following Pierre Bourdieu into the Field."
Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day*: Preface; chs. One, Two, Four.
Online: Mustafa Emirbayer and Matthew Desmond, "Race and Reflexivity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (forthcoming, April 2012).

11 — Marginality and Morality

Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*: Part III.
Learn@UW: Pierre Bourdieu, "Thinking about Limits."
Online: Jack Katz, "Ethnography's Warrants," *Sociological Methods and Research* 25 (1997): 391-423.
Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*: Introduction; Part One; Appendix.
Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street*: Preface: Introduction; chs. 1, 3-4.
Online: Loic Wacquant, Elijah Anderson, Mitchell Duneier, and Katherine Newman, Symposium on "Scrutinizing the Street," *American Journal of Sociology* 107 (2002): 1468-1599.
Learn@UW: William Julius Wilson and Anmol Chaddha, "The Role of Theory in Ethnographic Research."

12 — Techniques of the Body, Dispositions, and Habitus

Learn@UW: Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body."
Douglas Harper, *Working Knowledge*, TBA.
Learn@UW: Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, ch. 4.
Online: Loic Wacquant, "Pugs at Work," *Body and Society* 1 (1995): 65-93.
Online: Black Hawk Hancock, "Learning How to Make Life Swing," *Qualitative Sociology* 30 (2007): 113-33.
Matthew Desmond, *On the Fireline*: Introduction; chs. 1-2, 6-7; Conclusion.
Shamus Khan, *Privilege*: Introduction; chs. 1, 3, 5; Conclusion. (Please note: This book is available in our library system only in an e-book format. Consult a librarian if you have trouble accessing it from your computer.)

IV

13 — Symbolic Boundaries and Boundary-Crossings

Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences*: chs. 3-4, 6, either 8 or 9.
Online: Black Hawk Hancock, "Steppin' out of Whiteness," *Ethnography* 6 (2005): 427-61.

Learn@UW: Robert Courtney Smith, *Mexican New York*, ch. 9.
Amy Wilkins, *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians*, chs. 1, 6-8.
Online: Hae Yoon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, "Practising Intersectionality in Sociological Research," *Sociological Theory* 28 (2010): 129-49.
Nikki Jones, *Between Good and Ghetto*, TBA.

14 — Moment, Location, and Emotion

Kai Erikson, *Everything in its Path*, TBA.
Michael Mayerfeld Bell, *Childerley*: chs. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11.
Peter Bearman, *Doormen*, TBA.
Learn@UW: David Snow, Calvin Morrill, and Leon Anderson, "Elaborating Analytic Ethnography."
Online: Andrew Abbott, "Against Narrative," *Sociological Theory* 25 (2007): 67-99.
Online: Alice Goffman, "On the Run," *American Sociological Review* 74 (2009): 339-57.
Mario Small, *Villa Victoria*, TBA.

15 — Relational Patterns in Conversations, Networks, and Fields

Learn@UW: Candace West and Don Zimmerman, "Small Insults."
Online: Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1997): 281-317.
Douglas Maynard, *Bad News, Good News*: chs. 3-5.
Online: David Gibson, "Taking Turns and Talking Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 110 (2005): 1561-97.
Ann Mische, *Partisan Publics*, TBA.
Mustafa Emirbayer and Victoria Johnson, "Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis," *Theory and Society* 37 (2008): 1-44.
Online: Andrew Papachristos, "Murder by Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (2009): 74-128.