

Fall 06

Sociology 735: Research at the Margins

Tuesday 4:30-7PM

Room 340 McGuinn

Professor Lisa Dodson

408 McGuinn Hall

617-552-6864

Lisa.dodson@bc.edu

This is a graduate-level research course about social research into “life in the margins” or into the lives and knowledge of low-income people, immigrants, people of color and all others who experience marginality in contemporary American and/or in other social contexts. Choosing to do research outside the social mainstream is challenging not only methodologically but also in terms of representational, personal and ethical issues. Within the context of what many now call *social justice research* the course will examine research challenges associated with inequality and marginality, at each stage of social inquiry. Over the term we will cover: considering the potential contribution of our research, clarifying research question/design, choosing methods, doing field research, analytic approaches to qualitative and mixed-method data, and composing results. We will be discussing collaborative research, creative methods of data gathering, and interpretive approaches that focus on making meaning with people “under study.”

This is a working seminar of (maximum) ten graduate students that will use a collaborative learning approach. The course materials include a combination of straightforward readings about research approaches and methods as well as theoretical and ethical challenges to the “investigation” of economically and/or socially marginalized people. Most classes will be based on discussions of the readings *and* their application to your projects. You should come to class with written questions, critiques and elaborations that we will share and discuss; they will guide our classes. We will also do some labs together in class; these are flexible and I hope to use your projects for in-class work. Additionally, we have exceptional speakers; people from diverse disciplinary backgrounds who share a commitment to social justice research. This is a chance for you to speak informally with and learn from critical thinkers who actually apply their thinking to complicated field research.

A goal of the course is real progress in your field-based, graduate-level research and thus student projects (pre-doctoral pilot studies, dissertation or thesis proposals/research, or a field-based study) will be central in each class, throughout the term. You will be doing an oral presentation on your projects over the last 2 weeks of class. I want to treat these as a chance for you to “do a talk” on some aspect or the entirety of your study (thus, this could be an elaboration of your research theme or question and proposed data gathering plans, or could include the analytic strategy you are designing and your thinking about the findings and hoped-for contributions of the work.) Your responsibility is twofold: your presentation *and* providing written (thoughtful!) critiques and suggestions for your classmates about their work. We will be talking about and more fully developing the parameters for the presentation, throughout the term. You can also meet with me individually during the last half hour of some classes.

Over the term, we will meet at Professor Dodson's house – near Boston College -- three times for pot-luck dinner to have informal discussion with guest speakers, including:

- *Wendy Lutrell*, Nancy Pforzheimer Aronson Associate Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education, who will discuss her research in public schools, the use of visual imagery, and social research that addresses issues of class, race and gender.
- *Janet Smith and Maria DeJesus*, who took this course 2 years ago and can discuss their ongoing research, specifically with immigrant communities in Boston and their reflections pursuing doctoral research “in the margins.”
- *Lucie White*, Louis A. Horvitz Professor of Law, Harvard Law School, who will discuss collaborative action research in the US in the context of poor women's lives and global collaborations most recently in Ghana.

Prerequisite: All students should get in touch with me if interested in the course to discuss your ideas for (or current progress on) a research project and to be sure you will have met university IRB (Institutional Review Board) requirements to do fieldwork during the fall term

Texts

1. Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2005) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. (Third Edition) Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA. (Note: This book is expensive and I will make sure it is on reserve at Boston College library. Those of you who are very interested in qualitative methods and a current discussion about social justice research may want to purchase it).
2. John Van Maanen (1988) Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography. University of Chicago Press: Chicago

Recommendations for those who want to pursue in-depth descriptive and/or interpretive ethnographic research.

1. Elliot Liebow (1993) Tell Them Who We Are: The Lives of Homeless Women. Penguin Books, New York
2. Margery Wolf (1992) A Thrice Told Tale: On Writing Ethnography. Stanford University Press, Stanford
3. Margery Wolf (1992) A thrice told tale: On writing ethnography. Stanford University Press, Stanford

September 5th

First part of the class (30-40 minutes):

- Introductions and overview of the class
- Review syllabus & assignments and answer questions

Second part: Initial descriptions of your research projects

We will use most of the class time to begin descriptions of your term research projects. Several of you (depending on the class size, maybe all of you) will describe your research – wherever you are in that process -- focusing on the central theme of the inquiry, what you hope to be learning about and what you hope could be the contribution of your study. *This is your chance to be inarticulate and confused!* Actually you will have more chances. But this opening exercise is your chance to speak about your research, raise your dilemmas and express how you hope this class will move you along. This week and next week, each of you will have 15-20 minutes for this opening exercise.

September 12th Social Justice Research

Continue descriptions of research projects.

Discussions questions/critiques

- Charmaz (2005) *Grounded Theory in the 21st Century: Applications for Advancing Social Justice Studies* Chapter 20 in Denzin and Lincoln.
- Clifford Christians (2005) *Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research* Chapter 6 in Denzin and Lincoln.
- Kirby and McKenna (2004) “Methods from the Margins” in W Carroll, *Critical Strategies for Social Research*
- Charmaz – one page – Critiquing Colleagues’ Work

Lab One - *Seeking out what is intentionally hidden*

Either, I will distribute a case study about a research project that is seeking to learn about and address health/survival issues for an “underground” community in Boston.

Or...One or more of you will distribute a case study of your own work, for class discussion next week. We will discuss this more in class.

September 19th: Formulating a research question and developing a study design

Over the next few weeks we will discuss the meaning of “research design” and we will review & discuss various traditions and methods, particularly in qualitative research and interpretive approaches that include research participant perspective. We will use your research projects whenever possible in our discussions.

- Any brief updates on research projects?
- Discuss lab one

Discussion questions. Continued focus on developing/articulating a research question.

- Neuman 1994 and
- Babbie 1989: Excerpts from textbooks on conventional descriptions of formulating a research question or the conceptualization of a study. **Handouts**
- Smith (2005) “*On Tricky Ground*” Chapters 4 in Denzin and Lincoln
- Becker (2004) “Whose side are we on?” In W Carroll, *Critical Strategies for Social Research* **Handout**

September 26th

Interviews

Discussion of readings

- Mishler (1986) “Standard Practice” in E. Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* **Handout**
- DeMarrais (2004) “Qualitative Interview Studies” in K. deMarrais and S. Lapan, *Foundations for Research* **Handout**
- Corbin and Morse (2003) “The Unstructured Interview” *Qualitative Inquiry* 9:3 (335-354) **Handout** and Online journals.

October 3rd

Speakers

Class will meet at 27 Cheswick Road in Newton. Take Commonwealth Avenue (Rte. 30), from BC campus and continue west on Rte. 30 about 2-3 miles. Just after large intersection with Route 16 (Washington street) take second left onto Cheswick road (you will see a large sign for Lasell College at this corner). The third house on the right, with a stone wall, is 27. *Those who need rides should bring up so we can carpool!*

Guest Speakers

Maria DeJesus, ABD
Janet Smith, PhD

After introductions we will hear from guest speakers about their research. This will be an opportunity for you to ask them questions about their topics, development of a design, field process and stumbles and how they are managing their research missions and principles while also managing a doctoral dissertation committee. A few of you will have time to raise your own research topics for general discussion.

October 10th

Focus Groups

Discussion of readings

- Klieber (2004) “Focus Groups: More than a Method of Qualitative Inquiry” in deMarrais and Lapan **Handout**
- Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2005) “Focus Groups: Strategic Articulations of Pedagogy, Politics and Inquiry” Chapter 35 in Denzin and Lincoln
- Tolich (2004) “Internal Confidentiality: When Confidentiality Assurances Fail Relational Informants. *Qualitative Sociology*. Volume 27, Number 1:101-106 **Handout**

Note: For more pragmatic detail on doing focus groups see *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice* by D. Stewart and P. Shamdasani (1990) Sage Publications

We will use some class time to talk about the progress/status of your research.

NOTE: Please bring a copy of:

- a. The latest version of your research question or theme of your research (everyone).
- b. A copy of all or part of an interview or focus group instrument (those of you who have them) that you would like critiqued. Note: I will be selecting a few of these for discussion in Lab 2 (October 31st). Please bear in mind we can only do a few and I will probably focus on examples that are not yet finalized but reflect some development of your research theme/question.

October 17th Ethnography and Observations

Discussion of readings

- Preissle and Grant (2004) “Fieldwork Traditions: Ethnography and Participant Observations in deMarrais and Lapan **Handout**
- Tedlock (2005) “The Observation of Participation and the Emergence of Public Ethnography” Chapter 18 in Denzin and Lincoln.
- Ruth Behar (2003) “Ethnography and the Book that was Lost” *Ethnography* 4:1(15-39). **Handout**

I will be handing out material for Lab 2, October 31st.

Note: If you wish, sign up to meet with me individually for the last half-hour of next several classes. I will make other meeting times if that is needed.

October 24th

Professor *Wendy Lutrell*, Nancy Pforzheimer Aronson Associate Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education will lead the class.

Class will meet at 27 Cheswick Road in Newton, as above.

Readings

- Harper (2005) “What’s New Visually?” Chapter 29 in Denzin and Lincoln.
- One of Professor Lutrell’s publications or papers.
- Charmaz *How to write memos*. (Adapted from Chazam (1995) *Grounded theory in* Smith et al (eds.) *Rethinking methods in psychology*). Handout

October 31st Design and methods continued

1. Discussion of readings

2. Lab Two: In the second part of class we will be discussing/critiquing your interview or focus group guides in class. Remember, our critiques should be framed by what the researcher (you!) have already told us is your central research theme or question. Methods and instruments matter as tools to do the inquiry, not on their own.

The last half-hour of class will be reserved for students to meet with me individually.

November 7th

Professor Lucie White, Louis A. Horvitz Professor of Law, Harvard Law School will lead the class.

Class will meet at 27 Cheswick Road in Newton, as above.

Readings:

- TBA: One of Professor White’s publications.
- Dodson, Piatelli and Schmalzbauer, 2007 (Forthcoming in *Qualitative Inquiry*)
Handout

November 14th Analytical strategies

Discussion of readings

- Weitzman (2000) “Software and Qualitative Research” Denzin and Lincoln, previous edition of *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. **Handout**
- Denzin (2005) “Emancipatory Discourses and the Ethics and Politics of Interpretation” Chapter 37 in Denzin and Lincoln
- Bauman “Afterthought: On Writing; On Writing Sociology” Chapter 43 in Denzin and Lincoln

Recommended for those new to qualitative analysis:

- Atkinson, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) Making sense of qualitative data: Complimentary research strategies. Sage Publications

Last half hour will be reserved for meeting individually.

November 21st

Reading

- Van Maanen (1988) Tales of the field: On writing ethnography. University of Chicago Press: Chicago
- Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) "Poor Mothers and Habits of Hiding: Participatory Research methods in Poverty Research" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 Handout

Discussion of readings

Last half hour will be reserved for meeting individually.

November 28th and December 5th Final project presentations and discussions

- James Scott (1990) *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale University Press: New Haven. Chapters 1- 4 (pg.1-69) and Chapters 6&7 (pg. 136-200).
- McCorkel and Myers (2003) *What difference does difference make? Position and privilege in the field*. *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2:199-229