



Ethnographic Methods and Understanding Rural Poverty

Two Seminars: Friday, April 5, 2013

Jennifer Sherman is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Washington State University. Her research looks at the ways in which job loss and poverty affect families, particularly in rural communities. Her work includes the critically acclaimed 2009 book *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*.

303 Rackley Building 12-1 PM

Ethnography on the Margins: Methodological Openings and Challenges in Poverty Research

This seminar will focus on the challenges, openings and dilemmas of conducting intensive ethnographic research within economically marginalized populations, and how these challenges and possibilities may be evolving, in part as a consequence of changing technologies that present new dilemmas with regard to recruiting, privacy, and confidentiality. How can researchers gain entrée and trust within socially and economically marginalized settings? How do we make sense of the fact that peoples' own testimonies often appear to contradict their lived experiences, while still respecting the processes by which people make sense of their lives? What is the difference between "external" and "internal" confidentiality, and what are the particular challenges within small and marginalized settings? How can "N of 1" ethnographic case study findings be translated into information that engages policy audiences and speaks to macro-level structures and processes? This talk will be structured to encourage discussion and audience engagement around these and other topics.

215 Armsby Building, 2-3 PM

Coping with Rural Poverty: Economic Survival and Moral Capital in Rural America

This presentation looks at the experience of unemployment and job loss in a rural Northwestern community, and explores the ways in which cultural norms around work and work ethics persist even in the absence of employment, continuing to influence the behaviors and decisions of the poor. I argue that in this setting survival strategies are chosen because they are socially rational rather than economically optimal. The choice of socially acceptable coping strategies is ultimately beneficial because it creates and sustains "moral capital," which can be traded for social capital in the form of community support, and economic capital in the form of job opportunities. I explore the implications of these findings in terms of political trends and poverty alleviation policies, particularly for rural populations.

Seminars co-sponsored by University Park Allocation Committee and Educational Policy Studies Student Association, along with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education, with assistance from the Center on Rural Education and Communities.