

**SOC493H1S**  
**New Topics in Sociology: Ethnography and Intimacy**  
University of Toronto – St. George Campus  
Winter 2025  
Wednesdays 3:10 pm – 5 pm

**Instructor:** Pamela Tsui (she/her)  
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**Office hours:** Wednesdays 5 – 6 pm

<b>Course Description</b>
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This course examines the intersection of ethnography and intimacy, focusing on how ethnographers study and theorize the intimate dimensions of social life. We will explore how researchers navigate complex intimate relationships both in the field and in their writing. The course begins with an introduction to ethnographic studies conducted in intimate settings, covering methods such as participant observation, interviews, and auto-ethnography. We will also address the ethical challenges of researching sensitive and personal topics, particularly the dynamics between the researcher and the researched. Through structured assignments and instructor feedback, students will develop their skills in ethnographic research design and analysis.

<b>Learning Goals</b>
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*For those of us who want to write ethnography, the first thing we must do is read ethnographies not as receptacles of information... but in a writerly way.*  
Behar, Ruth (2020) “Read More, Write Less”

This course explores the sociology of intimacy through the lens of ethnographic research, with an emphasis on developing sustainable and enjoyable reading habits. Students will engage with a diverse range of ethnographic works, gaining insight into sociological discussions around intimacy and mastery of ethnographic methods.

A key focus of the course is the power dynamics within intimate relationships and the evolving boundaries between “private” and “public” spheres. Through various theoretical perspectives—feminist, queer, social constructionist, anti-colonial, and intersectional—the course examines multiple forms of intimacy.

By the end of the course, students will have developed a nuanced sociological understanding of intimacy, along with practical skills to design and conduct their own ethnographic projects. These projects may be presented in traditional academic formats or through alternative media forms. Throughout the course, students will participate in discussions and activities designed to refine their individual projects collaboratively.

**A note on content warnings**

This course engages with ethnographic research on intimate relationships. Topics may involve explicit language, sexual practices, family trauma, and personal experiences.

While the course aims to promote critical thinking, open dialogue, and intellectual exploration, I recognize that some material may be triggering or distressing for certain individuals. It is important to prioritize your well-being throughout the course. Participation in discussions and engagement with course materials is always voluntary. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or need to step

back from certain topics, I encourage you to prioritize your emotional well-being and engage in self-care practices.

If you are dealing with challenges related to the course materials or class discussions, please feel free to reach out to me. I am committed to fostering a respectful and inclusive learning environment for all students.

**Prerequisites:** The prerequisite to take this course is 1.0 SOC at the 300-level. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

### Accessibility Needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: [disability.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:disability.services@utoronto.ca) or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>

Evaluations		
Evaluation Components	Due Date	Weight
<i>Engagement-based assignments</i>		
Weekly reading reflection check-in (2% each x 8 times for Weeks 2-8 & 10)	Ongoing	16%
Reading responses (5% each x 2 submissions. At least one must be submitted before the reading week)	Ongoing	10%
In-class activities (1% each x 10 submissions)	Ongoing	10%
<i>Project-based assignments</i>		
Research plan	Feb 7	15%
Fieldnotes	Mar 10	12%
Consultation	See announcement	2%
Presentation	Mar 26 or Apr 2	10%
Final report	Apr 4	25%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

### Reading Reflection Check-in

This weekly self-reflection is a low-stakes assignment that helps you build sustainable reading practices and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Rather than summarizing readings, you will spend **10-15 minutes** reflecting on your reading progress, challenges, and interests. It is okay if you occasionally cannot finish the weekly readings. You will receive the full 2% credit as long as you **honestly reflect** on your reading experience and **thoughtfully complete** the check-in form. Since this assignment focuses on your personal reading experience and habit-building, using AI tools to assist in your reflection is *not* permitted. The deadline for submitting the reflection is three hours before each week's class at 12 noon.

### Reading Responses

From Weeks 2-8 and 10, you are required to submit two reading responses in total. You have the flexibility to choose which two weeks to submit your responses, but at least one submission must be completed before Reading Week. Your response should first briefly address and synthesize the key arguments, theoretical/conceptual approaches, and methodological insights from the weekly

readings. Then, discuss how these readings may inform your own research project. You may also incorporate insights gained from class discussions if you wish.

Each response should be 1-2 pages (double-spaced), well-structured, clear, and grammatically correct. The deadline for submitting reading responses is 11:59 pm on Wednesday of your chosen weeks.

### **In-class Activities**

Each class will conclude with an in-class activity that connects course concepts to your individual research projects. These activities serve as scaffolding exercises to help you develop your project and prepare your final report. You will upload your completed activity to Quercus after each class. These activities are graded as Complete/Incomplete, emphasizing participation rather than perfect responses.

If you are unwell, please prioritize your health and stay home. You only need to submit 10 in-class activities out of the 12 classes to get the full credit. Contact the instructor if you need support catching up on missed activities.

### **Research Plan**

In this course, you will develop an individual ethnographic project exploring the theme of “friendship.” Building on our in-class scaffolding exercises, you will submit a 1000-word research plan that includes essential elements such as research questions, the targeted group or setting, ethical considerations, and the proposed approach for conducting participant observation. Your submission will also include an annotated bibliography and an informed consent letter for the participants tailored to your project. Detailed guidelines for this assignment will be provided during class sessions.

### **Fieldnotes**

After receiving feedback and making necessary revisions to the research plan, you will conduct participant observation at least twice and submit fieldnotes and notes-on-notes documenting and reflecting upon your experiences in the field. Participant observation is a qualitative research method used to study and understand social phenomena by immersing yourself in the natural environment of the subjects being studied. During fieldwork, you may become a participant in a friendship setting and observe the interactions firsthand. The fieldwork should not involve risks beyond those of ordinary life, meaning that it will not involve observation of any friendship activities that might put either yourself or the participants in an emotionally or physically demanding context. You should avoid observing vulnerable populations, such as minors, individuals with cognitive impairments, and people engaged in illegal activities. While observations can occur in public or private spaces, you should concentrate your observations on the chosen individuals, respecting the privacy of others in the same vicinity. Detailed guidelines for this assignment will be discussed in class.

### **Consultation**

Prior to the final presentation, you will have a one-to-one consultation with the instructor to discuss your project. These 15-minute meetings will be scheduled during Week 9 and Week 10. Detailed schedules for these consultations will be provided during class sessions.

### **Presentation**

During the final two weeks of the course, you will present your work-in-progress to the class. These presentations provide an opportunity to share your project and receive valuable peer

feedback. Other students are encouraged to actively engage by asking questions and offering constructive feedback to help you refine your project further.

### Final Report

In your final report, you will present your research findings and demonstrate how course materials have enhanced both your understanding of ethnographic methods and your sociological insights into intimacies.

The final report can be submitted in one of the following formats:

- A 3000-word essay adhering to formal academic convention
- A 3000-word essay in an alternative creative genre
- A 5-minute multimedia/video presentation

During your consultation session, you are encouraged to discuss with the instructor the most suitable format for your final report. You may choose between written or multimedia formats to demonstrate your understanding of course materials and develop your “writing” skills in a way that best suits your strengths and preferences.

<b>Late/Extension Policy</b>
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- **48-Hour Delayed Submission Policy:** This means that you have the flexibility to submit your assignments up to 48 hours after the official due date without incurring any penalties. No documentation or notification to the instructor is necessary. Beyond the 48-hour grace period, standard late penalties apply, calculated from the original due date.
- **If you need more than 48 hours:** Extension requests must be submitted to the instructor via e-mail. Request for an extension should come before the due date of the assignment. You should also ask for a specific amount of additional time. I typically do not request documentation, and I typically approve these requests. Any assignment that is submitted beyond the new date, on which you have agreed with the instructor, will be penalized as explained below.
- **Late Assignments:** Assignments submitted without prior notice will incur a deduction of 5 points per day, including weekends and holidays.
- According to the university guidelines, students who miss a paper deadline or a test will receive a mark of zero for that paper or test unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. Within three days of missing a paper deadline or test, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with **one of the following:**
  - Absence declaration via ACORN (**can only be used once during the semester**)
  - U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
  - College Registrar’s letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)
  - Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

<b>Regrade Policy</b>
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The teaching team will do our best to grade fairly and consistently. If issues with your grade arise and you wish to appeal, please follow this procedure:

If it is a mathematical error, simply alert the instructor/grader of the error.

In the case of a more substantive appeal, you must:

1. Wait at least 24 hours after receiving your mark.
2. Carefully re-read your assignment, all assignment guidelines, marking schemes, and the grader's comments.
3. Submit a regrade request to the instructor within 1 week of receiving your grade, including a one-page explanation of why you believe the mark and comments do not adequately reflect your work.
4. Note that upon regrading, your mark may go up or down or stay the same.

## Detailed Course Outline

### **Class Format**

All required readings will be available electronically on the course website on Quercus. Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to each class and participate in classroom discussions.

You are also expected to be respectful of fellow co-learners in discussions and lectures, remain curious and open-minded about different perspectives, and cultivate an environment for mutual growth through collaboration and dialogue.

Note: Every attempt will be made to follow this schedule, but it is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

Week 1  (Jan 8)	<b>Introduction</b>  Behar, Ruth. 2020. "Read More, Write Less." Pp. 47-53 in <i>Writing Anthropology: Essays on Craft &amp; Commitment</i> , edited by C. McGranahan. Durham: Duke University Press.  <u>In-class Activity: Brainstorming research topics</u>
<b>PART I – Exploring ethnographies of intimacies</b>	
Week 2  (Jan 15)	<b>Why ethnography? And how to write?</b>  *Duneier, Mitchell. 1992. <i>Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <b>Chapters 1 &amp; 9</b>  *Winder, Terrell J. A. 2023. "The Discursive Work of "Bottom-Shaming": Sexual Positioning Discourse in the Construction of Black Masculinity." <i>Gender &amp; Society</i> 37(5):774-99.  <u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 2 before class, by noon</u>  <u>In-class Activity: Rethinking intimacy and power</u>
Week 3  (Jan 22)	<b>What is (not) the problem?</b>  *Barcelos, Chris. 2020. <i>Distributing Condoms and Hope: The Racialized Politics of Youth Sexual Health</i> . Oakland, California: University of California Press. <b>Introduction &amp; Chapter 2</b>

	<p>Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2014. "Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research." <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> 20(6):811-18.</p> <p><u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 3 before class, by noon</u></p> <p><u>In-class Activity: Identify the research question</u></p>
<p>Week 4</p> <p>(Jan 29)</p>	<p><b>Research design: Sex and institutions</b></p> <p>*Kulick, Don and Jens Rydström. 2015. <i>Loneliness and Its Opposite: Sex, Disability, and the Ethics of Engagement</i>. Durham and London: Duke University Press. <b>Chapters 1 &amp; 3</b></p> <p>Tavory, Iddo and Stefan Timmermans. 2009. "Two Cases of Ethnography." <i>Ethnography</i> 10(3):243-63.</p> <p><u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 4 before class, by noon</u></p> <p><u>In-class Activity: Describe the group/setting</u></p>
<b>PART II – Intimacies in the field</b>	
<p>Week 5</p> <p>(Feb 5)</p>	<p><b>Ethics in the field</b></p> <p>*Humphreys, Laud. 2017[1975]. <i>Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places</i>. Second Edition. Routledge. <b>Chapter 2</b></p> <p>Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." <i>Journal of Contemporary Ethnography</i> 22(3):267-94.</p> <p>González-López, Gloria. 2011. "Mindful Ethics: Comments on Informant-Centered Practices in Sociological Research." <i>Qualitative Sociology</i> 34(3):447-61.</p> <p><u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 5 before class, by noon</u></p> <p><u>In-class Activity: Ethical considerations</u></p> <p><b><u>Submit the Research Plan by 23:59 pm on Feb 7 (Friday)</u></b></p>
<p>Week 6</p> <p>(Feb 12)</p>	<p><b>Self and embodiment in the field</b></p> <p>*Meadow, Tey. 2018. <i>Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the Twenty-First Century</i>. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. <b>Chapter 1, 2, &amp; 5</b></p> <p>Meadow, Tey. 2018. "The Mess: Vulnerability as Ethnographic Practice." Pp. 154-66 in <i>Other, Please Specify, Queer Methods in Sociology</i>, edited by T. Meadow, D. L. Compton and K. Schilt: University of California Press.</p> <p><u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 6 before class, by noon</u></p> <p><u>In-class Activity: Intimacies in the field</u></p>

Feb 19	<b>READING WEEK – No class</b>
Week 7  (Feb 26)	<b>Writing fieldnotes – Intimate details</b>  *Sandelson, Jasmin. 2023. <i>My Girls: The Power of Friendship in a Poor Neighborhood</i> . Oakland: University of California Press. <b>Introduction, A Note on Research and Writing, &amp; an empirical chapter of your choice.</b>  <u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 7 before class, by noon</u>  <u>In-class Activity: Writing workshop</u>
<b>PART III – Writing intimacies</b>	
Week 8  (Mar 5)	<b>Memoir and autoethnography</b>  *Cho, Grace M. 2021. <i>Tastes Like War: A Memoir</i> . New York: Feminist Press. <b>Prologue, Part 1 and 2.</b> (Trigger warning: The sections “1983” and “1986” in Chapter 3 “The Friendly City” contain descriptions of sexual violence that some may find disturbing. You may choose to skip these sections.)  Adams, Tony E. and Andrew F. Herrmann. 2023. “Good Autoethnography.” <i>Journal of Autoethnography</i> 4(1):1-9.  <u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 8 before class, by noon</u>  <u>In-class Activity: Writing workshop</u>
Week 9  (Mar 12)	<b>Guest lecture - Rethinking ethnographic gaze from the community’s view</b>  Revisiting Week 3’s: Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2014. “Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research.” <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> 20(6):811-18.  <b><u>Submit the Fieldnotes by 23:59 pm on Mar 10 (Monday)</u></b>  <u>Consultation</u>
Week 10  (Mar 19)	<b>Ethnography beyond</b>  *Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2015. <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press. <b>Prologue &amp; Part I</b> OR Herzog, Warner. 2005. <i>Grizzly Man</i> . Lions Gate Films. OR Kazuo, Hara. 1974. <i>Extreme Private Eros: Love Song 1974</i> . Shisso Productions.  <u>Submit a Reading Reflection Check-in for Week 10 before class, by noon</u>

	<u>Consultation</u>
Week 11 (Mar 26)	<b>Student Presentation (1)</b> <u>In-class Activity: Peer review</u>
Week 12 (Apr 2)	<b>Student Presentation (2) and Conclusion</b> <u>In-class Activity: Peer review</u> <b><u>Submit the Final Report by 23:59 pm on Apr 9 (Wednesday)</u></b>

<b>Academic Integrity</b>
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- Be sure that you have familiarized yourself with the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters before submitting assignments or sitting for exams. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.
- You can find advice on "How Not to Plagiarize" and other advice on documentation format and methods of integrating sources at <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources>.

### Turnitin

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.'

Assignments not submitted through *Turnitin* will receive a grade of zero (0 %), unless a student instead provides, along with their position paper, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. The alternative (not submitting via *Turnitin*) is in place because, strictly speaking, using *Turnitin* is voluntary for students at the University of Toronto.

### Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

In this course, I recognize and encourage the use of generative AI, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Notion AI, as a tool for brainstorming, and editing in the research and writing process. AI can be an invaluable partner, helping you to generate ideas, refine and polish your writing, and deepen your thinking about the subjects at hand.

However, it is essential to note that **students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit**. AI should not be the primary source of your academic understanding or research. AI is a brainstorming tool, but it is not a source of peer-reviewed references and often lacks the accuracy or evidence support that is inherent to rigorous academic work.

Therefore, to ensure the highest academic integrity, please use peer-reviewed academic sources when researching and building an understanding of literature. Primary sources should always be cited directly in your work. AI can help you navigate these sources and make connections you may not initially see, but it should not replace your engagement with the original texts.



**Students must submit, as an appendix with their assignments, any content produced by an artificial intelligence tool, and the prompts used to generate the content.** When it comes to citing AI in your work, we will follow a slightly relaxed version of the APA AI citation guidelines (<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>). You are required to cite the AI only if it generates something entirely original for you. If you have used the AI to edit your writing or brainstorm ideas, it is not necessary to provide a citation.

Remember, the goal of using AI in this course is to enhance your learning process, not to shortchange it. AI should help you think more deeply, converse more broadly, and engage more thoroughly with the course material. Use it wisely and responsibly.