

# Ethics in Contemporary Ethnographic Research

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Spring 2023

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# 1. ECER

## Course Information

This course revolves around data: what it consists of, what it can say and do, how to handle it responsibly, who defines it and who is defined by it. In our approach to each of these questions, we will combine ethical reflection with practical application of skills and tools. We will pay special attention to new forms of data generated in and by digital technologies, which are now nearly ubiquitous in ethnographic field sites and our own research practice.

### Code

6491av2et

### ECTS

5.0

### Level

100

### Period

Semester 2, Block 4

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## Dates

unit theme	lecture	tutorials due
<a href="#">1</a> Contemporary Challenges to Ethical Research	Apr 13, 9:15–11:00	Apr 17
<a href="#">2</a> Data, Data Everywhere	Apr 20, 9:15–11:00	Apr 24 <a href="#">Assignment 1</a>
<a href="#">3</a> Hacking Ethnography	May 4, 9:15–11:00	May 8
<a href="#">4</a> The Ethics of Ethnography in Industry	May 11, 9:15–11:00	May 22 <a href="#">Assignment 2</a>
<a href="#">5</a> Data Management in Action	May 25, 9:15–11:00	<b>none</b>
<a href="#">6</a> The Open Imperative	Jun 1, 9:15–11:00	<b>none</b> <a href="#">Assignment 3</a>

All times CEST.

Please consult [MyTimetable](#)  for the schedule of your tutorial sessions. Note: There are **no tutorials** on May 1.

# Readings

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The **required book** for this class is Kimberly Kay Hoang's *Dealing in Desire* (University of California Press, 2015). It is available electronically through the university library catalog. You will read this book at your own pace, aiming to complete it in time for [assignment 3](#).

Other **required and supplementary readings** will be [available for download](#).

# Academic Integrity

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This class adheres to Leiden University's [regulations on academic integrity](#). According to the university, "Plagiarism is understood as presenting, intentionally or otherwise, someone else's words, thoughts, analyses, argumentations, pictures, techniques, computer programmes, etc., as your own work."

We will refer **all suspected violations** of these regulations to the examination committee. Be careful to **properly cite** all works you draw on in your assignments. The University Library offers [tutorials and advice](#) on what and how to cite.

# Changes

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This syllabus is a living document and may be adapted as the course progresses. You can keep track of changes in the [timeline](#).

# 2. Units

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## Week 1

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### Lecture

**Location**

PdIC SC01

**Readings**

- Mutaru (2018)
- Le Guin (1973)

Contemporary ethnographic research continues the tradition of ethnographic inquiry in anthropology and sociology, but has some distinguishing characteristics. We will discuss the past and present of ethnographic research and how at every stage it involves decisions where ethical concerns are at stake, forcing us to ask what “the good” is in society and how we are meant to act. Further, we will cover the current research ethics regime, where it comes from, what it entails, what it looks like in practice, and why it is at times contested.

### Tutorial

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**Homework**

- Find the ethics code of an anthropological or sociological association in your home country or region and read it with Mutaru (2018) at the back of your mind.
- Ask yourself: How well do you think the code could guide you when dealing with emerging ethical dilemmas? Jot down some notes.

# Week 2

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## Lecture

### Location

Kamerlingh Onnes A1.44

### Readings

- Bratich (2017)
- Thomas-Hébert (2019)
- Mejias and Couldry (2019)

Whether we like it or not, we live in data-saturated environments. The lecture will present concepts for thinking about this situation, introduce cases that illustrate risks that result for individuals and groups, and discuss some implications for the conduct of ethnographic research.

## Tutorial

### Homework

- Read Powell (2018) and think about how you can put her ideas into practice.
- Find a news article about a recent data breach, or visit the [GDPR Enforcement Tracker](#) and read about the details of at least one violation that was sanctioned by authorities in the Netherlands, your home country (if GDPR applies there), or another country of your choice. Come prepared to discuss the details of the case you read about.

During tutorials, you will discuss and plan the [first assignment](#).

# Week 3

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## Lecture

### Location

Kamerlingh Onnes A1.44

### Readings

- Markham (2012)
- De Seta (2020)

We have discussed challenges we face as we want to conduct ethnographic research in an ethical manner in today's world. But what can we do as researchers to put ethical principles into practice? How can we avoid causing harm and protect those in the field, ourselves included? We will draw on a range of practices and literatures to think through ways of "hacking" ethnography.

## Tutorial

### Homework

- Come up with a fictional ethnographic research project and complete the [EFF risk assessment](#) for that hypothetical scenario. Think about what skills or tools you would need to mitigate the risks you identified.
- Browse some of the following resources and write down a few ideas for what you would like to work on for your second assignment:
  - <https://defendourmovements.org/resources/>
  - <https://myshadow.org/>
  - <https://securityinabox.org/en/>
  - <https://totem-project.org/>

During tutorials, you will discuss and plan the [second assignment](#). This will require forming groups with two or three other students in your tutorial group and coming up with a contribution to the Hacking Ethnography collection.

# Week 4

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## Lecture

### Location

Kamerlingh Onnes A1.44

### Readings

- Cohen (2005)

In this lecture, we will be joined by **Zinzy Waleson Geene** for a conversation about navigating ethical and other considerations as a researcher in industry.

About our guest speaker:

[Zinzy Waleson Geene](#) is a researcher and designer specialized in building products for people at work. She taught herself to build websites when she was a child, and has 16 years of professional experience in research, design, and development. She likes to think about what “research” means in a business context, and how academia can help make it better.

## Tutorial

During tutorials, you will have a chance to show off what you made for assignment 2. You will also discuss ethical issues you might encounter as industry researchers.

### Homework

- If possible, bring a hardcopy of your group assignment.
- Learn about the Crisis Text Line scandal by reading McNeil (2022) and at least one additional source of your own choice. Take some notes to prepare for a discussion in tutorials.



# Week 5

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## Lecture

### Location

Kamerlingh Onnes A1.44

### Readings

- Chin (2021)
- Jarzabkowski et al. (2014)

For this session we are honored to welcome Dr. **Andrew Hoffman**, the Faculty of Social Sciences data steward, who will speak from his vantage point about data management, its institutionalization and professionalization in contemporary academic research, its relation to ethnography—but especially what it looks like in practice and why it can be a helpful skill even if you don't intend to become an academic researcher.

About our guest speaker:

[Andrew Hoffman](#) had an early career as a research data coordinator in academic cancer medicine before going on to complete a doctoral degree in sociology/social studies of medicine at McGill University. Over the course of two subsequent postdoctoral fellowships, Andrew studied and collaborated with researchers, data scientists, and software engineers on the development of new knowledge infrastructures, predominantly in the domain of translational science.

Combining training as an ethnographer with dedication to user-centered design, Andrew aims to make data management policies and workflows legible, useful for, and responsive to the values and practices of social science researchers working across the methodological spectrum. As a Data Steward, his primary responsibility is to liaise with researchers and support staff in Cultural Anthropology & Development Sociology and the Centre for Science & Technology Studies (CWTS) to address research data management needs spanning the whole project lifecycle.

**No tutorials this week.**

### Homework

- Put some of this week's lessons into action by rethinking how you organize your own files and folders. You have a [backup](#), right?

# Week 6

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## Lecture

### Location

Kamerlingh Onnes A1.44

### Readings

- Fassin (2013)
- Reyes (2017)
- Dilger et al. (2018)
- De Koning et al. (2019)

Researchers have a responsibility to address issues of public concern, and critical scholars in particular have the ambition of making public interventions. This requires finding formats for scholarly communication that can reach the public, but also resisting tendencies that enclose scholarly knowledge behind paywalls or within proprietary systems. In that sense, ethnographers are champions of opening up our work. The demand to be “open” can also be a challenge to those conducting critical research, particularly for ethnographers who are unable to share their data or be totally transparent about their research process. We will discuss a variety of ethical issues that are at stake in this tension.

You will also have a chance to ask questions about [assignment 3](#) following the final lecture.

**No tutorials this week.**

# 3. Assignments

## Assignment 1: Data Walk

### Due date

May 3, 15:00

The goal of this assignment is to sensitize you to the ways in which data is continually produced in contemporary social settings. In another context we might talk about the *opportunities* this holds for social researchers, many of whom have welcomed the “data deluge” as an opportunity to invent new ways of knowing the social. In the context of this class, however, we will mostly discuss its ethical implications—the ways in which the research process is shot through with ethical concerns when it takes place in data-saturated environments.

Canadian media scholar [Alison Powell](#) came up with the idea for **data workshops** with the express purpose of “opening up civic discussions about data and its ethics within urban space.” A variation on the ethnographic go-along method, it has been adopted by scholars around the world, including the [Centre for BOLD Cities](#) in our own region.

In this assignment, you will plan, carry out and report on a data walk. Each student will submit **a brief report** (around 800 words) with supporting materials such as maps, photographs and notes taken en route.

During the walk, you will focus on *data hubs*: objects or sites that collect data. Examples include customer loyalty cards, ATMs, traffic cameras, RIFD tracking systems, OV chip card scanners, QR codes, parking meters, air quality meters, but the list could go on and on.

A data walk should involve a small group, with members taking on different roles, such as navigator, note-taker or photographer. For the purposes of this assignment, you should involve at least one other person, such as a roommate or family member. Plan your walk someplace convenient, for instance in your own neighborhood, and restrict it to about one hour. You may also ride by bike, but we advise not to drive unless you or your participant is unable to be mobile in other ways.

Your report should address the planning, execution and your reflection on the data walk. You may take the following points as a guide as you complete the assignment:

1. **Plan your walking route ahead of time.** Make a map or list some landmarks you intend to pass on your walk.
2. **What will you look for?** Which data hubs do you expect to encounter along the way?
3. **Collect evidence.** Take pictures or bring back objects from your walk.
4. **Tell a story.** Why did you walk where you walked? What was an important thread that you decided to follow? What did you learn about your environment? Did the other participant in your workshop see things differently?
5. **Discuss the results.** How visible are the data hubs you spotted? What kinds of data do they collect? Who owns the data? Where are they stored? What value might they bring to you or others? What do you think are the “costs” of data collection—in terms of the technology required for its collection, the likely environmental impact, encroachments on privacy, or possible “chilling effects”?

Please write your report in clear and coherent prose. The format should resemble a fieldnote memo rather than an academic paper. Use proper references as needed.

# Assignment 2: Hacking Ethnography

## Due date

May 19 (end of day)

Working in groups of up to four students, you will design and produce a contribution to a collection of public-facing resources on the theme of Hacking Ethnography. Your contribution can take one of two forms:

1. A zine (for instance, to provide guidelines for how to protect the identities of your research participants).
2. An instructional video (for instance, to show how to use a certain tool to secure research data).

**You will find a selection of earlier assignments in [this collection](#).**

Regardless which format you choose, try to create your resource in such a way that it will be useful to others like you wondering what kinds of practices they can adopt in the course of ethnographic research to protect research participants, secure data, and otherwise ensure that their research is ethical. We will discuss possible topics during tutorials in [week 3](#).

When you have created your resource, [choose a Creative Commons license](#) under which to release your work into the public.

## Zine

Zines are a self-published format with a DIY aesthetic. They usually consist of literally cut-and-pasted texts and graphics, and traditionally they have been reproduced using copying machines. Zines have been associated with a variety of subcultures, such as the punk scene of the seventies and riot grrrl scene of the nineties.

ABC No Rio, a cultural institution in New York City that archives zines, has the following [advice](#) for “new zinesters”:

Look at a variety of zines before starting out on one of your own, to really take your time with the layout, and to think about how your zine might be different, depending on where you are in the world: does it have a sense of PLACE? Be specific and descriptive. ... Just to let you know, there are a LOT of punk rock zines out there, so if you’re doing one, go the extra mile to make yours stand out.

You can find lots of examples of zines created through the ages on [archive.org](#). For additional inspiration, look at the zines created or curated by [Nika Dubrovsky](#), [Psaroskala](#), [Julia Evans](#), and [Sprout Distro](#). Design tools like Canva and templates can be helpful, they don’t exactly help with standing out—and they may also contain copyrighted material, limiting your ability to share your zine.

Let your creativity run free. You don’t even have to stick to the zine format too strictly. For instance, you can also consider making a deck of [tarot cards](#).

After choosing a Creative Commons license for your zine, submit it, preferably as a single PDF, through Brightspace. Making hard copies to distribute to your friends is optional but encouraged!

## Instructional Video

Create a video that conveys a useful skill for ethnographers in 4–9 minutes. Aim to make an engaging and concise video that (1) incorporates visual cues highlighting important information, (2) uses minimal text, and (3) has some personality!

Once you have chosen a Creative Commons license for your video, upload it to [archive.org](https://archive.org), the university's [Kaltura site](#), or a PeerTube instance like [TubEdu](#). Submit the public link through Brightspace.

# Assignment 3: Essay Question

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## Due date

June 7 (end of day)

## Self-assessment due date

June 9 (end of day)

This assignment consists of **an essay question** that will be posted to Brightspace in the final week of May. In your answer to this question, you will have the chance to demonstrate what you have learned about ethical issues contemporary ethnographers face and ways they can respond practically. Successful answers will make connections between the course content (lectures, readings, and discussions in tutorials) and *Dealing in Desire*.

This assignment is **self-assessed**. This means that, after submitting your answer, you will grade your own effort. Here's how that works:

1. We will prepare a "model answer" for the essay question. Read the model answer and the assessment criteria it is intended to demonstrate. The "model answers" are *not* the definitive answers, and it is possible that a good answer will differ significantly in its content provided it successfully demonstrates understanding and analytical thinking.
2. You will write a brief reflection on your own answer. Think of your reflection as a letter addressed to the instructors in which you explain what you think was successful about your answer, and what, with the benefit of hindsight, you think could have been improved. What did you find challenging about writing your answer? What did you learn as a result of preparing your answer and reviewing it?
3. Finally, you will tell us what grade you would give yourself. (Ideally, we would give everyone the grade they give themselves, but we reserve the right to raise or lower grades as appropriate.)

You will find the self-assessment on Brightspace after you submit this assignment and the deadline has passed.

# 4. References

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Thomas-Hébert, Charlotte. 2019. "Conducting Sensitive Research as an Alien Ethnographer in the United States." *American Studies Journal* 68. <https://doi.org/10.18422/68-07>.



# 5. Frequently Anticipated Questions

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## How much work is this class?

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ECER is a class of 5 EC, which corresponds to 140 hours of work total. That means that, in addition to attending lectures and tutorials, you should plan on spending an average of 12 hours per week on readings, homework, and assignments.

## What will we work on?

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According to the official [course listing](#), you will be able to do the following when our time together comes to a close:

1. Critically reflect on ethical dilemmas presented by various kinds of materials gathered in ethnographic research.
2. Apply ethical principles and practical skills to process data in a way that is accountable to academic norms and codes of professional conduct.
3. Understand how power and knowledge are related in social scientific inquiry.
4. Articulate how computational approaches and new forms of data both integrate with and call into question the practice of ethnographic research.

We designed the lectures, tutorials and assignments and chose the readings with these objectives in mind.

## Is attendance mandatory?

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Attendance during lectures is voluntary but strongly advised. Participation in tutorials is obligatory. You may miss one session, but your tutorial instructor may ask you to complete an additional assignment to make up for the missed session. Students who miss more than one session without valid reasons will have a penalty of half a grade point applied to their final grade.

## What is my grade based on?

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Assessment in this class is based on three assignments:

1. Your [research report](#) on a data walk (50 percent).
2. Your [group contribution](#) to the Hacking Ethnography collection (pass/fail, 10 percent).
3. Your answers to [essay questions](#) relating the course content to *Dealing in Desire* (40 percent). This assignment is self-assessed.

We will discuss all three assignments during tutorials and lectures.

## Can I retake any assignments?

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Yes, if you do not pass an assignment after making an honest first attempt, you are entitled to a retake. If you think you will not be able to submit an assignment by the deadline, please let us know well in advance and/or consult the study advisor. We will require you to appeal to the exam board before we can allow you to retake an assignment for which you did not submit a first attempt.

## What happens if I don't pass this course?

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Completing this course is required to register for the second-year courses Fieldwork NL, Research Preparation, and Multivariate Analysis. If you do not earn a passing grade, that may result in a delay in your studies. If you are worried about your progress, please do not hesitate to reach out to the course coordinator and study advisor.

## Why do I have to grade my own work?

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Yes, it is true: [Assignment 3](#) is self-assessed, which means you will give yourself a grade. Two big reasons we've adopted self-assessment are (1) it enables metacognition (thinking about thinking), and (2) it gives some more control to you, the learner, over the learning process.

## Can I redo any of the assignments?

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In accordance with Institute and Faculty policies, you can redo an assignment if your overall grade is lower than 5.5. Your revised assignment will need to be a noticeable improvement over your original assignment to be considered for an improved grade. Be sure to incorporate any feedback provided on your first attempt.

Revised assignments will be due within two weeks after the grades for assignment 3 have been published. If you decide to redo an assignment at that point, please let the course coordinator know which one you intend to redo.

## How should I format my assignments?

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Assignments 1 and 3 should follow the Institute's Style Guide, employ consistent references, and include a list of works cited. Aim to write clear prose, using paragraphs and subheadings to organize your writing. Use your creativity in assignment 2—no formal criteria apply (though you should still make sure to credit your sources!).

## I'm a pre-master's student, what can *I* hope to get out of this class?

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We will tailor tutorial discussions to issues you are likely to encounter as a master's student.

## Your question here!

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Got more questions? [Contact us](#) and we'll do our best to clear everything up!