

## Gang Leader for a Day Paper Guidelines

Question: *Gang Leader for a Day* (2008) is an account of Sudhir Venkatesh's study of the lives of those living in the Robert Taylor housing projects in Chicago. In his study, Venkatesh encounters a number of ethically challenging situations and potentially conducts himself in some ethically questionable ways while conducting his research. You are tasked with addressing the following questions in your paper: *What are the ethical considerations that a sociologist must consider in his/her research and, given this, what are the major ethical challenges/situations that Venkatesh faced during his time studying JT and other members of the Robert Taylor community? Do you think that he conducted himself in an ethical manner in these situations? If so, why were his actions ethical? If not, why were his actions unethical and what should he have done differently?* (note: you can think that some aspects of his research were ethical and others not).

Format: The paper should be 10 pages in length, typed and double-spaced with normal margins and font. Papers are to be uploaded to the appropriate dropbox on Moodle by 11:59pm (EST) on Sunday, October 16th. No late papers will be accepted.

Papers are worth 200 points. Papers will be evaluated in terms of the clarity of the writing, the competency with which course materials are presented and evaluated, and how well it is reasoned and supported. Note there is a 20-point (or one letter grade) penalty for failure to adhere to the formatting criteria (e.g. by not stating what your paper is about in your conclusion, by using contractions, by not including sufficient quotations/citations, etc.) and a 20-point (or one letter grade) penalty for failure to adhere to the American Sociological Associations citation conventions (i.e. not following ASA formatting or using a different citation convention).

Writing tips: Below are some tips to help you in writing your paper.

- When you are writing your paper pretend that someone who is not familiar with the specifics of the material will be reading it (in other words, don't take it for granted that the reader knows the materials that you are discussing). Thus, you will need to both present the readings to this person (i.e. describe the situation) as well as explain it (e.g. discuss and support how or why you think a particular situation was ethical or not).
  - o Students have a tendency to simply state their points: e.g. that A is B. While this is an important first step of an answer, what is really necessary is for you to **explain** how, why, and upon what basis you are coming to the conclusions that you are: e.g. A is in fact B **because**.... where everything after because is your explanation (to check if you are explaining yourself, look for because in your answers as what comes after that should be your explanation).
    - The above is another way of saying that you should not take your points as being self-evident. Remember that the reader can only work with the material that you give them. As such, **you need to explain your points in enough detail, and to give your readers enough context, in order for them to understand the points you are making.** So even if something makes sense in your head, the real test is whether you are giving the reader enough material so that he/she can understand it on his/her own. For example, you cannot assume the reader knows what the hustler study is unless you have explained it to him/her.
      - A good way to test the depth of your explanation is have a friend read your paper to see if at the end he/she can explain both what the ethical principles in sociological research are and how/why particular instances in the book are or are not ethical.

## Suggested paper format

- Introduction: your goal with your introduction is to provide the reader with a roadmap for what they will find in your paper. This means you should tell the reader what this paper is about (i.e. what question(s) your paper will answer) and why this question(s) is important (in other words, why should a reader invest their time in reading your paper). Since you are talking about research ethics in the context of *Gang Leader for a Day*, you should note what the ethical issues a researcher should take into consideration in his/her work are and the general context in which to book takes place (here you will just state what these are as you will define/explain them in more detail below) (note: I have found it is easiest to start talking about the general context of *Gang Leader* and then raise the issue of research ethics). After this, you can then talk about what this paper is about. *Your introduction should not be more than 3/4 of a page.*
- Body: what I have found that what works best for the body of this paper is to address the major ethical issues that a researcher confronts in his/her research one at a time. In general, this means that in each section you will introduce a particular ethical issue from Babbie (or another source), define it, and then explain it. After this, you will then provide an example(s) of where this was followed or not in *Gang Leader for a Day*, explaining how/why these examples show that Venkatesh upheld this principle or not, and then provide a short conclusion stating whether Venkatesh's actions were ethical or not. You will have one of these sections for each of the ethical principles that you discuss in your paper.
  - Note: you should talk about 4 – 5 ethical principles in sociological research. Fewer than this is probably not enough. If you try to cover more than this, you are probably not discussing/explaining them in enough detail.
- Example body section
  - One ethical principle that must be considered in sociological research is X. Babbie (1992: 465) defines X as (quote Babbie here). .... This means that...(here you are explaining what this principle means and fleshing out the definition just given). In *Gang Leader for a Day* Venkatesh violated this principle on two occasions when he.....(or supported on one when he...or violated it on one when he but upheld it in another when...whatever it happens to be in the book). The first involves the time when (now describe situation, making sure to give the reader enough context to understand the significance of the points you are making)..... As Venkatesh (2008: 132) describes it “....” (quote the book here and let Venkatesh do some of the work for you). This was a violation of principle X because.... (now explain to the reader what in fact this instance was a violation of this principle). Another time.... (repeat above format for this example). These violations are important because.... Given the above, I do/do not think that Y aspects of Venkatesh's research were ethical because he upheld/violated X on numerous occasions.
    - o Note: I am making sure to define my terms, explain myself (not taking concepts or examples as self-evident), and supporting my answer with quotations and citations.
- Conclusion: here you tell the reader what they have just read (what you showed them) why it was important, and what implications/conclusions can be drawn from this. This should be no more than half a page.

## Formatting Criteria

- Tell your reader what your paper is about in the Introduction. Your paper should say something like: In this paper I am going to .....
- Don't (©) use contractions (e.g. don't, shouldn't, didn't, etc.), instead, use the full words (did not, would not, etc.). The only exception to this is the case of direct quotations – if you are quoting a source that uses a contraction, then it is perfectly acceptable to include it.
- Make frequent and explicit use of the readings. In fact, your paper should be anchored in Babbie and the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics and in terms of ethical considerations in sociological research and Venkatesh in terms of the ethical situations he encountered. Use ample quotations and citations from the readings to reinforce the points that you are making.

**In general, each body paragraph of your paper should have at least 2 – 3 quotations/citations, and more if appropriate/they help strengthen your case.**

- Use quotation/citation styles of the discipline. Quotations and citation in sociology generally have 3 components to them: the author's last name, the year of publication, and the specific page(s) being referenced. They also have the same general format: (author's last name, year: pg #) or (Venkatesh 2008: 57). If you are referencing a point that runs throughout the entire book, you need not include the page numbers (e.g. In *Gang Leader for a Day* Venkatesh (2008) conducts a study of...). However, *if you are referencing a particular situation or instance, you must include the page number*. For example: Venkatesh first met JT when he was trapped in a stairwell by gang members after trying to conduct a survey (Venkatesh 2008: 7).
  - o Note: all quotations must be cited; so too must be references to specific incidents/situations in the book.
  - o **Note, the year of publication for Venkatesh is 2008; the American Sociological Association is 2018; Babbie is 1992; and the National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway is 2006 where the issue of complicity is discussed on page 22.**
- Here are some examples of how to cite materials.

If the author's name is in the text:	If the author's name is not in text,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reference to entire work<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Babbie (1992) outlines ethical considerations one must take into account when conducting sociological research...</li></ul></li><li>• Reference to particular page/specific incident<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o When Babbie (1992: 465) studied...</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reference to entire work<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o ...provides a vivid portrayal of daily life of those living in the Robert Taylor projects (Venkatesh, 2008).</li></ul></li><li>• Reference to particular page/specific incident<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o ...watched as JT beat up C-Note (Venkatesh, 2008: 45).</li></ul></li></ul>

If you have questions about any of the above, or if you would like me to look at your paper before it is due, just let me know. Good luck!