

Sarah J. Halford, PhD

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ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Boston University <i>Post-Doctoral Associate, Center for Media Innovation and Social Impact</i>	July 2026-Present
Harvard University <i>Post-Doctoral Fellow in Sociology, Harvard College Fellows Program</i>	July 2024-June 2026

EDUCATION

PhD in Sociology Brandeis University Dissertation: “Mobilizing Distrust: Understanding Institutional Power in the Anti-5G Movement” Methodology: Digital ethnography: long-form, semi-structured interviews; online and offline participant observation; document analysis.	August 2024
MA in Sociology Brandeis University	May 2020
MA in Individualized Study New York University, Gallatin School of Individualized Study	May 2017
BA in Liberal Arts New School University, Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts	May 2014

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Institutional trust and distrust; cultural sociology; social movements; conspiracy communities; mis/disinformation; online communities; media sociology; digital qualitative methods.

PUBLICATIONS

- Sarah J. Halford.** 2026. “Learning to Distrust: Pedagogical Interactions in Anti-5G Movement Recruitment Processes.” Forthcoming at *Mobilization*.
- Sarah J. Halford.** 2023. “Conspiracy Movements: A Definitional Introduction and Theoretical Exploration of Organized Challenges to Epistemic Authority.” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 64(2): 187-204. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2022.2060147.
- Gowri Vijayakumar, Subadra Panchanadeswaran, Shubha Chacko, **Sarah J. Halford**, & Sanjitha Subramaniam. 2022. “Between Pandemics: Sex Worker, Sexual Minority, and Transgender Activism from HIV to Covid-19.” *Global Public Health*, 17(12):3596-3610. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2022.2124531.
- Stephen Duncombe, George Perlov, Steve Lambert, & **Sarah J. Halford.** 2018. “Assessing the Impact of Artistic Activism.” New York: Center for Artistic Activism. White paper.

<https://c4aa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Assessing-the-Impact-of-Artistic-Activism.pdf>

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Sarah J. Halford. "Narrating Big Wireless: Conspiracy Theories as Critiques of Systemic Power."
(Draft)

TEACHING AND ADVISING EXPERIENCE

Course Head, Harvard University

Sociology 1203: Conspiracy Culture	Fall 2024; Fall 2025
Sociology 98HB: Junior Tutorial: Online Communities	Fall 2024; Fall 2025
Sociology 1204: Propaganda and Persuasion	Spring 2025; Spring 2026

Course Head, Brandeis University

Sociology-155B: Protest, Politics, and Change: Social Movements	Spring 2022; Spring 2024
Sociology-47B: Conspiracy Culture	Spring 2023
Sociology-1A: Order and Change in Society	Summer 2019

Advising and Mentorship

Senior Thesis Advisor , Harvard University	2025-2026
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Writing Consultant , Brandeis University, Writing Center	2018-2022
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Graduate Student Mentor , Senior Thesis Improvement, Brandeis University	2021-2022
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Teaching Assistant, Brandeis University, Department of Sociology

2018-2024

Sociology of Mental Health, Prof. Chris Gillespie (Spring 2024)
 Order and Change in Society, Prof. Sarah Mayorga (Fall 2023)
 Order and Change in Society, Prof. Michael Strand (Spring 2023)
 Self and Society: Who Am I Really?, Caitlin Slodden (Fall 2022)
 Sociology of Celebrity, Prof. Michael Strand (Fall 2021)
 Order and Change in Society, Prof. Michael Strand (Spring 2021)
 Sociology of Body and Health, Prof. Sara Shostak (Fall 2020)
 Sociology of Celebrity, Prof. Michael Strand (Spring 2020)
 Order and Change in Society, Prof. Wendy Cadge (Fall 2019)
 Sociology of Birth and Death, Caitlin Slodden (Spring 2019)
 Sociology of Body and Health, Prof. Sara Shostak (Fall 2018)
 Order and Change in Society, Prof. Carmen Sirianni (Spring 2018)

Teaching Assistant, Tufts University, Department of Sociology

2017-2018

Media and Society, Prof. Michelle Holliday-Stocking (Spring 2018)
 Globalization and Social Change, Prof. Michelle Holliday-Stocking (Fall 2017)

PRESENTATIONS

Invited Talks and Lectures

"Pedagogies of Distrust: Media Effects and Institutional Distrust Formation in the Anti-5G Movement." Department of Sociology and Criminology, Villanova University. December 2025.

“Radical Distrust: Reclaiming Individual Agency through 5G Conspiracy Theories.”

Department of Sociology, University of Oregon. December 2023.

“The Sociology of Conspiracy Theories.” Order and Change in Society, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University. April 2022.

“Building Culture in the Midst of Political Chaos, a Global Pandemic, and Climate Collapse.” Alumni panel, Gallatin School of Individualized Study, New York University. 2020.

Guest Lecturer in Globalization and Social Change, Department of Sociology, Tufts University. 2018.

Panelist, “Master of Arts Students on the Value of Individualized Study.” NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study. 2016.

Facilitator, Theatre of the Oppressed workshop. Peace Boat (INGO). 2014.

Panelist, “Storytelling and Communications.” United Nations Headquarters. 2013.

Conference Papers Presented

“Learning to Distrust: Pedagogical Interactions in Anti-5G Movement Recruitment Processes.” Amsterdam Trust Summit. 2025.

“Field Infiltration or Challenger Activation? Cultural Power and Conspiracy Beliefs in the Anti-5G Movement Coalition.” American Sociological Association. 2023.

“Capitalizing on 5G Conspiracy Theories: Big Wireless and the Corporate Weaponization of Anti-Conspiracy Discourse.” International Conspiracy Theory Symposium, University of Miami. 2023.

“Studying Conspiracy Theorists: Lessons from the Field on the Benefits and Ethics of Ambivalence.” Eastern Sociological Society. 2022

“Propaganda, Disinformation, and Media Effects: A Comparison of Past and Present Scholarship.” American Sociological Association. 2022

“From Trustworthy to Dubious: Conspiracy Movements, Their Discursive Strategies, and the Process of Symbolic Recoding in the Anti-Vaccination Movement.”

Conspiracy Theories Conference, University of Miami: Developing Solutions for Conspiracy Beliefs, Fake News, and Misinformation, University of Miami. 2020. (Cancelled due to Covid-19).

“Mobilizing Birtherism: Applying a Social Movements Framework to the Analysis of Conspiracy Theories.” Eastern Sociological Society. 2019.

“Artistic Activism: The Practitioner’s Guide to Art for Change.” Brandeis University, ‘deis IMPACT Festival. 2019.

RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Qualitative Researcher, Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois **2022-2023**

- Project: Evaluating Children's Mental Health Systems of Care (SOC) for the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation
- Conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups with program directors, mental healthcare providers, and patient's parents from four sites.
- Collaborated with the qualitative research team to code and analyze interview and focus group data using a priori codes in Atlas.ti.
- Evaluated the successes and issues experienced by partners during the SOC implementation process.
- Wrote an evaluation report in collaboration with the qualitative research team.

Research Assistant, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University **2021-2022**

- Project: "Between Pandemics: Sex Worker, Sexual Minority, and Transgender Activism From HIV to Covid-19" (published in *Global Public Health*)
- Composed a literature review of scholarship on social movement abeyance and mutual aid.
- Trained an undergraduate student in how to research and compose literature reviews.

Research Assistant, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University **2020-2021**

- Project: Cascading: Gender, Race, and Downward Mobilities, Dr. Karen Hansen (2021), Dr. Debi Osnowitz (2020-2021).
- Created literature reviews for projects related to gender, work, and downward mobility.

Graduate Representative Covid-19 Task Force, Brandeis University **Summer 2020**

- Conducted focus groups and one-on-one interviews with students and faculty across Brandeis to gather feedback on necessary improvements to hybrid teaching.
- Presented feedback to administrators, in which I shared notable issues and successes that students and faculty experienced in hybrid learning environments.

Qualitative Research Fellow, Center for Artistic Activism, New York University **2016-2019**

- Project: *Efficacy Project* – an exploration of the role of affect in the creation of effect through art for social change projects.
- Conducted approximately 18 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with artistic activists to investigate their understanding of the role of affect in their work.
- Collected artistic activists' practical assessments of successes and failures in their work.

Lead Interviewer, British Research Council **Summer 2017**

- Project: Spotlight on Arts and Social Practice Fellows
- Conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three featured artistic activists from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

Research Fellow, Urban Democracy Lab, New York University **2016**

- Project: Gallatin Global Fellowship in Urban Practice
- Traveled to Berlin, Germany to conduct seven (7) semi-structured interviews with artistic activists to explore the development of art for social change projects in urban centers.

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND GRANTS

- 2023 **Stephen Berkowitz Award for Dissertation Research**, Brandeis University, Department of Sociology
- 2022 **Dissertation Research Award**, Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
- 2022 **Stephen Berkowitz Award for Dissertation Research**, Brandeis University, Department of Sociology
- 2022 **Summer Dissertation Writing Grant**, Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
- 2022 **Career Development Fellowship Program**, Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
- 2020 **Peter Conrad Award for Graduate Student Research**, Brandeis University, Department of Sociology
- 2020 **Exceptional Departmental Service Award, Remote Learning Transition**, Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
- 2020 **ConnectedPhD Grant**, Brandeis University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences ICPSR Summer Program for Quantitative Methods of Social Research
- 2017 **Teaching and Research Fellow**, Brandeis University, Department of Sociology (2017-2022).
- 2017 **Gallatin Graduate Scholarship**, Gallatin School for Individualized Study New York University
- 2014 **Eugene Lang Student Union Special Projects Award**, New School University
- 2012 **Undergraduate Merit Scholarship**, Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts New School University

ADDITIONAL TRAINING IN RESEARCH AND TEACHING

- 2020 **Mixed-Methods Workshop**, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), Summer Program
- 2019 **Foundations of Teaching and Designing Online Courses** Brandeis University, Rabb School of Continuing Studies
- 2018 **Digital Pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning Certification**, Brandeis University

SERVICE

Professional
 Peer reviewer, *Social Movement Studies*

Peer reviewer, *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*

Peer reviewer, *The Sociological Quarterly*

University

2022 **Graduate Representative,** PhD program review, Brandeis University

2020 **Covid-19 Task Force,** Improvements to Hybrid Teaching, Brandeis University

Department

2022 **Graduate Representative, Faculty Search Committee,** Brandeis University, Department of Sociology

2020 **Graduate Representative,** Brandeis University, Department of Sociology

2018 **Graduate Committee Representative,** Brandeis University, Department of Sociology