

**Department of Sociology  
Harvard University**

**Qualitative Social Analysis  
Soc 209**

**Fall Term, 2004**

[Syllabus in MS Word Format](#)

[Syllabus in PDF Format](#)

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Meeting time: Wednesdays, 1-3.

This course is required for and limited to G-1 students in Sociology and Sociology/Social Policy programs, and the Sociology tracks of the Organizational Behavior and the African and African American Studies doctoral programs. It is designed to provide students with an understanding of the methodological approaches we commonly think of as qualitative, with special emphases on interview-based research, ethnography, and comparative research.

Sociology 209 is organized with the following four objectives in mind: (1) To give you basic training in qualitative research. This requires exposing you to issues of conceptualization, theory, research design, and strategies for framing questions, although these are not the prime focus of the course. (2) To consider the various domains or topical areas in sociology where qualitative work has made, and continues to make, major contributions. (3) To examine the ethical responsibilities of qualitative researchers, who have closer contact with “subjects” and “informants” than survey researchers typically do. (4) To think collectively and critically about the forms of writing (articles, dissertations, books, etc.) and professional presentations that sociologists must master to present qualitative work to their peers and the public.

The course will cover the basic techniques for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing qualitative data. Throughout the semester, the course will operate on two interrelated dimensions, one focused on the theoretical approaches to various types of qualitative research, the other focused on the practical techniques of data collection, such

as identifying key informants, selecting respondents, collecting field notes, analyzing data, writing, and presenting findings.

Theoretically, we will consider questions such as the following: What is “qualitative” research? What is it best suited for? By what criteria does it meet or fail to meet the standards of scientific evidence? What are the roles of induction and deduction in qualitative research? Can qualitative research verify hypotheses, or only generate them? Can qualitative research explain social phenomena, or only interpret them? Do ethnographies have a small-N problem? In what ways is ethnographic research “grounded”? Is true replicability possible in interview-based research?

Practically, we will consider questions such as the following: How do you go about starting a project? How do you connect research design and data collection? How should one structure an interview schedule? How many interviews are enough? How does one ensure reliability? How does one write good fieldnotes? What is coding? How does one determine the best sampling strategy? How does one write an ethnographic paper? How does one give a presentation based on interview data?

### **Required books (ordered for purchase and on reserve):**

- Robert R. Alford, 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Howard S. Becker, 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists*. University of Chicago Press.
- Howard S. Becker, 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. University of Chicago Press.
- R. M. Emerson, ed., 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Shultz, 1996. *Journeys Through Ethnography. Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Charles C. Ragin, 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robert S. Weiss, 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.
- Robert K. Yin, 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

A reading packet can also be purchased from [Harvard Printing and Publication Services](#) (HPPS). Several readings are available on the web. Other course readings are available on reserve in the Social Sciences Library on the first floor of William James Hall.

### **Requirements:**

1) **Final Research Report:** The main requirement is to produce a final research report based on research conducted in the Boston/Cambridge area during the course of the semester. The objective of this assignment is two-fold: 1) it will expose each of you to

some aspect of the metropolitan area, and 2) your site will enable you to develop some qualitative research skills.

You have the choice of developing your project either individually or in a duo. Should you choose the latter, it is imperative that the research site provide ample space for you both to develop unique paper projects.

**The final report should include**

- 1) **A problem statement, supported by some references to the research literature.**
- 2) **A description of the research site, including people and activities involved.**
- 3) **A description of your method for gaining access to the site and establishing field relationships. Observer effects on the data. Ethical problems encountered.**
- 4) **A description of your data-gathering activities.**
- 5) **A description of your data-analysis procedures.**
- 6) **A statement of your findings. These will be exploratory and tentative, but should be grounded in the data you will have collected. How do the findings relate to your original problem statement? Do they confirm, refute, or suggest a reformulation of the research problem? What do these early findings suggest about what you would need to do to continue this research?**

The final paper should be submitted in two copies by January 15. It should not exceed 30 pages in length (double-spaced). Write an analysis of your qualitative data in article form, suitable for submission to the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *Poetics*, or the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

**Your project includes nine assignments that lead up to the final course paper.** We will discuss each at length in class. You will be divided into response-pairs and asked to comment on each other's submission prior to class.

**2) Reading Memos and Comments:** Every **second week**, students will be expected to post a brief weekly reading memo, maximum 300 words (about 1 double-spaced page). These should be posted in the "Weekly Memos" folder on the [course web site](#) every Tuesday by 5pm at the latest. The web site address is:

<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~soc209/>

Reading memos are informal comments on the key methodological questions you see in the readings, issues you thought worthy of further discussion, and analytic problems you think are important in the readings. The purpose of these memos is to insure that students keep up with our common reading while engaging in their individual/group projects. The students who are not writing memos in a given week are asked to post informed responses on the reading memos by noon on the day of the seminar. This will prepare you for the class discussion. Each student is expected to write six reading memos and to post six comments by the end of the semester.

Attendance in this class is mandatory, and participation is important. Only dire illness should keep you away. If you must miss a class, you must notify the teaching fellow and explain.

**The final paper is worth 30 percent of the final grade.**  
**The eight assignments are worth a total of 45 percent of the final grade.**  
**The weekly memos and class participation are worth 25 percent of the final grade.**

## **COURSE OUTLINE: WEEKLY SESSIONS**

### **Week 1 (September 22): Qualitative Research Design**

Reading to be completed prior to our first meeting:

Robert R. Alford, 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry*. New York: Oxford UP. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.

#### **Optional reading:**

Andrew Abbott, 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

National Science Foundation, Sociology Program. 2004. *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research*. Washington, D.C. National Science Foundation (link will be available soon).

**Assignment 1: Post a 2-3-page autobiography. If possible, use sociological concepts you are familiar with to describe your identity, community of origin, and social trajectory (due by Friday the 24<sup>th</sup>, 5pm). You must be logged to the website with your HUID in order to access the Assignments folder. Read the descriptions of your classmates before our second meeting.**

### **Week 2 (September 29): Theory and Qualitative Research: What is Theoretical Progress?**

Howard Becker, 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

Howard Becker, 1996. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research." Pp. 53-72 in *Ethnography and Human Development. Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*, ed. Richard Jessor, Anne Colby, and Richard A. Schweder. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[Jeff Goodwin and Ruth Horowitz, 2002. "Introduction: The Methodological Strengths and Dilemmas of Qualitative Sociology." \*Qualitative Sociology\* 25 \(1\): 33-47.-](#)

Susan Silbey, 2003. "Designing Qualitative Research Projects." Memo prepared for the Workshop on the Evaluation of Qualitative Research, National Science Foundation, July.

**Assignment 2:** The class will be divided in half and students will be paired. Each pair will choose a qualitative study they are familiar with (for the neophytes, a [list of books](#) can be found on the [Resources](#) folder of the course website). In 2 pages, one member of the pair will identify the theoretical argument of the book, describe some of the evidence used to support it, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the study. Post on the website by 5pm on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The other member will post a response on the course website by noon on the 29<sup>th</sup>. This will serve as background for class discussion on the strengths of qualitative research, the role of theory, and what is progress.

### **Week 3 (October 6): Choosing a Research Site and Gaining Entry**

Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., 2000. *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-18 and 121-138.

Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Shultz, 1996. *Journeys Through Ethnography. Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. **Skim only.**

**Assignment 3:** This will be the first step toward your major research project. Go out, explore the world, and come back with some possibilities for the research topic, setting, scene, locale, etc. Be prepared to present your ideas to the class for discussion and possible modification. You will be asked to form response-pairs for the Assignment 4, 5, 7 and 8 following the presentation of your ideas.

### **Week 4 (October 13): Approaches to Ethnography and Fieldwork (Ideally this class will be held from 2-4)**

Robert M. Emerson, 2001. "Introduction: The Development of Ethnographic Field Research." Pp. 1-54 in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, ed. R. M. Emerson. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

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Kathy Charmaz, 2001 (1995). "Grounded Theory." Pp. 335-352 in *Contemporary Field Research*.

Mary Jo Deegan, 2001. "The Chicago School of Ethnography." Pp. 11-25 in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Michael Buroway et al., 1991. *Ethnography Unbound*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. ix-28 and 271-290.

Clifford Geertz, 2001 (1973). "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pp. 55-75 in *Contemporary Field Research*.

David A. Snow, Calvin Morill, and Leon Anderson, 2003. "Elaborating Analytic Ethnography." *Ethnography* 4 (2): 181-200. (Click on the Journal title to access the website. You may also link directly to the pdf file through [Citation Linker](#).)

Ulf Hannerz, 2003. "Being There... and There... and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography." *Ethnography* 4 (2): 201-216. (Click on the Journal title to access the website. You may also link directly to the pdf file through [Citation Linker](#))

Optional:

Listen to an [interview with Dr. Barney Glaser](#) (You will need the Real Audio Player to see this interview)

**The class will be divided in several groups, and each will be in charge of introducing one of these six approaches to ethnography and of assessing its strengths and weaknesses.**

**Assignment 4: Prepare a research blueprint (2-4 pages maximum) including its conceptual focus, empirical data to be gathered, and a draft of interview questions to be used in the field. For those conducting joint projects, the division of intellectual topics between the members of the duo should be spelled out. Post by 5pm on October 12. Post comment to your response-pair by noon on the 13<sup>th</sup>.**

## **Week 5 (October 20): Sampling, Interviewing, and Developing Interview Instruments**

Robert S. Weiss, 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Pp. vii-150.

Patrick Biernacki and Dan Waldorf, 1981. "Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques in Chain Referral." *Sociological Methods and Research* 10 (2): 141-163.

John K. Watters and Patrick Biernacki, 1989. "Targeted Sampling: Options for the Study of Hidden Populations." *Social Problems* 36 (4): 416-430.

Howard Becker, 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chapter 3.

**Guest: Mary Waters, Department of Sociology, Harvard University.**

**Assignment 5: Develop your interview guide, based on the feedback you will have received. The questions should be open-ended and intended to elicit narrative accounts pertinent to your research concerns. Post your interview guide by October 18, 5pm. Comment to your response-pair by the 19<sup>th</sup>, noon.**

**Sample interview guides are available on the web.**

## **Week 6 (October 27): The Ethics of Qualitative Research**

Christopher Shea, 2000. "Don't Talk to the Humans." *Lingua Franca* 10 (6): 27-34.

John Van Maanen, 2001 (1983). "The Moral Fix: On the Ethics of Field Work." Pp. 269-287 in *Contemporary Field Research*.

Katherine S. Newman, 2002. "Qualitative Research on the Frontlines of Controversy." [\*Sociological Methods and Research\*](#) 31 (2): 123-130. (Click on the Journal title to access the website. You may also link directly to the pdf file through [Citation Linker](#))

Read the [Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association](#)  
Obtain Human Subject Approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. [Fill out and submit a Questionnaire A.](#)

Become certified by the National Institute of Health to conduct research on Human Subjects. This requires completing the [online training course](#), which takes less than 60 minutes. Click on:

Laura Stark, Raymond de Vries, & Jan Jaeger, (2004) [When IRB Members Become Human Subjects: Lessons from Asking to Watch IRB's Work](#) (A draft of this unpublished manuscript is available in the Resources Folder of the website, under [Additional Readings](#))

**Guest: Jane Calhoun, Institutional Review Board office.**

**Assignment 6: Recruit two people you don't know for an open-ended interview, preferably someone associated with the organization or setting that will be the subject of your final report. If possible, use a tape-recorder and keep a field note diary.**

**Examples of interview schedules are available on the course website.**

## **Week 7 (November 3): Analyzing Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis and Coding**

**There are overlaps between these various iterations of the ABCs of interview data analysis, but it is useful to read them together.**

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 142-166.

Robert Weiss, 1994. *Learning from Strangers*. Pp. 151-182.

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, 1998. "Open Coding." Pp. 61-74 in *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapter 3 and Chapter 7A. Skim chapters 4 and 5.

**Guest: Wendy Luttrell, Graduate School of Education, Harvard.**

**November 4, time TBD: Workshop on the use of ATLAS.ti for coding, sorting, and analyzing qualitative data, Cheri Minton, Department of Sociology, Harvard University.**

**Assignment 7: Transcribe one interview. Develop a coding key. Spell out how the key relates to the key concepts and hypotheses of the study. Post by the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5pm. Comment on your response pair by the 3<sup>rd</sup>, noon.**

**Examples of coding keys and coding are posted on the [course website](#).**

## **Week 8 (November 10): Validity, Reliability, and the Insider/Outsider Problem**

Jack Katz, 1983. "A Theory of Qualitative Methodology: The Social System in Analytical Fieldwork." Pp. 127-148 in *Contemporary Field Research*.

Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapter 7B.

Wendy D. Roth and Jal D. Mehta, 2002. "The Rashomon Effect. Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events." *Sociological Methods and Research* 31 (2): 131-173. (You need to go through the journal website to get to this article. Citation Linker does not provide a direct link to the pdf)

Alford A. Young, Jr., 2004. "Experiences in Ethnographic Interviewing About Race." Pp. 187-202 in *Researching Race and Racism*, ed. Martin Blumer and John Solomos. New York: Routledge.

Wendy Luttrell, 2000. "[Good Enough Methods for Ethnographic Research](#)." *Harvard Educational Review*. 70 (4): 499-523. (You will be asked for a Username [32890] and a password [harvard] to access this article)

**Guest: Annette Lareau, Department of Sociology, Temple University.**

**Assignment 8: Code your interviews using your revised coding key.**

## **Week 9 (November 17): The Case Study and the Comparative Method**



Robert Yin, 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapters 1, 2, 4.

John Stuart Mill, 1973. "Of the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry." Pp. 388-406 in *A System of Logic*. London: Routledge.

John Walton, 1973. "Standardized Case Comparison: Observations on Method in Comparative Sociology," Pp. 173-188 in *Comparative Social Research, Methodological Problems and Strategies*. New York: Wiley.

Charles Ragin, 1987. *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 1-102.

**Guest: Diane Vaughan, Department of Sociology, Boston College.**

**Assignment 9: Prepare a tentative outline of your paper based on your observations, field notes, and interviews. Narrow your theoretical focus; identify the data you will need to make your argument. Discuss how you will organize and analyze your data. Post by November 15<sup>th</sup>, 5pm. Comment to your response-pair by the 17<sup>th</sup>, noon.**

## **Week 10 (November 24): Historical Research**

Victoria Bonnell, 1980. "[The Use of Theory, Concepts, and Comparison in Historical Sociology](#)." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (2): 155-173.

Theda Skocpol, 1984. "Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology." Pp. 356-391 in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stanley Lieberson, 2000. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." Pp. 105-118 in Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Theda Skocpol, 2003. "Doubly Engaged Social Science: The Promise of Comparative Historical Analysis." Pp. 407-429 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. New York: Cambridge University Press.

James Mahoney, 2004. "[Comparative-Historical Methodology](#)." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 81-101.

**Guest: Orlando Patterson, Department of Sociology, Harvard University.**

## **Week 11 (December 1): Writing**

Howard Becker, 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kai Erikson, 1989. "On Sociological Prose." *Yale Review* 78 (1): 525-538.

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 169-208.

## **Weeks 12-13 (December 8 and 15): Overview and Presentation of Student Projects**

Charles C. Ragin, Joane Nagel, and Patricia White, 2004. "Report of the Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research." Washington, DC: National Science Foundation (read by the 8<sup>th</sup>).

### **Additional resources:**

Jennifer Platt, 1996. *A History of Sociological Research Methods in America, 1920-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

On the logic of research:

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, 1995. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

On various ways of writing ethnography:

John Van Mannen, 1988. *Tales of the Field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

On other data collection techniques:

Richard Krueger, 1988. *Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

On collecting and analyzing archival data:

Glen Elder, Elizabeth K. Pavalko, and Elizabeth H. Cliff, 1993. *Working with Archival Data: Studying Lives*. Newbury Park: Sage.

See also [links in course website](#)