SCJ 648 – Qualitative Research Methods
Fall 2026

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Class Schedule: CLJ 567, 1:00-3:40pm, Wednesdays
Office Hours: 4-5pm Wednesdays or by appointment

Course Objectives: Despite criminology's deep qualitative roots, the field is now one in which quantitative methods are predominant, as are the epistemologies that hold these methods in high esteem. Despite the routine characterization in criminology of qualitative works as "exploratory," "descriptive," or even "anecdotal," such works have and continue to offer significant theoretical insights on crime and justice. To understand these insights requires an understanding of qualitative ways of thinking and knowing, and appropriate standards for assessing methodological and theoretical rigor. *Qualitative Research Methods* investigates the philosophical underpinnings and goals of qualitative research, in the social sciences generally and in criminology/criminal justice specifically. The course is *not* about the practice of qualitative research, but instead designed to provide foundational knowledge from which you can build in applied courses that more deeply engage with the 'nuts and bolts' of study design, data collection, data analysis, and presentation. Issues under consideration will include:

- The place of qualitative research in criminology/criminal justice
- The processes by which qualitative researchers move between method, theory building, theoretical refinement and expansion
- Strategies for ensuring methodological rigor in qualitative research
- The role of positionality, including insider and outsider statuses, in qualitative research and theorizing
- Considerations of the future of qualitative criminological research, including its relationship to quantitative criminological knowledge-building

Course Learning Goals: This course is designed to prepare you, upon completion, to:

1. Understand the goals and philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, and how such methodologies contribute to knowledge-building in criminology and criminal justice.
2. Develop critical thinking skills about criminological research through an in-depth exploration of (1) how qualitative scholars orient to the research enterprise, their epistemological commitments and approaches to theory, and key debates among qualitative scholars; and (2) how these are positioned and understood in the field.
3. Understand the ways in which qualitative and quantitative research in criminology and criminal justice might better work in tandem for knowledge-building.
4. Read, appraise and evaluate qualitative research.

Doctoral (PhD) Program Goals:

1. Students will demonstrate foundational knowledge of the theories, policies, and research methodologies of criminology and criminal justice
2. Students will exhibit professional socialization required for a career in criminology and criminal justice

Required Readings:

1. Selections from Jody Miller and Wilson Palacios, eds., *Qualitative Research in Criminology (QRC)*
2. Additional articles and chapters posted on Canvas (see Course Packet, pp. 10-11)
3. Mario Small and Jessica Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (University of California Press)
4. Rahim Kurwa, *Indefensible Spaces: Policing and the Struggle for Housing* (University of California Press)
5. Nora Gross, *Brothers in Grief: The Hidden Toll of Gun Violence on Black Boys and Their Schools* (University of Chicago Press)
6. Hadar Aviram and Chad Goerzen, *Fester: Carceral Permeability and California's COVID-19 Correctional Disaster* (University of California Press)

Course Requirements: The final grade will be assessed based upon your performance on the following assignments:

DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP – 10%
Twice during the semester, you will lead class discussion of the readings; first with one or more additional student, then individually. For this role, you should be prepared to ***briefly*** summarize the main arguments of the readings, consider the ways they dialogue with or challenge one another, and have questions prepared to facilitate and guide class discussion. For substantive readings, be sure to focus careful attention on relevant methodological issues/assessment. Please submit the notes/materials you have prepared for discussion leadership *prior to* the start of class.

READING REACTION ESSAYS – 40%
Each week, you are expected to submit an approximately 3 page reaction essay *prior to* class. The reaction essays are designed as an opportunity for you to reflect on the readings, discuss ideas, and/or raise questions, by thinking through the philosophical, methodological, and/or theoretical issues raised by the readings. Please do so from an *analytic* perspective, not simply based on personal beliefs. This could include, for example, reflecting on how the week's reading(s) engage, dialogue or debate with one another; how they dialogue with previous course readings/materials, and/or how they relate to other topics or debates relevant to the course. *You are NOT required to write a reading reaction essay on the dates you are responsible for leading class discussion.*

CODING EXERCISE – 20%
While our primary focus in this seminar is to understand the foundations of qualitative research, an introduction to the analytic 'nuts and bolts' of such work is one way to illustrate these foundations in practice. For this exercise, you will be provided with a single qualitative interview, and will complete preliminary coding of the interview utilizing three distinct coding strategies (open, domain, and narrative). In addition to submitting all your produced coding materials (e.g., marked up transcripts, other work products), you will (1) summarize your preliminary findings, (2) compare and contrast the insights gleaned from the three strategies, and (3) offer your suggestions for how the study might

be further developed to more deeply investigate the themes you have preliminarily identified as important and meaningful, considering, for example, sampling and further analysis.

CODING EXERCISE EXCHANGE – 10%
The goal of the coding exercise exchange is (1) for each of you to have the opportunity to receive detailed feedback from a colleague about your preliminary coding, and (2) to evaluate your own coding in relation to a colleague's. Coding involves active processes of interpretation and sense-making, which means data analyses are inseparable from study findings – each of us may see things others missed and see things through different interpretative lenses. There are thus two parts to this assignment. Please provide to me and the colleague whose coding exercise you review: (1) feedback on the thoroughness and insights of their coding, and (2) assesses and compares your own coding with that of your colleague, considering the following: What did both of you see? What did one/the other miss? Did you see anything in different ways/with a different interpretive lens? To what consequence?

ASSESSMENT: GENERATING CROSS-METHOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS – 20%
This assignment requires you to select two articles – one qualitative and one quantitative – each of which investigates a question or topic related to crime or criminal justice. Drawing specifically (though not exclusively) from the position presented in Wright et al. (in *QRC*), provide, for each article, a careful assessment of the main findings and contribution to knowledge that scholars could further build from in future research. Then, for the quantitative article, identify the specific concepts and ideas that might be better understood and further refined through additional qualitative investigation, explaining why and how this might be accomplished. For the qualitative article, identify the specific concepts and theoretical elaborations that merit testing using quantitative methods, again explaining why and how this might be accomplished. In selecting articles, I suggest relying on pieces that appear in what are considered leading journals in the field (for example, *Criminology, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, British Journal of Criminology, Punishment & Society, Theoretical Criminology, Justice Quarterly*), criminological articles in leading sociology journals (for example, *ASR, AJS, Social Problems, Social Forces*) or otherwise are considered seminal works. Please get my approval if you use article(s) that are not listed above. Be sure to provide full citations for each article.

Class Participation
The Reading Reaction Essays and Discussion Leadership assignments are designed to ensure that you actively participate in the seminar discussion and come to class ready to engage. This is a basic expectation for a graduate course. Two unexcused absences will result in the loss of a letter grade; each additional unexcused absence will result in a half letter grade reduction. All members of this class are required to conduct themselves in an appropriate and professional manner.

Academic Conduct Policies

General Conduct
You have a right to learn in an environment that is free from disruptions or offensive comments. I have the right to set appropriate standards of conduct that foster respectful and dignified treatment of faculty, students, and staff. As such, please be mindful of the general code of conduct that would be appropriate in any classroom setting. It is important to engage in a professional and respectful manner with me and your peers at all times. Being respectful of the thoughts, ideas, and

contributions of others—including those you disagree with—will help foster participation in a non-threatening and comfortable learning environment.

Academic Freedom
Faculty and students alike are free to express their viewpoints at appropriate times in class, including perspectives that differ from most in the Rutgers University community. Students may be exposed to views they find challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing. But, since Rutgers is a public institution, First Amendment speech protections apply. Legally, feelings of discomfort are not sufficient to restrict speech. Pedagogically, exposing people to different ideas—even challenging their most deeply held beliefs—is a feature, not a flaw, of academic life. Free inquiry is essential to a robust learning environment. Students and professors are at our best–and best able to contribute to society–when we are exposed to a wide range of challenging ideas.

Academic Integrity
As a member of the Rutgers University community, you are not to engage in any academic dishonesty. You are responsible for adhering to basic academic standards of honesty and integrity as outlined in the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students: http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity.

Your academic work should be the result of your own individual effort, you should not allow other students to use your work, and you are required to recognize and reference any material that is not your own. Plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and cheating are serious violations. Ensure that you cite references appropriately in your written work. Violations of the university's policy will result in appropriate action.

AI Policy
Given the nature of our course assignments, I expect that all submitted work will be produced by you. You must not seek the assistance of Generative AI Tools like Chat GPT. Use of a Generative AI Tool to complete an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty.

PLEASE NOTE: I will make every attempt to stick to the syllabus as written, but scheduling conflicts may come up that require us to make minor adjustments.

Course Schedule & Assigned Readings

9/2 Introduction and Course Overview

9/9 Qualitative Research: A History and Overview

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]

READINGS: Hammersley, "Defining Qualitative Research"
Adler & Adler, "The History and Epistemology of Fieldwork Roles"
Charmaz, "An Invitation to Grounded Theory"
Miller & Palacios, "Introduction: The Value of Qualitative Research for Advancing Criminological Theory" (*QRC*)
Agar, "Kites from Drug Research Rehab" (*QRC*)
Hobbs, "Criminal Practice: Fieldwork and Improvisation in Difficult Circumstances" (*QRC*)

9/16 Ontology, Epistemology and Knowledge Production

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]

READINGS: Hammersley, "Methodological Philosophies" and "Divergent Analytic Styles"
Lather, "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research"
Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research"
Groves & Lynch, "Reconciling Structural and Subjective Approaches to the Study of Crime"
Wright et al., "Where are We? Why Are We Here? Where are We Going? How Do We Get There?" (*QRC*)

9/23 Research Ethics in Qualitative Research

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]

READINGS: Murphy & Dingwall, "The Ethics of Ethnography"
Fine, "Ten Lies of Ethnography"
Flaherty, "The Challenges of Reciprocity"
Ellis, "What Do We Mean By a 'Hard-to-Reach' Population?"
Campbell et al., "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Research Ethics and Open Science"
Charmaz & Belgrave, "Thinking about Data with Grounded Theory"

9/30 Positionality and Reflexivity

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]

READINGS: Twine, "Racial Ideologies and Racial Methodologies"
Bucerius, "Being Trusted with 'Inside Knowledge': Ethnographic Research with Male Muslim Drug Dealers" (*QRC*)
Contreras, "Recalling to Life: Understanding Stickup Kids through Insider Qualitative Research" (*QRC*)
Panfil, "Queer Anomalies? Overcoming Assumptions in Criminological Research with Gay Men" (*QRC*)
Chevalier, "Close Encounters with a Third Leg"
Lichterman, "Interpretive Reflexivity in Ethnography"

10/7 Coding Qualitative Data: A Brief Introduction

READINGS: Miles, et al., "Fundamentals of Qualitative Data Analysis"
Charmaz, "The Logic of Grounded Theory Coding Practices and Initial Coding"
Spradley, "Analyzing Ethnographic Interviews" and "Making a Domain Analysis"
Presser & Sandberg, "Research Strategies for Narrative Criminology" (*QRC*)
Deterding & Waters, "Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews"

10/14 NO CLASS – *USE THIS WEEK TO COMPLETE CODING EXERCISE*

10/21 Interviews and Narratives: Debates and Insights

DUE: CODING EXERCISE
DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READINGS: Jerolmack & Khan, "Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy"
Maruna & Liem, "Where is This Story Going? A Critical Analysis of the Emerging Field of Narrative Criminology"
Polletta et al., "The Sociology of Storytelling"
Miller, "Grounding the Analysis of Gender and Crime"
Sandberg, "What Can Lies Tell Us About Life?"

10/28 Approaches to Theory in Qualitative Research

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READINGS: Timonen et al., "Challenges When Using Grounded Theory"
Timmermans & Tavory, "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research"
Snow & Morrill, "Elaborating Analytic Ethnography"
Zhang & Chin, "Swim Against the Tide: Using Qualitative Data to Build a Theory on Chinese Human Smuggling" (*QRC*)
Haney, "Observing Prisons, Conceptualizing Punishment" (*QRC*)
Liebling, "Appreciative Inquiry, Generative Theory, and the 'Failed State' Prison" (*QRC*)
Lynch, "Penal Artifacts: Mining Documents to Advance Punishment and Society Theory" (*QRC*)

11/4 Assessing Qualitative Research

DUE: CODING EXERCISE EXCHANGE
DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READINGS: Small & Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy*

11/11 Reading Ethnography I

DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READING: Kurwa, *Indefensible Spaces*

11/18 NO CLASS – *AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY ANNUAL MEETINGS*

11/25 – NO CLASS – *THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY*

12/2 Reading Ethnography II
DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READING: Gross, *Brothers in Grief*

12/9 Reading Ethnography III
DISCUSSION LEADERS: [student names]
READING: Aviram and Goerzen, *Fester*

12/16 **DUE: CROSS-METHOD ASSESSMENT**

Accommodation and Support

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals Experiencing Disability: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the RU-N ODS website (ods.newark.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Short-term Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University's Title IX Policy and Grievance Procedures located at https://uec.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/60-1-33-current-1.pdf

For support related to Interpersonal Violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. The office does **not** have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence; any student can receive services, information and support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If students are not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out *Sanvello* for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support. Visit https://my.rutgers.edu/, click on Sanvello: Wellness @ RUN, and log in with your netid to begin your journey toward wellness.

For Emergencies: Call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

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Course Packet

Adler, P. and P. Adler. 1987. Selected reading from *Membership Roles in Field Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Becker, H.S. 1996. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research" Pp. 53-71 in *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry,* edited by R. Jessor, A. Colby, and R.A. Shweder. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, R., R. Goodman-Williams, and M. Javorka. 2019. "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Research Ethics and Open Science." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence.* 34: 4765-4793.

Charmaz, K. 2014. Selected readings from *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K. and L.L. Belgrave. 2019. "Thinking about Data with Grounded Theory." *Qualitative Inquiry.* 25: 743-753.

Chevalier, D. 2025. "Close Encounters with a Third Leg: Including Fieldwork Experiences of Sexual Harassment as Research Data." *Ethnography.* Online first.

Deterding, N.M. and M.C. Waters. 2018. "Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach." *Sociological Methods & Research.* 50: 708-739.

Ellis, R. 2023. "What Do We Mean By a 'Hard-to-Reach Population? Legitimacy versus Precarity as Barriers to Access." *Sociological Methods & Research.* 52: 1556-1586.

Fine, G.A. 1993. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography.* 22: 267-294.

Flaherty, C. 2025. "The Challenges of Reciprocity: Access, Uncertainty, and Politics." *Ethnography.* Online first.

Groves, W.B. and M.J. Lynch. 1990. "Reconciling Structural and Subjective Approaches to the Study of Crime." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency.* 27: 348-375.

Hammersley, M. 2013. Selected readings from *What is Qualitative Research?* London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.

Jerolmack, C. and S. Khan. 2014. "Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research.* 43: 178-209.

Lather, P. 1986. "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place." *Interchange.* 17: 63-84.

Lichterman, P. 2017. "Interpretive Reflexivity in Ethnography." *Ethnography.* 18: 35-45.

Maruna, S. and M. Liem. 2021. "Where is This Story Going? A Critical Analysis of the Emerging Field of Narrative Criminology." *Annual Review of Criminology.* 4: 125-46.

Miles, M.B., A.M. Huberman and J. Saldaña. 2019. "Fundamentals of Qualitative Data Analysis." Pp. 61-99 in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook,* 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Miller, J. 2011. "Grounding the Analysis of Gender and Crime: Accomplishing and Interpreting Qualitative Interview Research." Pp. 49-62 in *The Sage Handbook of Criminological Research Methods,* edited by David Gadd, Susanne Karstedt, and Steven F. Messner. London: Sage Publications.

Murphy, E. and R. Dingwall. 2001. "The Ethics of Ethnography." Pp. 339-351 in *Handbook of Ethnography,* edited by P. Atkinson, et al. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Polletta, F., P.C.B. Chen, B. Gharrity Gardner, and A. Motes. 2011. "The Sociology of Storytelling." *Annual Review of Sociology.* 37:109–30

Sandberg, S. 2010. "What Can 'Lies' Tell Us About Life? Notes Towards a Framework of Narrative Criminology." *Journal of Criminal Justice Education.* 21: 447-465.

Snow, D.A. and C. Morrill. 2003. "Elaborating Analytic Ethnography: Linking Fieldwork and Theory." *Ethnography.* 4: 181-200.

Spradley, J.P. 1979. Selected readings from *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Timmermans, S. and I. Tavory. 2012. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory.* 30: 167-186.

Timonen, V., G. Foley, and C. Conlon. 2018. "Challenges When Using Grounded Theory: A Pragmatic Introduction to Doing GT Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* 17: 1-10.

Twine, F.W. 2000. "Racial Ideologies and Racial Methodologies." Pp. 1-34 in *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies,* edited by F.W. Twine and J.W. Warren. New York: NYU Press.