Chapter 7
Qualitative Research: Interpreting Observations and Interviews

What is Qualitative Research?

Imagine that you are at a party on a Saturday night. There are a lot of people, some you know, others you don’t, weaving through the crowds as music blasts in the background. At the party, you hear complaints that the boys and the girls at the parties are not really interacting that much. The boys are clustered around activities like Guitar Hero, darts, and pool while the girls are in groups talking together. You wonder if this is true, so you look around to see if this is actually the case. You also ask more of your friends about it to see if they have noticed the same thing and why they think this happens. Most agree that they usually expect this to happen at parties. Some give reasons for this difference between how boys and girls act at parties such as guys are more competitive, girls just like to gossip, or the guys act like jerks when they play so the girls don’t like playing with them. After hearing several of these explanations from your friends, you can’t help observing the girls’ and boys’ behavior more closely to see if these reasons are true. Do girls just gossip when they talk to each other or is this an erroneous stereotype most of the time? Are guys really more competitive than girls? Are guys really that rude to the girls who play against them or is this also an erroneous stereotype?

Believe it or not, you are now informally engaged in qualitative research at this party. **Qualitative research** is concerned with observing and interviewing people to learn about their social and cultural context, recording as much **descriptive detail** in the process as possible. In fact, where **quantitative research** is numerical, **qualitative research** is descriptive. By studying people in their natural contexts, qualitative research tries to understand more about how specific cultures shape how and why people do things. In the previous example, you were observing the social phenomenon of how the guys and girls interacted in their natural context of the party. You then interviewed your friends to find out more about why this social phenomenon occurred. And then, after hearing their responses, you relied on a more focused observation to see if the reasons they gave you actually happened.

In qualitative research, culture can be defined broadly as someone’s national or ethnic culture, such as the cultures of Samoans or Cherokee Native Americans. Because larger ethnic cultures are so complex, qualitative researchers will spend many years immersed within that culture before they even begin to gain an understanding of it. For instance, pioneering anthropologist Margret Mead spent years in Samoa studying the Samoan culture through observation and interviews.

However, culture can also be defined in smaller ways as a subculture. A subculture is a group of people who are part of a larger ethnic or national culture but who are also joined together by a
specific place and set of social practices—a set of activities and rules for those activities. In this way, almost any group of people can be identified as a subculture. A subculture could be a group of skaters, fraternity brothers, or bus commuters. You are already part of many subcultures. By attending a college or university, you become part of that subculture. Your writing class will also form its own subculture and create its own rules for behavior and other social practices within the class. Some of these social rules will be the same as your other college classes, but others may be quite different and unique to your writing class. Just by being in the class and participating—reading the syllabus, listening to class discussion and asking questions, and talking individually to your teacher and classmates—you will undoubtedly learn the social rules of the class and how to perform the activities involved in finishing your assignments and participating in class. Because subcultures are smaller, it is not always necessary for researchers to spend as much time studying them as they would if they were studying an entire ethnic culture. However, researchers will often still spend several years studying a subculture, especially if it is a fairly large subculture. For instance, researchers might spend several years immersed within a specific skater culture before they feel they can begin to really know it.

Qualitative research is also concerned with studying social systems, such as a school, a prison, or a family, to understand how that social system works and how it shapes the people within it. For example, a researcher could use qualitative methods to examine how and why violence occurs within prisons. Also, the social system of the college or a university you attend shapes you in various ways—where you live, how you live, how you study, where you study, who you can socially interact with, etc.

Why Do Qualitative Research?

Because qualitative research provides a level of descriptive detail and depth that is impossible to achieve with other types of research, it is the best form of research for studying how and why individuals interact within social contexts. While quantitative research is good at generalizing about large groups, qualitative research is concerned with the many deep layers of detail about a small group. For instance, quantitative surveys can easily be distributed to hundreds, possibly thousands, of people, and they can get at some self-reported motivations for why people do things within certain social contexts; however, surveys are unable to accurately examine how these individuals actually interact within the social contexts they describe. Qualitative research often generates a large amount of data as well, but instead of numbers researchers may gather hundreds, possibly thousands, of pages of detailed observation and interview notes. Furthermore, to study a social context fully, researchers often must observe for a long time. Margaret Mead spent many years in Samoa amassing many hundreds of pages of observation and interview notes. Of course, the more focused and shorter term qualitative projects you will be responsible for can also provide valuable insights about specific cultures and practices.
When deciding whether or not to conduct qualitative research, consider your audience and purpose. Will your audience be more persuaded by the numerical information that quantitative research can provide, or will your audience be more persuaded by the nuanced, in-depth, descriptive detail and analysis of specifics that qualitative research can provide? In educational research for example, administrators are primarily interested in numerical data with breadth because they are interested in how the whole system of the university works. However, teachers are also interested in examining learning in context and examining its complex subtleties so that they can better teach individual students. For this reason, teachers often turn to the specific detail that qualitative research provides, even though this research may only cover one class or a few students in depth. In other words, in deciding whether to conduct qualitative research, figure out first if your audience would be more persuaded by the breadth of the big picture and how everything works together as a whole that quantitative research provides or whether your audience would be more persuaded by examining how the individual parts work within the details of the smaller picture that qualitative research provides.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) Imagine that you have a free round-trip ticket and $3000 to take a one week vacation to London. You are trying to research the best hotel to stay at for seven nights. (Don’t forget to calculate food and other necessities into your budget.) Go online and look and find the best places to stay on your budget.
   a. What online hotel information was most helpful in finding out the best hotel for you to stay at? Was the most helpful information qualitative, quantitative, or both? Why?

2) Make a list of the many subcultures that you belong to. These can be larger groups such as gender, age or education, but also smaller groups such as specific hobbies or interests. If a researcher were studying how two or three of these subcultures overlap, what could qualitative research capture that quantitative or text-based research couldn’t? Why?

**What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Research?**

The level of descriptive detail needed in qualitative research means that it tends to be quite specific. Most qualitative research will only study one particular social scene within a subculture in depth—one local group of skaters, one particular class, one fraternity, etc. In other words, to acquire this level of detail through observations and interviews, it is often impossible to study more than one specific cultural setting or social scene at a time. Unfortunately, this also means that it is impossible to accurately generalize what is learned about one cultural setting to another cultural setting. For example, if a qualitative researcher only observes one classroom to find out why students do not turn in work, it is impossible for her to generalize what she has learned about that classroom to all other classrooms because their social contexts might be quite different; the reasons students have for not turning in homework in one class might not be the same ones they have in another class.
Because qualitative research examines individuals within a larger social or cultural context, it is also impossible to replicate qualitative research. Each social context is unique, and it changes from moment to moment. For this reason, a full social context is impossible to control or replicate completely. In conducting education research, if you were to observe how students interacted within the social context of a specific classroom, this would vary from day to day. Students would not act exactly the same on Wednesday as they did on Monday, nor would they act the same at the beginning of a term as at the end of the term. Qualitative research has often been critiqued because it cannot be replicated. It is impossible to fully conduct someone else’s qualitative study and get the same results to see if the original study was accurate.

Despite its limitations, though, qualitative research is valuable because it is the only way to fully examine how and why individuals interact within certain social or cultural contexts. While it is impossible to replicate social contexts while studying them, no other research techniques are able to examine culture in its lived context as fully or completely. Qualitative researchers study culture because they believe that knowledge is created through social interaction with others. Of course, this knowledge can change as societies and cultures change. Studying other cultures, then, becomes one way of discovering new knowledge.

Finally, qualitative research can only study what is either observable—people’s actions or activities—or what can be learned through interviews. Qualitative researchers cannot directly observe someone’s thought processes. For example, qualitative writing research is limited by the fact that even though people can describe as best as they can their thought processes when they write, the mental process of writing cannot be directly observed. Consequently, qualitative writing researchers can only observe the activity of writing—what people put down on paper and how—or they can ask people to describe what goes through their minds as they write. Observing the activity of writing will not tell researchers about deletions that writers made in their writing before they even put anything on the page. It also will not tell them about why writers made certain choices and not others—why they kept certain parts of their writing but deleted others, for example. In both cases, researchers are not getting the full picture of the mental process of writing.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) Now that you have a fuller picture of what qualitative research is, what are some other advantages and disadvantages to qualitative research?

**Who Does Qualitative Research?**

Qualitative research is used in a wide range of disciplines. The social sciences developed qualitative research because those fields are concerned with studying people within larger social systems and cultures. Consequently, it is also used most often in these disciplines. Anthropology uses qualitative research to understand cultures—both larger, ethnic cultures and smaller subcultures. For example, Betty Tutt conducted an ethnography on the subculture of female poker players, investigating in particular how women talked to each other. Sociology uses qualitative research to understand how social systems such as prisons or schools impact
large groups of people. Joshua Page conducted an ethnography examining two gatherings of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA), a labor union for prison officers. Specifically, he examined how the prison officers used these meetings to ally with crime victims’ groups. Psychologists use qualitative research to study how social structures, such as the family, affect individuals. Usually this is done by extensively interviewing one individual or groups of individuals. For instance, Wendy Reiboldt and Avery Goldstein conducted a two year qualitative study of Cambodian American families to see if they used governmental social services. They found that Cambodian refugee families typically do not use these public social services but instead rely on their family members and friends in the community for aid.

Disciplines outside of the social sciences are also interested in how culture and society affect individuals and therefore widely use qualitative research methods. In education, teachers and administrators are extremely interested in studying how school structures—anything from lesson plans to school socialization—impact students so that they can make their teaching more effective. Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, a college writing teacher, used both observations and interviews to investigate why some students do not classify themselves as ESL (English as a Second Language) and want to take mainstream writing classes even though they may have only lived in the United States for a few years. Business is another discipline that is interested in how social contexts impact customers. For example, business researchers have conducted qualitative research investigating how lighting and music might positively influence customers to purchase items in a store or positively influence how they perceive a certain brand.

**Where Does Qualitative Research Come From?**

Qualitative research relies primarily on two types of research methods (or ways to do research) to obtain evidence: observations and interviews. To conduct an observation, qualitative researchers write exhaustive notes, recording everything they can observe at the scene. Researchers also often interview someone who is involved in the culture or scene they are observing or they interview someone who is unusual in some way that they want to learn more about. When conducting interviews, researchers also write copious descriptive notes throughout the interview or they will tape the session and then transcribe the recording after the interview.

Although there are many types of qualitative research used to find evidence, the four most common types are the case study, ethnography, focus group, and surveys with open-ended questions. In a case study, researchers will interview one person in depth. This could be a long-term study conducted over a few years or a short-term study of a few weeks, but in a case study, the researcher will usually interview the person several times, trying to get as much detailed information as possible from this person. In psychology, Sigmund Freud is famous for conducting several case studies from which he developed his theories about psychotherapy and the subconscious. An ethnography is conducted by recording as many details about a specific culture or social system as possible. An ethnographer will conduct extensive observations over an extended time period. However, an ethnographer will also try to interview as many participants in the culture he or she is observing as possible. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz
conducted an ethnography in Indonesia. He lived in an Indonesian village, observing the culture of that village, participating in the culture of village life, and also interviewing many members of that village. A **focus group** is a group of individuals who are also participants within the culture being studied. However, unlike an ethnography which much more broadly looks at multiple aspects of a culture, in a focus group, researchers have a narrower scope for their research and examine only specific aspects of a culture. Also, in a focus group, instead of interviewing participants separately, participants answer the researcher’s questions as a group. For example, if a researcher is interested in learning which teaching methods are most effective, he or she might show a videotape of a teacher using different teaching techniques and then ask a group of students in a focus group which technique was best at helping them learn the material. Focus groups are also commonly used in business and in politics. Political advisors will conduct focus groups to find out which parts of a political candidate’s speech people liked the most and why. Finally, a **qualitative survey** is a survey that uses open-ended questions for which respondents can write in their answers. An open-ended survey is unlike a quantitative survey that only uses closed questions that present limited, pre-set options—multiple choice, true-false, yes/no, or scale questions. Open-ended questions have the advantage of allowing qualitative researchers to amass a large amount of responses through surveys; however, these responses are much harder and more time-consuming to sort through and analyze than a quantitative survey. The benefit of qualitative, open-ended surveys, though, is that they allow freedom of response; people can provide more complete descriptions in answering the questions than they could with pre-set responses. Some people, for instance, might find that none of the pre-set responses in a quantitative survey are truly accurate and/or are too limiting to give a complete and accurate response. A good example of a poor quantitative survey that limits responses too much would be many of the Facebook quizzes in which none of the responses seem to fit your personality.

The type of evidence that qualitative researchers gather through observations and interviews is called **primary research** because the researcher is gathering this data firsthand. In other words, the researcher is not reading about a study someone else conducted, which is called **secondary research**, but, through observations and interviews, is conducting research him or herself. However, qualitative researchers also rely on secondary research for sources. First, qualitative researchers usually find other qualitative studies that are related in some way to their study and use these studies to build their **literature review**. A literature review is a brief overview of previous research in which the researcher also argues why his or her own research is important and necessary. Second, qualitative researchers use secondary sources to analyze findings from their interviews or observations in the discussion and conclusion sections of their research studies. Usually, qualitative researchers will use other qualitative research to analyze their data; however, this is not essential. It is becoming more common for qualitative researchers to also draw from textual scholars in the humanities such as philosophy or literature. In this way, qualitative scholars often treat the data they obtain through interviews and observations as a type of text that they interpret, in a similar way as a text-based scholar in the humanities will interpret a written text.
When selecting qualitative research methods and sources for your project, consider your writing and research context first. Think strategically and rhetorically about the best qualitative research methods for achieving your research purpose and persuading your particular audience.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) The local natural history museum wants to know which of their exhibits people enjoy the most and why.
   a. Describe in as much detail as possible the qualitative research methods you would use for this particular audience and purpose.
   b. Why would these particular qualitative research methods be the best ones for this audience and purpose?

**How Do You Do Qualitative Research?**

This section will more clearly define the major ways of doing qualitative research—observation, interviews, focus groups, and surveys with open-ended questions—what they involve and how to conduct research using each of these methods.

**Researching Ethically**

Because qualitative research relies on gathering in-depth and often personal information from real people, it is important to research ethically and treat your research participants with respect, no matter what qualitative research method you use. The research participants have full autonomy, meaning that they have the right to understand the research you are asking them to participate in so they can decide whether to participate in the research or not. They have to consent to participate in your research before you can do it. This also means that the research participants should be informed of any physical or emotional risks involved in participating in your research. They have the right to end participation in your research at any time and for any reason. They also have the right to full confidentiality if they want it. Refer to Chapter 4 for more information about research ethics.

Before you conduct any qualitative research involving people, make sure you get permission from your school’s institutional review board (IRB) first. The institutional review board is a federally governed board that is part of every college or university. It protects the rights of human research participants. However, every school has slightly different rules for research conducted as part of a class, so check with your school’s IRB first before conducting your research. You can usually find out how to contact your school’s IRB online.

**How Do You Do Observations?**

Observation differs depending on the observer’s degree of participation or involvement in the scene. Observation also differs depending on if the observer is an insider or an outsider to that scene.
Nonparticipation
In nonparticipation, the observer is not even present at the scene. This type of observation occurs when someone is observing sports events on television.

Passive Participation
In passive participation, the observer is present at the scene but is not participating at all in the scene. In fact, the observer may not even be noticed by other people there. For example, taking observation notes of a class that you are not a part of or getting a grade in would be a form of passive participation. In passive participation, it is quite easy for the observer to take notes while he or she is at the scene.

Active Participation
In active participation, the observer seeks to do the activities he or she is observing and to fully interact as much as possible with the other participants at the scene. For example, an active participant of skater culture would not simply hang out and observe it but would also learn how to skateboard and would learn as many of the different skating moves as possible. This observer seeks to gain full acceptance into the community he or she is observing in order to fully understand it by observing it first as an outsider but then gradually coming to observe it as an insider as he or she becomes more a part of it. In active participation, it is difficult for the researcher to write notes while he or she participates. Instead, researchers usually take notes right after they participate.

Total Participation
In total participation, the observer is observing a cultural community in which he or she already belongs. Consequently, the researcher already understands the cultural customs of that community and actively participates in them often. For instance, someone who already plays college hockey would be a total participant if he or she observed a college hockey game he or she was also playing in. In total participation, the researcher, of course, cannot write notes during an event. Instead, researchers usually take notes immediately afterwards.

There are many benefits to observing a scene as an outsider. Because the researcher does not have close, emotional ties with this scene, the researcher is less likely to let personal relationships influence how he or she sees a culture or event. Also, the more familiar we are with something, the more we tend to take it for granted and even forget about it. Someone who is brand new to the scene is more apt to record details that natives might find so common that they become invisible to them. However, these normal details might be extremely important in understanding the culture of that scene.

There are disadvantages to observing as an outsider as well. Observers might not understand all of the cultural practices going on in a scene and might misinterpret them. Furthermore, having personal ties to a particular scene might help an observer have greater insight into the inner cultural workings of that place.

Discussion and Practice
1) What are some other advantages of doing passive participation research? What are some other disadvantages of doing passive participation research?
2) What are some other advantages of doing active participation research? What are some other disadvantages of doing active participation research?
3) What are some other advantages of doing total participation research? What are some other disadvantages of doing total participation research?
4) Do you have an impact on the scene you are observing even if you are not a participant within it? Why or why not?

Recording Observations
Good observation usually takes time. It is virtually impossible for a researcher to become completely familiar with a scene after only observing it once. In fact, most ethnographers will conduct observations for several years. Of course, you don’t have to observe for that long, but plan your observations ahead of time so that you can schedule more than one observation into your busy school schedule. Also, the more time you spend observing in one sitting, the better data you will have. A good rule of thumb is to observe for at least an hour at a time. Finally, make note of what time you observe and how long it takes because the time of day affects many scenes.

Here are some more tips to keep in mind as you conduct your observation and write your observation notes:

- Record your five senses. Record what you see, hear, smell, and feel. If your observation entails observing some place that serves food or drink, record what this food or drink tastes like as well. Record the time. Record the weather. Record what the place you are observing physically looks like. In fact, you might want to draw a diagram of the layout of the room or area under observation. The layout of an area can greatly influence how people interact with each other. Record what people are wearing. Definitely record what they say, their facial expressions, and body language.

- Don’t interpret. This can be tricky because we naturally tend to interpret everything around us, especially other’s emotions, without realizing it. For example, someone may appear happy. They may smile, laugh, and tell many jokes. However, because we cannot directly observe this person’s happiness internally, it is impossible through only observation to know if this person is actually happy or not. Some people are good at hiding unhappiness. There could possibly be other factors that contribute to this person appearing happy when he or she actually is not. Consequently, just describe in your observation notes what you can see of this person: laughter, facial expressions, and jokes. Also, avoid assigning motivations to people while you observe—unless you can hear as they describe their motivations while they talk to someone else.

- Be exhaustive. Record everything you can, even if it may not seem relevant to your study. You never know which details will become relevant as you look at your observational data later. The important thing is to record as much of the context—the
big picture—as possible so that you can see more clearly how everything works together. Even a seemingly insignificant detail, such as the time of day, could have a tremendous influence on what people do and why in this particular setting. For example, the time of day at a restaurant greatly impacts what people order and why.

- You will notice different details than someone else. We all notice different details than one another. In qualitative research, this is fine. It definitely does not mean that you are doing your observation wrong. In large qualitative studies, different observers are often trained to observe and record similar details; however, even then, observers will differ slightly in what details they record.

Observing Ethically
Because you often do not interact with others while observing, it is not usually necessary to inform participants of your observation or get their consent. The only exception to this is if you intend to record your observations using video or audio; then, you do need to obtain your research participants’ consent. You should never secretly record an observation using video or audio. However, even if you are not recording, still check with your school’s IRB before you conduct any observational research, especially if you intend to fully interact with the people you are observing. Remember, you want to hide in plain sight when doing observations.

Discussion and Practice
1) Imagine you wanted to study your student union or a favorite local eatery on campus using observational research.
   a. Go to the student union or a favorite local eatery on campus and write observation notes of it using your five senses to record details for 15 minutes. (If it’s a nice day, you might want to observe a popular campus spot outside.) In your descriptions, make sure not to interpret emotions or motivations of people.
   b. Return to class and discuss what you observed. What sensory details did you see, feel, hear, smell, and possibly taste? If you observed the same place as some of your classmates, you might want to get together and compare notes, noticing what you observed that was similar and what was different. Once again, when discussing your observation notes, make sure to only include the details you can observe with your five senses without including any interpretation of emotions or motives.

2) Comparing how and what you see in different settings can help you become a better observational researcher. This can also help you develop strategies for writing down details about an observation.
   a. Observe a setting as a total participant for 30-60 minutes
   b. Observe a different setting you do not belong to as a passive participant for 30-60 minutes.
   c. Write a one-page comparison of what observing each of these places was like. What did you see, hear, feel, smell, and possibly taste in each place? How did being a passive participant affect what you observed? How did
being a total participant affect what you observed? How did these two observational experiences compare?

**How Do You Conduct Interviews?**

Interviews can take many forms. For qualitative research purposes, the face-to-face interview is probably the best. In a face-to-face interview, the researcher has the benefit of reading his interview participant’s facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. In this way, the researcher can learn even more about the interview participant. Furthermore, with the aid of these nonverbal cues and the context of a more natural conversation, the researcher will be better able to tell how to interpret the interview participant’s responses. The researcher can also quickly find out if a question was misunderstood and rephrase appropriately, or if a response is particularly rich, the interviewer can immediately ask follow-up questions. However, time and resources are always a large factor in research. Face-to-face interviews demand the most time of both the researcher and the participant. Also, if the interview participant lives far away, the researcher may not have the money or time to travel to a face-to-face interview.

If money and time make a face-to-face interview impractical, the next best option for a qualitative researcher is to schedule a phone interview. In a phone interview, at least the researcher has the benefit of tone of voice and the context of a normal conversation. Plus, the researcher can still quickly clarify questions or ask productive follow-up questions. If the interview participant is unable to schedule a phone interview or you would like to interview so many participants that you do not have time to speak with them all, then you can conduct an email interview. You can interview many people by just mass emailing your list of questions. Also, with email you have the benefit of easily obtaining verbatim responses from your participants without the difficulty of transcribing them (taping a response and then writing that response down word for word). However, there are many drawbacks to email interviews, too. There is a good chance that many of your questions will not be answered and emailed back. Also, in an email interview, nonverbal cues are lost, so most humor such as sarcasm and irony is lost as well, unless you know the interview participant well. Also, the context of a normal conversation is lost, reducing the spontaneity of responses and potentially creating more confusion. Finally, it is more difficult to ask follow-up questions or clarify original questions that may have been misunderstood. Aside from these very practical research concerns, email is not a secure medium. Anybody along the email’s route can read your email, so some IRB offices will forbid certain types of questions via email. You also cannot guarantee confidentiality with an email interview.

**Writing Effective Interview Questions**
The quality of information gathered during an interview depends largely on how you design your questions and how you conduct the interview session. Keep the following advice in mind to help you get the best results from this type of qualitative research.
• **Avoid questions that are worded confusingly.** For instance, avoid using words that could create two possible meanings for your question. Also, use words that you know your interview participant will understand. Use clear, straight-forward language and avoid jargon, unless you are interviewing a professor or expert in the particular field that uses that jargon.

• **Avoid asking a question that is actually asking more than one question.** For instance, if you are conducting research about how a teacher’s comments on papers affects revision, avoid asking a question such as, “How do your teacher’s comments affect your revision and which comments do you think are the best?” The participant will probably only remember one of the questions and will only answer one.

• **Avoid questions that are too broad or vague.** Interview participants could easily get overwhelmed and then only give general or vague responses in return. A question like this would be “What do you enjoy about the extracurricular activities at your school?” There are too many options here. A better idea would be to narrow the extracurricular activities down to just one.

• **Avoid double negatives when phrasing questions.** Double negatives tend to confuse people. An example of a double negative question is: “What do you not dislike about the extracurricular activities available at your school?” A better question would be “What do you like about the extracurricular activities available at your school?”

• **Avoid biased questions.** Do not use biased or leading questions that give away your perspective. For example, if you are researching coaching strategies in college soccer and you are interviewing a soccer player, do not ask a question such as “So, what did you think of that horrible practice today?” Sometimes bias can be subtle. Things as subtle as body language and tone of voice give away our bias. Also, the more strongly we believe in or feel about something, the more likely we are going to be to let our bias show. However, in phrasing and then asking questions, do your best to appear as impartial as possible. Remember, you are trying to discover your interview participant’s perspective and not your own.

**Basic Advice for Most Interview Situations:**

• Schedule a time for the interview that is convenient for the interview participant well in advance.

• Make eye contact with your interview participant throughout the interview.

• Thank the interview participant for their time before and after the interview. Also, shake your participant’s hand before and after the interview if appropriate.
• Make the interview participant comfortable before the interview begins. Small talk, jokes, etc., can go a long way in making the interview participant comfortable. Also, feel free to explain a little bit about yourself, your research project, and what your research project will be used for before the interview begins.

• Dress appropriately for your interview participant.

• Address your interview participant appropriately for his or her position.

• Don’t make the interview too long. Respect your participant’s time and design your interview questions with your appointment limitations in mind. You may try to reschedule if the interview is running long and the interview participant looks tired.

• Start off with the easy questions first and then warm up to harder questions. This will put your interview participant at ease and give you a chance to get to know each other better by the time you ask the tougher questions.

**Interview Advice for Qualitative Research:**

• You can be redundant in your questions, but rephrase them productively. To get the most information possible out of your interview participant, you can ask the same question over again—especially if it is an important question to your research. If you ask the question in different ways, you might get different perspectives on it or get a lengthier response.

• Don’t give away your research question. You don’t want your interview participant to tell you what he or she thinks you want to hear. Instead, you want your interview participant to answer honestly according to his or her own experience. You may explain the basics of what your research is about, but you do not need to go into the specifics of your research question.

• Clarify interview questions if needed. To get the best information possible from your interview participant, it is important that he or she is not confused in any way. If he or she seems confused or hesitant in answering your question, feel free to rephrase it in simpler terms or explain it more.

• Ask follow-up questions if the interview is headed in a direction that is productive for your research. If your interview participant goes off on an unexpected tangent that is still relevant to your research, feel free to ask him or her more about this tangent. Also, if the interview participant gives a lengthy response that has many interesting facets or sides to it, feel free to ask follow-up questions that explain the interview participant’s perspective even more.
Let the research participant do most of the talking. You want to learn as much as possible about the interview participant’s perspective. A good rule of thumb to follow is not to talk more than 10% of the time.

Interviewing Ethically

Because your interview participants are human beings with their own set of rights, issues, and potential problems, make sure to respect them during the interview. In order to respect your interview participants’ rights during the interview:

- Make sure your interview participant is aware of his or her options for confidentiality before the interview begins and abide by those conditions. When interviewing a person, you will know the identity of the person, but when you write it up for your research, the participant has a right to have his or her identity remain confidential from the audience you are writing for. The interview participant can have full confidentiality where you refer to him or her by a pseudonym. The interview participant can have partial confidentiality where you refer to him by his or her title or position but do not disclose his or her name. Finally, the interview participant can have full disclosure. In this case, you can refer to the research participant by his or her full name.

- Make sure your interview participant is aware of his or her rights as a research participant. Make sure your research participant knows that he or she must give consent to be interviewed before you begin the interview. (Refer to researching ethically at the beginning of this section to find out more about research participant rights.)

- Request that the interview participant sign a consent form that states that the participant understands his or her rights as a research participant and that, by signing the form, the research participant is giving his or her consent to be interviewed.

- Always ask the interview participant for permission first if you are going to tape record the interview. If the interview participant declines, do not record the session.

- If the interview participant is uncomfortable answering a question, do not pressure or force him or her to answer. As an autonomous research participant, the interview participant has the right to not answer any question that he or she does not wish to answer. If this happens, just move on to the next question.

- Do not ask interview questions that could directly incriminate the participant for illegal activity. For example, don’t ask a question such as “How often do you smoke marijuana?” You can ask questions about the participants’ attitudes and beliefs about an illegal activity but not a question that directly asks if they have participated in the illegal activity. So, you could ask a question about whether the interview participant thinks marijuana should be legalized and why.
• Get Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission before the interview begins.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) Say you wanted to research movie preferences of college students using qualitative research method, namely interviews. Using your class as a sample of students:
   a. Write interview questions asking a classmate about what their favorite movies are and why.
   b. Get together with another classmate and interview them about their favorite movies and why they like them. Be sure to take good notes recording your interview.
   c. In class, discuss what you discovered about each other’s favorite movies.
   d. Based on the information you discovered in your interview and your class discussion, what overall claims can you make about what college students like in movies? Remember, while you are looking at why college students like certain movies, your class is too small to generalize about all students’ preferences quantitatively.
   e. What specific strategies did you use to write effective interview questions?
   f. What interview strategies did you use to get the most information from your interview participant?
   g. What could you have done better next time in either writing your interview questions or interviewing?

**How Do You Conduct a Focus Group?**

In a focus group, an interviewer will develop a list of discussion questions and then let the discussion of the group develop from there. While still structured to a certain extent, focus groups are much more free-form than a traditional interview because you need to let the discussion develop naturally and take its normal course.

The benefits of focus groups are that they allow a lot of responses from many different individuals in a short amount of time. Also, because the interviewer is only developing discussion questions (not direct interview questions) and the intimidation some participants might feel from the interviewer is minimized by being part of a group, most focus group participants feel more comfortable and are often more forthcoming than they would be in a one-on-one interview. However, a problem with focus groups is that group dynamics can change dramatically from group to group. It can be a challenge to get a cohesive group together that can not only offer pertinent insights for answering your research question but also feels comfortable enough together to talk freely in a short amount of time. In a focus group, it is essential that the researcher gets insights from all the participants; however, if certain members are shy or feel intimidated by more dominating or socially powerful members of the group, they may not fully offer their perspectives. Finally, it can be difficult to get the conversation off to a productive start in only an hour or so. Time management of the conversation is key and can be tricky.
The first step in doing a focus group is finding a problem that needs the insight of many individuals to solve. For example, teachers have been using focus groups for years to test out various teaching techniques on students. Getting the perspectives of many students is crucial in figuring out what teaching methods work best for everyone. The next step is finding a group that can offer the insight you need to answer your research question. Finally, just like with an observation or an interview, it is important to take good notes during the focus group session. It is crucial to record everyone’s responses so that no one’s perspective is lost.

Writing Focus Group Questions
- Follow the same guidelines for writing qualitative interview questions mentioned above. For example, make sure that your questions are clear, direct, and understandable to everyone in your focus group.
- Start with the general questions first and then move to the specific ones.
- Start with the most important questions first and end with the least important.

Creating Conversation in a Focus Group
- Start the focus group with a brief welcome. This will help your group feel more relaxed. You might also ask everyone in the group to introduce themselves to further break the ice.
- Second, briefly summarize what the topic under discussion will be. Understanding the point of the discussion will help orient the group quickly so that they give you pertinent information right away. However, just like in an interview, remember not to give away your research question.
- Next, you may want to establish any rules for the conversation if you think they apply. This will help the conversation get off to a smoother start.
- Ask the first question and let the conversation develop on its own, if possible. You may want to mediate to some extent by acknowledging people who seem to have something to say while another person is talking or asking follow-up questions if the conversation stalls.
- Remember to be relaxed and conversational in a focus group and act just as you would in a normal conversation.
- Keep the conversation focused on the question at-hand. In other words, don’t let the conversation stray and go off-track.

Creating Ethical Focus Group Conversations
Follow the same principals for creating ethical focus group discussion questions as you would for interview questions. Make sure all focus group participants are aware of their rights as research participants and know that they must give consent to be part of the focus group before the focus group begins. Make sure your focus group participants are aware of their options for confidentiality and abide by those conditions. Request that the focus group participants sign a consent form that states that they understand their rights as research participants and that, by signing the form, they give their consent to be part of the focus group.
Always ask the focus group participants for permission first if you are going to tape record or videotape the focus group discussion. If any focus group participants are uncomfortable answering a question, do not force them to answer. Do not ask interview questions that could directly incriminate any of the participants in illegal activity. Finally, get Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission before the focus group begins.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) What are some further benefits of focus group research that are not listed above in your opinion?
2) What are some further problems with focus group research that have not been mentioned above?
3) Imagine the provost or dean of your college wanted to find out more about problems that concern students at your campus.
   a. Develop a research question around some problem on campus that needs the multiple perspectives of a focus group to solve.
   b. Write focus group questions that will give you pertinent information to answer your research question. However, design your questions for a short, 10-minute focus group.
   c. Get together with your classmates and get in groups of five.
   d. Practice leading a focus group on this five person group for 10 minutes. Make sure to take good notes and record everyone’s responses. Let everyone in your group conduct their focus group on the rest of the group too.
   e. Freewrite:
      1) How did the responses from the focus group answer your research question? In other words, what did you learn from it?
      2) Now that you have written questions for a focus group and then led it, what would you do differently?
      3) What did you do well in writing your questions and leading the group?
   f. Discuss your freewrite responses as a class.

**How Do You Conduct a Qualitative Survey?**

Instead of interviews, qualitative researchers might conduct a survey or questionnaire. Because qualitative data is always descriptive, questionnaires employ open-ended questions—questions that allow respondents to write out their own responses and/or fill in the blanks. In other words, qualitative questionnaires do not use closed questions that only allow for predetermined options like multiple choice or simple yes/no or true/false questions (Refer to chapter 8, Quantitative Research, to learn more about using surveys with closed questions). Closed question questionnaires create excellent numerical or quantitative data but poor descriptive data.

The benefits of using a qualitative, open-ended survey over a face-to-face interview are that they are easier and faster to conduct. It is much easier and quicker to pass out (or email) a
survey than it is to interview someone in person. It is also less time intensive for the research participant. Therefore, researchers can usually survey many more people than they can interview, making it easier for them to generalize their survey data. There are problems with survey research, though. Some depth in responses may be lost. For instance, surveyors are usually unable to tell if their questions are being misunderstood until after their survey has already been filled out and it is too late. Also, although open-ended questions allow for a certain amount of depth in responses, some depth will inevitably be lost. Surveyors are unable to ask follow-up questions to hear more about a particular perspective like interviewers can. Also, someone filling out a questionnaire may rush through it and give perfunctory answers or they might get tired of writing by the end, so the quality of responses can be uneven.

Writing Qualitative Survey Questions
Basically all the tips for composing good interview questions apply to composing qualitative survey questions as well. However, because you do not have a face-to-face advantage and cannot read tone of voice, body language, or facial expressions and do not know until after the survey has been filled out if your questions were understood, it is even more crucial to ask questions that are clear and understandable to your audience. Remember, you do not have the option of clarifying a question for your research participants. If they get confused, that part of your data will be useless.

- Use language that is clear to your audience. If your research participants are in high school, use language in phrasing your questions that you know they will understand. Don’t use the specialized jargon you learned in your psychology class for instance. However, if your research participants are all psychology majors, do include common psychological terms you have learned. These terms will be more precise and actually clarify your intentions to this audience with psychological expertise.
- Avoid using words that could be interpreted in more than one way.

Refer to chapter 8 on Quantitative Research for more information about creating and administering surveys and questionnaires.

Surveying Ethically
Just as with interviews and focus groups, survey participants have a right to research autonomy. They need to be informed briefly of what the survey is about and then told that they do not have to participate if they do not want to. Also, while confidentiality is not as big of a problem in surveys, survey participants should still be told what demographic information about them will be used. You should not ask survey questions that directly incriminate participants in illegal activity, even if their identity will remain anonymous. Finally, as with all research involving human subjects, you should get IRB approval first before you conduct your surveys. Researchers usually add a paragraph at the beginning of they survey that explains the purpose of the study and informs respondents of their rights.

Discussion and Practice
1) Say you wanted to research music preferences of college students using open-ended, qualitative surveys. Using your class as a sample of students:
   a. In groups of three, write a qualitative survey asking another group of three what their favorite kinds of music are and why.
   b. Discuss the results of your survey as a class, possibly putting the results of the entire class up on the board.
   c. What do these survey results say about college students’ music preferences? Why?
   d. Now that you have written your survey and distributed it, how would you better write your survey next time?

How do you Analyze Your Data?

After doing your interviews, observations, or surveys, wait a day or so. Then come back to your observation and interview notes or open-ended survey data and interpret them in what is known as cooked notes. In your cooked notes, you will examine how your observation or interview notes answer your research question, possibly looking for patterns in your data that you hadn’t noticed before. Then you might make tentative interpretations about why certain patterns are occurring. Also, you should ask more questions about your research or make possible notes for further research.

However, in your cooked note analysis, go a bit further as well. Perhaps your data reminds you of a lecture or a book you read in another class, so you might want to go back and talk to the professor further or check the book out from the library. You might realize you need to interview someone who participated in the scene you observed to get his or her thoughts on it. Or, perhaps, you realize you need to observe more or that you need to observe some other place for further comparison. Finally, realize that your interpretations are tentative. Have an open mind to changing your interpretations if needed.

After you have written your cooked notes, you will want to code or sort and organize your observation, interview, or survey data. For qualitative data, coding often consists of sorting your data around certain recurring themes or topics that seem to come up. Your cooked notes should help draw your attention to what was important in your data and help you develop what your themes or categories should be. Make sure that each of your coding categories answers your research question in some way. For example, if your research question is how female baseball fans act compared to male baseball fans at a baseball game, some themes might be types of clothing, types of cheering, types of interactions with neighbors, etc. To code the category for cheering, you might highlight every time your interview participant mentions cheering or highlight every time you noticed cheering in your observation notes. Then you would put all the highlighted information about cheering together and compare and contrast it, seeing if you could see any similar patterns or differences between how males and females cheer. (For more about statistical coding, refer to Chapter 8, Quantitative Research).

Discussion and Practice
1) At the end of this chapter is a collection of 23 short interview responses about motivation to play online games under Qualitative Case D on page 102. For this exercise your qualitative research question is “What motivates people to play computer games?” An alternate research question could be “Is playing computer games beneficial or harmful? Why?”
   a. In groups of three, code the qualitative data. When coding your data in groups, look for any recurring patterns in your qualitative data that answer your research question.
   b. In class, discuss what coding categories you came up with that answered your research question.
   c. Did groups have different coding categories? Why?

**Triangulating Data**

Often qualitative researchers will use two or three different qualitative research methods which is called **triangulating** data. For example, they may observe people in a particular location but then also interview some of the people they observed. By triangulating data, researchers can compare the data they get through using different research methods and gain a greater perspective about their data. For instance, a researcher who is observing coffee shop customers could also interview some of them to see if they see the coffee shop in the same way as the researcher does. If they don’t see the coffee shop in the same ways, the perceptions of the coffee shop customers could ultimately change what the researcher observes about the coffee shop as well. Triangulating data is particularly important in qualitative research since research cannot be replicated and validity cannot be tested. By comparing one data source with another, triangulating data is also a way to double check for bias or potential other problems with your data. However, triangulating data also helps the researcher interpret his or her data in a way that is more insightful. (For more information on how to triangulate data using methods from more than one research tradition, refer to Chapter 9, Mixed Method Research.)

**Discussion and Practice**

1) Can qualitative research be truly objective? Why or why not?
2) Can any research by truly objective? Why or why not?
3) What are some ways to minimize subjectivity in qualitative research?
4) What are some benefits of subjectivity? What are some disadvantages of subjectivity?

**How Do You Write about Qualitative Research?**

Now that you have a fuller picture of what the different research methods entail in qualitative research, this section will help you get started on conducting and writing about your own research as an actual qualitative scholar and researcher would. This section will not only help guide you through the research process, but it will also help you begin writing a scholarly research article. While thinking of how to write a scholarly article, remember your rhetorical situation. Keep in mind that your audience for an academic article is a community of other qualitative researchers. Understanding what this audience values in research and writing will
help you as you write your article. Also, understanding your purpose in presenting your research to this audience will also help guide you in your writing. Begin by developing your research question, followed by planning and conducting your study. Next, analyze your data and write up the report.

**How Do You Develop a Qualitative Research Question?**
The first step in conducting and writing about qualitative research is figuring out your purpose for conducting research. Consider any interesting social phenomenon that happens in your life—on campus, in your neighborhood, in any organizations you are involved in, with your family or friends, etc. Is there anything that happens in these social groups that you do not understand and want to learn more about? Are you conducting research because you have noticed some social problem on campus that you want to learn more about? For example, have you ever wondered why some dorm roommates get along well while others do not? Or are you interested in learning more about a culture you know nothing about? For example, would you like to learn more about how DJs mix music in clubs and the culture surrounding their activities? Also, are there any organizations or hobbies that you do not know much about and want to learn about?

After figuring out the purpose of your research, develop a clear research question that accurately reflects this purpose. In qualitative research, a research question is like a thesis—everything you do stems from that one research question. Not only is developing a research question the first step in your research and writing process, but it is important that you carefully compose your research question to reflect the research you want to conduct as closely as possible. Like an unclear thesis statement, an unclear research question can lead you astray both in research process and in your actual writing of that research.

Good qualitative research questions are descriptive and usually start with “how” or “why.” “How” usually describes a process. An example of this kind of process question would be: how do students interact with each other while riding the elevator? Or how do fans interact during a hockey game? “Why” questions not only describe but also explain phenomenon. For example, questions such as this would ask: why do students riding the elevator interact in certain ways? Or why do fans interact the way they do at a hockey game?

The most important thing to remember when developing your research question is to make sure it can be observed or at least discovered through interviews. Some phenomenon simply cannot be directly observed or explored through interviews and are better left to other research methods. For example, the research question “what strategies do physics majors use to study” is observable to an extent. You could observe whether students highlight or write information down as they read. You could also interview physics majors and find out any study strategies that are not directly observable such as memorization techniques. However, the research question “how do physics majors learn their material” would be impossible to directly observe because learning is a complex mental process. While interviewing might uncover some of the physics majors’ learning processes, it would still only give a partial picture.
The best qualitative questions are descriptions of why and how certain social phenomenon occur and do not simply count them quantitatively. For instance, a question that starts with “how many” is not a good qualitative research question but might make an excellent quantitative research question. Questions of “how many” do not get at the depth of descriptive data that other qualitative research questions can. These types of counting questions do not explore how and why certain social phenomena exist, which is what good qualitative research does. For example, counting how many lattés people order at a coffee shop would make an interesting quantitative study, but it is not a good qualitative question. A better qualitative question would be to examine how people interact with other customers and employees as they order their drinks, to look at the process of how exactly they order their drinks, or to interview both customers and employees to investigate why customers purchase certain drinks. In many studies, qualitative and quantitative research does mix, and if you find yourself asking counting questions of “how many,” perhaps you should consider conducting a quantitative study or a study that uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Qualitative researchers rarely if ever form hypotheses before they conduct their research. Instead, qualitative researchers strive to keep an open mind about their research, seeing their research as a way of discovering new aspects of their social world that they did not know before. If they formed a hypothesis before they had even conducted their research, they might miss out on pertinent details and only see what they intended to see—not what was actually there. It would also be much harder for them to discover anything new or unexpected in their research.

Because it is so important for qualitative researchers to remain as unbiased as possible in investigating social phenomenon, it is crucial the research questions remain unbiased. For example, the research question, “Why are women bad at playing video games?” is biased. It is already assuming that all women will play video games poorly even before the researcher has started his or her research. The question, “What kinds of video games do women play and why?” is much more unbiased. It lets the researcher remain open to discovering—and possibly being surprised by—what types of video games women play and their reasons for playing them.

In coming up with a clear, precise research question, make sure to narrow your question to address exactly what you want to study and can accomplish in the given time frame. For example, the research question, “Why are female sports more unpopular than male sports?” is an interesting one, but it is much too broad to investigate during one class. First of all, which sport is it investigating? Second, it is unclear whether the popularity of female sporting events is going to be investigated in the televised media or by attending local college female sporting events. A more focused question would be, “Why is there lower attendance at women’s college basketball games than at men’s basketball games at my school?” This question narrows down exactly which sport—college basketball at your school—you will be looking at and what aspect of popularity—attendance at games—you will be examining.

Finally, make sure that your research question is getting at new knowledge and not asking a question that you and everyone else knows the answer to. Research is about uncovering new
knowledge and is only worth doing if it will increase our understanding of the culture or context being studied.

How Do You Choose a Qualitative Research Method?
After you are done carefully composing a clear, accurate research question, the next step is to choose the research methods you will use to answer that research question. Most qualitative research relies on triangulating both observation and interview research methods. However, there can be some variation. So, when choosing your research method, the most important thing is to choose the method or methods that best answer your research question. In the party example opening this chapter, a possible research question could be: “How do males and females compare in their interactions at parties and why?” To answer this question, it would be best to employ a range of qualitative methods: both observations and interviews. Observations are crucial to see what social behaviors males and females are actually engaging in at the party. However, observation may not be enough, especially if the researcher wants to delve into the reasons for certain patterns of behavior. In other words, the interview data might enrich what the researcher observes. However, the researcher also needs to use the observations to triangulate her interviews to verify them. (Refer to the previous section in this chapter on research methods for more information on how to conduct your research.)

Discussion and Practice

Chapter Project: Step 1
1) Decide on a topic of interest that you could research using qualitative methods. Create a research question for it. Underneath your research question, include what research methods you will use to answer the question.
   a. After constructing your research question and method, switch research questions with a classmate and peer review it.
   b. Peer Review. In giving your classmate advice on how to better revise his or her research question, answer the following questions:
      • Is the research question something that can be discovered through observation or interview?
      • Is the research question as narrow and precise as possible?
      • Did your classmate pick the best qualitative research methods to answer the research question? Does the research question accurately reflect the research methods being used?
      • Is the research question doable in the time-frame of the class?
      • Is the research question qualitative and descriptive? In other words, is it getting at a “how” or “why” question?
      • Is the research question asking for new knowledge? In other words, will it provide some new insight about the topic?
      • Is the research question open or does it assume a hypothesis of some sort?
      • Are there any problems with the research question? Is it biased? Is it too obvious?
c. After answering these questions, if you think that any part of the research question needs to be changed, make sure to offer specific suggestions for revision along with your critique.
d. Switch research questions with your partner and go over your feedback with each other.
e. Revise your research question after hearing your partner’s feedback.

**How Should You Organize and Write a Qualitative Research Report?**

Just like with other research methods, different audiences will have different expectations for how to organize a research report. In qualitative research, your goal is to introduce your research question, describe your setting and how you collected your data, and to cover what you found and its implications. For this reason, following an Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRAD) format can be helpful as a researcher in communicating something as complex as a primary source research report. No matter who you are writing for, however, you will find that the following writing strategies can be adapted for many different organizational schemes.

**The Introduction**

Like all introductions, the introduction of an academic study should do two things: 1) clearly let audience know what your study is about and 2) hook their interest. To let readers know what your study is about, clearly state the purpose of your study. This is also where you need to clearly state your research question. Your audience of scholarly researchers wants to read the newest, most important research that builds upon previous research in crucial ways. Researchers, more than anything, value the making of new knowledge. So, to grab readers’ interest, briefly argue for why your research is important. How could your research help people? How could your study further research? How is your research new and ground breaking? What other benefits does your study have? Right off the bat, give other researchers a reason to keep reading about your research.

**The Literature Review Section**

The literature review section summarizes previously conducted research that relates to your research question. In this summary, you will definitely want to explain how this previous research relates to your own study.

All research builds upon previous scholarship. So, while the literature review is a summary of previous research on your topic, it is also much more than that. The literature review is actually an argument to other researchers for how your research question is answering something new that has not been studied before. No one wants to read about supposedly “new” research that has already been done, unless this new research critiques older research in important ways. So, the literature review summarizes previous research in order to explain why your own research is new and needs to be conducted. Showing how your own research is new is called creating a research gap. You need to show other researchers that there is a “gap” in the previous research— something that previous research has not done—and show how your research will fill this gap and create new knowledge.
Usually, the beginning of the literature review summarizes the previous research related to your research question. This is also where you will want to explain how this previous research is related to your own research. However, remember that in summarizing this previous research you are also beginning to build your case for why your own research is new and different from the previous research.

The statement of the research gap often comes at the end of the literature review. Here you want to explain in a clear and concise statement what you are contributing in your research that is new or different from the other sources you have found on your research topic.

Here are some strategies to help you develop your research gap and differentiate your study from the previous research you have found:

- In what ways might your research extend previous research? In what ways might your research take previous research to the next step? For instance, you could design a qualitative research study that is similar to a previous qualitative study but also does something more and goes further in certain ways.
- Are there any problems with how the previous research was conducted that you could do better in your own study?
- Was there interesting research that was conducted on one particular population that has not been conducted on another population before?
- Are you examining a social phenomenon or specific aspect of culture that has not been studied before?
- What is your research doing differently that no other research has done before?

**Discussion and Practice**

1) Annotated Bibliographies are a list of sources related to a topic with a summary of what the source is about and how it relates to your research question or issue. We discuss these in Chapter 11, Documenting Sources. Before you can write a good introduction, you need to first find sources and summarize them.

   a. Find five academic, peer reviewed sources (for a refresher on what a peer reviewed source is refer to Chapter 3) that are related in some way to your research.

   b. Include the reference, works cited citation of each source in either APA, MLA, or Chicago for each of your five sources. Ask your professor for guidance. (Also, refer to Chapter 11 for more information on how to cite end-text citations.)

   c. Underneath each citation, summarize the article. Make sure to be careful in your summary and either quote or use your own words while paraphrasing.

   d. Make sure to clearly explain how each of your five sources relates to your research question

**Chapter Project: Step 2 -- Literature Review.**
Using the sources you found for your annotated bibliography, write a one-two page literature review. In your literature review, remember that you are writing an argument of how your research is new—defining your research gap. So, in your literature review, you will clearly explain how your research is adding something new that the previous research did not mention or building upon the previous research. To do this, refer to the bulleted list of questions above to help build your research gap.

The Methods Section
The methods section is the section in which you describe how you did your research. The methods section is one of the most important sections of a qualitative study. Because qualitative studies cannot be replicated, it is important for the qualitative researchers to describe how they did their research in as much detail as possible. It is important to describe how you did your research in detail, making your research appear as transparent as possible to your audience so that they can at least evaluate how you did your research and, perhaps, improve upon it in the future. Your research findings are only as good as the research strategies you used to get them, so explaining exactly how you did your research is crucial for your audience. And, of course, the methods section is important for your audience because, as researchers themselves, your audience wants to learn about how other research is being done.

Specifically, the purpose of the method section is to describe every step you performed to gather your data. Everything from coming up with your interview questions to specifically what you were looking for in your observation and how you did your observation needs to be recorded so that future researchers can perform similar research. Everything that appears in your method section should be described explicitly and be observable. When writing a method section, think of writing directions to somebody you have never met on how to do what you did in your study.

In the methods section, it is also important that qualitative researchers present themselves as transparently as possible as well. This is referred to as situating the researcher. No two people ever observe a place in the same way; no two people notice exactly the same things in an interview. This is because our backgrounds, personal histories, and cultures are all slightly different, and, as a result, they shape us in different ways. For example, a hockey player observing fan behavior at a hockey game would notice different things about fans than someone who had never played hockey. A female would notice different things about a group of females talking than a male would. A teacher would notice slightly different things about her class than one of her students would. So, it is important to describe as much about your background as possible when writing about your qualitative research, especially your relationship to your research subject, since this relationship will inevitably shape your perceptions.

Observations
In describing how you did your observations, it is important to clearly state where you conducted your observation. Include what times you conducted your observations and for how long. It is also important to explain your rationale for choosing this particular location. How
does observing this location answer your research question in pertinent and provocative ways? Because no two people ever notice the exact same things about a place or event, it is particularly important to explain exactly what you were looking for in your observation. The more specific you are in explaining what you were trying to observe, the easier it will be for other researchers to evaluate and perhaps emulate your research. For example, if you observed fan behavior at a basketball game, be more specific in describing what you studied than “fan behavior at a basketball game.” What about fan behavior did you observe? Did you focus on how male and female fans interact during the basketball game? If so, what about this interaction did you observe? Whether males and female sit together? What they say to each other? Their facial expressions when they interact with each other? Their tone of voice or body language when they interact with each other? In explaining your method, list every relevant feature of the setting or activity that you set out to observe.

**Interviews**
When describing how you did your interviews, it is important to clearly state who you interviewed, but it is also helpful to explain your rationale for choosing this particular person as an interview subject. How could interviewing this particular person answer your research question? What unique insights could this particular person bring to your study? You also might want to describe how long your interview sessions were and how many you conducted.

Briefly summarizing your interview questions in the methods section or including your interview questions in an appendix at the end could also help other researchers know exactly what questions you asked during your interview, making your interview research more transparent. Also, offering your rationale or reasons for choosing to ask these particular questions explains to other researchers how and why your interview questions address your research question. Clearly listing your interview questions and then including your rationale for them will help your audience of academic scholars better evaluate whether your interview questions were appropriate or effective in answering your research question.

**Qualitative Surveys**
The most important thing to mention in describing how you conducted your qualitative survey is including as much information about who you surveyed as possible. If you have the data, include gender and age. Also, include anything else that might be relevant about the people you surveyed. For instance, you might want to include year in college or major, especially if your survey is related to academics or life on campus. Another crucial factor to include is how many people you surveyed. For surveys, the more people you survey the better. Finally, just as with interview questions, briefly summarize your survey questions and offer an explanation of why those particular questions answer your research question.

**Headings and Organization**
Organize the methods in a way that makes the most logical sense. In other words, you should more than likely put all your description of your observation in one place and then all your description of your interview in one place. In addition, you may consider subheadings. This will
make it easier for your audience of busy academic scholars to quickly read and comprehend your methods section.

*Tense*
You should describe how you conducted your research in past tense, even though the methods section can be written before you have even done your research. In fact, describing how you will do your research in your methods section can help give you a clearer idea of how you will specifically go about conducting your study. However, if you write your methods section ahead of time, be sure to describe it in past tense as if you have already done your research, even though doing this may feel odd.

*Data Interpretation*
Finally, you might want to describe how you interpreted your data. What coding or categorization system did you use to interpret your data? Because you will have tons of data, you will inevitably need to sort it in some way. Of course, this categorization will also shape how you interpret your data and your results. Another coding system will probably give you a slightly different set of conclusions, so it is important for other researchers to see how you coded or sorted your data in interpreting it. Of course, this coding system will probably be greatly influenced by what you were trying to look for in your observations. For instance, if you were observing fan behavior like in the previous example, your coding or sorting system would consist of: 1) How males and females sat in relation to each other, 2) What males and females said to each other, 3) What their body language was toward each other, 4) What their facial expressions were in reaction to each other, and 5) What their tone of voice was like when they spoke to each other. For each category, you would develop a list of possible descriptors. For example, you might keep track of how much of the conversation pertained to the game and how much was devoted to different topics.

**Discussion and Practice**
1) In groups of two, develop a qualitative research question and qualitative research methods for answering it.
   a. Write a methods section describing your research methods in detail. (Even though you have not conducted your research, use past tense in writing about your research.) While the questions below are not exhaustive, answering them should help you write your methods section.
      • What is your relationship to whom or what you are researching?
      • Where are you observing?
      • When are you observing?
      • How long are you observing?
      • Why are you observing? In other words, how will this observation help you answer your research question?
      • What exactly will you look for in your observation?
Chapter Project: Step 3 -- Methods section

Write a methods section explaining how you will conduct the research for the research question you have previously developed.

Results/Discussion

In qualitative research, the results consist of the data gathered from observations, interviews, and qualitative surveys. In the discussion, these results are analyzed. In analyzing the data, the qualitative research writer will look at the data in the results and explain how this data answers his or her research question. Usually, to interpret their data, qualitative researchers will also use additional sources—other qualitative studies from their literature review or other theorists studying some aspect of the social phenomenon the qualitative researcher is also studying. These outside sources will explain more in depth how and why the data answers the research question. However, there are many different ways to present the data in the results and analyze it in the discussion.

Separating the Results and Discussion Sections

In the results, the data can be merely recounted as a straight retelling without any interpretation. In this case, the interview, observation, or survey data would be retold verbatim straight from the notes. The writer attempts to present his or her data as objectively as possible. This more closely follows how data is presented in most academic physical science writing such as biology or physics. Most importantly though, in this case, the results section would be clearly separated from the discussion section because the data would only be interpreted in the discussion section. The results section would be titled “Results” and the discussion section would be titled “Discussion.” Separating the results in its own section can help your audience of researchers see exactly what was said or observed in your research without any clouding of interpretation.

When the results and discussion are separated into separate sections, any interpretation of the data occurs in the discussion section. The discussion is where the researcher looks at the data and explains how it answered the research question (or not). The discussion is probably the most important part of any study because it is where you explain what it all means—something your scholarly researcher audience is definitely interested in. They want to know the further implications of your research. This is also where researchers may offer some insight into why they think they observed certain things or received certain responses to interview questions. To
offer more insight into what the data means and why the researcher obtained certain
responses or observations, the researcher might turn to other theories or books. For example,
this is where, if your data reminded you of a lecture in another class, you could interpret your
data using the theories you and information you learned in that class.

If you previously coded your data, finding patterns or themes in it, those organizational themes
might also help you analyze your data further. In fact, the organizational themes or patterns
you found in your data when you originally interpreted it might serve to organize the analysis in
your discussion and could possibly even serve as subheadings.

Finally, no matter how you analyze your data and interpret it, make sure to offer data from
your observations and interviews of proof of this interpretation. Be specific with your data
evidence. Offer specific quotes from your interviews or surveys or specific details from your
observation as evidence.

Combining the Results and Discussion Sections
In most writing of qualitative research in the social sciences, there is recognition of the
interpretive nature of gathering data from observation, interviews, and surveys. Consequently,
it is quite common for the results and discussion sections to be combined. The qualitative
researcher presents his or her data and then immediately analyzes it. Many times qualitative
research writers will also present the analysis of their qualitative data in an argumentative
form, which tends to be more thesis-driven like interpretive textual research. In this case, the
research question still serves as the over-arching thesis, but the qualitative researcher presents
his or her analysis of data in an organized and compelling way, almost like supporting points in
an argument, explaining how and why his or her data answered the research question and what
his or her findings were. The qualitative research writer offers his or her data as proof in this
argument and then interprets it, showing how this data proves a point about the findings. For
this proof, the researcher will often use specific quotes from interviews or details from an
observation. In this way, the qualitative research writer constructs arguments similarly to how a
writer would construct a text-based argument. In fact, in this case, the qualitative researcher
treats his or her observational, interview, or survey data like a text, using other sources to then
interpret it.

When combining the results and discussion sections, headings become crucial as they present
the main points that the qualitative research writer is trying to make with his or her analysis of
data. In fact, these headings usually serve as a type of transition between the major points of
analysis being made about the data.

The First Paragraph
No matter how you organize and write your discussion section, the first paragraph should
clearly state how you answered your research question and what your overall findings were. In
other words, the first paragraph should serve as an introduction for the rest of your analysis to
come.
Discussing Research Limitations
Regardless of whether the results and discussion section are combined, at the end, the qualitative research writer should clearly and accurately discuss the limitations of his or her study. This not only creates better credibility for the qualitative research writer, but it also creates a jumping off point for the audience of other researchers to further this qualitative research in the future. Because all research builds on other studies, describing places where future qualitative research could be improved upon is particularly important, particularly to your audience of other researchers who might use your suggestions to begin further research of their own. Finally, the qualitative research writer can also explain how his or her research could have social significance and how it could possibly help others. Explaining the social significance should answer “So what? Why is this research important for other people?” In some studies, the limitations and significance are often under the heading of “Conclusion,” although not always.

Discussion and Practice
1) In a previous Discussion and Practice, we asked you to look at data from Qualitative Case D and the collection of 23 short interview responses responding to the research question, “What motivates people to play computer games?” If you did not do that activity, code and analyze that data now, looking for categories and patterns. Using the notes now or from the last time you coded that data, write a brief discussion section about those results in groups of two or three.
   • In the first paragraph, explain how you answered your research question and what your most important findings were.
   • In the next paragraphs, discuss each finding in more depth (each major finding should at least have its own paragraph or more). Support each finding with interview quotes or paraphrases.
   • Analyze each finding in more depth. What do you think causes each motivation? Why? Refer back to the interview quotes and see if any of them shed more light on why these motivations happen. Also, in explaining why these motivations are possible, feel free to refer to any theories or ideas in any other books you have read or lectures you have heard.

Chapter Project: Step 4 – Discussion and Results Sections
Conduct your research and then write a results and discussion section for it, using the steps described above.

References
Most social science research is cited using the style of American Psychological Association (APA). However, citation style varies between disciplines. Always ask your professor about which citation style he or she wants you to use. (For more information on how to cite your sources using APA style, refer to Chapter 11.) While citation can often seem overly nit-picky, it is important to be accurate because citation quickly tells other researchers how to find the sources you have used. By looking at your sources, they can check your sources for accuracy or, even more likely, they can read and then use your sources in their own research.
The Appendix
The appendix comes at the very end of a research report. The appendix is where you can include the detailed data from your study that would be too overwhelming to include in your article. Here is where you could include a verbatim transcript from your interviews or your observation notes. Some researchers will add artifacts that they referred to in the rest of their report including documents, pictures, and diagrams.

While the appendix is an optional part of a research report, it is especially important for your audience of qualitative researchers. This is where other qualitative researchers interested in your research can critique your methods or investigate even more in depth how you conducted your study so that they can build upon it in their own studies. They can also read the appendix and tell if your analysis of the findings match up with your data.

The Abstract
The abstract is a paragraph summary of your whole research project. The abstract serves as a type of cliffs notes for other researchers. Most academic research studies are extremely long, so other researchers will read the abstract instead of the entire study in order to quickly see if the study is related or relevant to their own research. If it is, then they will more carefully read the study in its entirety. The abstract is located at the beginning of your report. However, because you are summarizing all of your research in the abstract, especially your findings, the abstract should be written last after you know exactly what your findings are.

As a summary of your entire study, the abstract should first clearly state the purpose of your study. However, it should also do more than that. Like the literature review, it should briefly summarize previous studies to argue for why your research is new or innovative. The abstract should also briefly describe your methods. In other words, who did you interview? Where did you conduct your observation? How many did you conduct? For how long did you conduct your observations? Clearly describing the purpose of your study and the methods will help quickly orient other researchers to what your research is about.

The most important part of the abstract, though, is the description of the findings. Your audience of other researchers needs to quickly see what your research found and judge for themselves whether or not they want to look at your study further for their own research purposes. Consequently, the more detailed you are in describing your findings the better.

Should You Use Headings?
Headings are most often used to label sections of a qualitative study. With headings, your audience of busy researchers quickly knows which sections of your study to read and can more easily navigate your article. They also serve as a type of transition between sections because usually there are not formal transitions between sections like there would be in a traditional essay. For instance, the abstract and introduction sections are usually labeled with a heading. In fact, in some studies, every section of the study has a heading. However, many times sections will also be combined and/or not clearly labeled with a heading. If the results and discussion
sections are separated, they usually are labeled with clear headings. If the results and discussion sections are combined, then usually sub-headings that list major points of data analysis are used.

What Voice Do You Use in Writing about Qualitative Data?
In qualitative research writing, there is no hard and fast rule on voice, or the use of first or third person. First person (the use of “I”) and third person (the use of he, she, or they) voice are both used in writing for the social sciences, business, and education. Consequently, the choice to use first or third voice depends mostly on audience—the type of academic forum you wish to publish in or the teacher you need to write for. For instance, for the journal *Women and Language*, Lynn Cockett and Johanna Holtan use first person in their study on female athletes. “We examined women athletes in three different contexts: on the playing space, in a focus group, and in the examining room of a college training room.” Using first person in academic writing is probably the most rhetorically honest because it indicates that you, as the writer, also conducted your research.

Using third person voice, on the other hand, sounds more objective. Third person often makes it sound as if the research conducted itself because third person makes it easier to erase the writer and the researcher. For example, for the journal, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, Sally Ross and Kimberly Shinew write in third person: “Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed to investigate how seven gymnasts and seven softball players competing in NCAA Division I athletics view and contend with a ‘female/athlete paradox.” Because of the use of passive voice, it is unclear who is conducting and analyzing the interviews. Responsibility for conducting and analyzing the interviews is removed from the writers. However, because of this, the research sounds more objective, as if the research could be conducted by itself, free from human error and bias.

Some social science academic journals strive to emulate the physical sciences’ use of third person voice because it sounds more objective. However, there is still debate about the use of first or third person voice in physical science journals as well. While third person voice sounds more objective, people still conduct and then write about studies and experiments—people who make mistakes and can be prone to bias.

Discussion and Practice

1) Examine the abstract from the Scholarly Example below—Yasemin Besen’s “Exploitation or Fun?” What voice does Besen use? Knowing that Yasemin Besen is an anthropologist who published this article in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, why do you think that she chose to use this voice? Skim the first few pages of the article. What voice does Besen use in the article? Why?

2) What are some other advantages and disadvantages of using first person voice in a scholarly research article? Why?

3) What are some advantages and disadvantages of using third person in a scholarly research article? Why?
4) Why do you think second person voice (using “you”) is hardly ever used in any scholarly writing (no matter the discipline)?

5) What voice do you think is the best for writing a scholarly research article? Why?
Scholarly Example

The article below, “Exploitation or Fun” written by Yasemin Besen, is a scholarly article written about qualitative research. It is an example of the type of scholarly research article that this chapter strives to teach you how to write. It specifically illustrates the writing advice given in the previous section, “How Do You Write about Qualitative Research?” To better see the writing strategies being used in the article, pay special attention to the call-out boxes on the side which will explain them. Of course, the scholarly example below is also written for an audience of researchers, so pay particular attention to the rhetorical writing strategies used in each section to make Besen’s qualitative research appear important, relevant, and new to this audience. Look at what each section of the article—the abstract, intro, methods, and results/discussion sections—accomplishes as well as the overall format, structure, and style of the article as a whole.

The following selection is an ethnography written by Yasemin Besen and published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, an academic journal that examines ethnography within a range of disciplines. The journal has featured ethnographies that examine cultural practices as diverse as baseball wives to how social control is used in a home for delinquent boys. Yasemin Besen is an assistant professor of sociology at Montclair State University.

Exploitation or Fun? The Lived Experience of Teenage Employment in Suburban America

Yasemin Besen
Montclair State University

Abstract: Objectivist scholars characterize typical teenage jobs as “exploitive”: highly routinized service sector jobs with low pay, no benefits, minimum skill requirements, and little time off. This view assumes exploitive characteristics are inherent in the jobs, ignoring the lived experience of the teenage workers. This article focuses on the lived work experience of particularly affluent, suburban teenagers who work in these jobs and explores the meaning they create during their everyday work experience. Based on a large ethnographic study conducted with the teenage workers at a national coffee franchise, this article unravels the ways in which objectivist views of these “bad jobs” differ from the everyday experience of the actors. The findings show that from the perspective of the teenagers, these “exploitive jobs”...
are often seen as fun, social, and empowering and are free spaces where they can express their creativity and individuality. These findings demonstrate the importance of employing a constructionist view in understanding teenage employment and inequality.

Author’s Note: The author would like to thank Dr. Daniel Cassino, Dr. James B. Rule, Dr. Timothy Moran, Dr. Naomi Rosenthal, Dr. Scott Harris and the three anonymous reviewers for their comments.

People think I do this for the money. “Oh, you are a typical teenager,” they say. “You need a car and a cell phone and clothes and stuff.” But . . . it’s not like that. I do [buy] stuff, but I don’t work here to pay for all that. It’s fun, you know. This is where I hang out.

Jenny, an 18-year-old college student, spoke these words to me as she emptied an overstuffed garbage bag at the end of her double shift. Jenny, like many teenagers, works everyday at the local coffee franchise after school. She commutes an hour and back every day after school, where she serves endless lines of demanding customers, mops floors, wipes tables, and carries loads of garbage. In her typical shift, she is asked to follow a detailed script and perform every task according to the “manual.” She does all of this work for minimum wage and no benefits.

Operating within an objectivist perspective, many sociologists would interpret these working conditions as undesirable and characteristic of “bad” jobs: highly mechanized, with minimal skill requirements, low hourly pay, and long shifts. Ritzer (2000) depicts such service work as “McJobs” that are boring and dehumanizing, in part because they involve deskilled, routinized labor that largely eliminates employee discretion and creativity. Such jobs are controlled by detailed rules and standardized techniques imposed from above.

From the employee’s perspective, McJobs are irrational because they don’t offer much in the way of either satisfaction or stability. Employees are seldom allowed to use
anything approaching all their skills, are not allowed to be creative on the job. The result is a high level of resentment, job dissatisfaction, alienation, absenteeism, and turnover.

(Ritzer 2000, 137)

Robin Leidner (1993), in Fast Food, Fast Talk, similarly depicts these jobs as detailed and scripted, in which the workers are left no autonomy and power.

Because objectivist scholars assume such jobs provide little intrinsic satisfaction, the reasons for working have been reduced to economic gratifications. That is why authors often assume these “bad” jobs are performed by the economically deprived: teenagers working after school, especially under severe conditions, are traditionally thought to be working to supplement their income and put themselves through school.

Surprisingly, Jenny, like all the other teenagers working at the coffee shop I studied, deviates considerably from these preconceptions. While such jobs have typically been associated with and taken up by the working classes, Jenny and her coworkers, with their fashionable hairstyles, designer clothes, trendy accessories, brand-new cars and high-technology cell phones, are far from working class. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Report on the Youth Labor Force (Herman 2000), a majority of the current youth labor force is comprised of teenagers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the report, only 15% of teenagers in the lowest income quartile work while employment increases substantially as the family income increases.

In both preconceptions and analyses of the youth labor market, the focus has been on the work experience of teenagers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While the work experience of economically deprived teenagers is more visible to many researchers—and is a

Comment [R6]: The literature review gets more specific here. Specific points from previous research are paraphrased and quoted. This also illustrates how you can cite these sources in your own paper.

Comment [R7]: This paragraph shows what is lacking with the previous research, building the research gap—the reason for why this research study is needed.

Comment [R8]: This paragraph develops the research gap more, explaining specifically how this ethnographic research study differs from previous research and also arguing further for why it is needed.
valid and important subject for research—such a perspective overlooks the lived experience of much of the current youth labor force. The perspective of these affluent teenagers is also worthy of study: how they experience what are referred to as “bad” jobs, and how they perceive this exploitation, are often neglected.

Furthermore, bringing in this sometimes ignored portion of the current labor force not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of the current youth labor force but also offers a unique opportunity to study motivations to work from the actors’ perspective. If, in fact, these “bad jobs” provide only economic benefits (and meager ones at that), then why would affluent teenagers end up performing such jobs? Such an analysis will explain how “objective” inequalities are interpreted and justified in the everyday subjective experience of these workers’ lives.

This article focuses on the lived experience of a large segment of the youth labor force—affluent teenage workers in suburban America—and looks at the everyday experiences of work from the perspective of the actors as they define and understand their seemingly inegalitarian and exploitive occupations. In doing so, I hope to show that inequality and exploitation are socially constructed interpretations (rather than inherent meanings), and that scholarly analyses of these concepts can benefit if they are based on the everyday perspectives of actors rather than outside observers (see also Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Harris 2000). Such research is also important from an economic perspective, as it focuses on a substantial portion of the labor force filling service sector jobs in America today: affluent, suburban teenagers. As Chris Tilly (1995) argues, youth constitute a substantial portion of the current labor force as they perform an important part of all service sector jobs.
The prevalence of teenage labor in the United States is a result of a number of factors. First, the American economy has shifted to a predominantly service- and retail-based economy. Between the 1940s and mid-1970s, the service and retail sectors combined created 15.8 million jobs: 9.3 million in the service sector, and 6.6 million in retail (Ginzberg 1977). While the shift from production to service and retail created an unprecedented number of jobs, most of these jobs were what Ginzberg (1977) referred to as “bad jobs.” Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) characterize these jobs as having low wages; odd hours; irregular shifts, including nighttime and weekend work; seasonality; high turnover; and absence of benefits and promotions.

Because these jobs are assumed to be exploitive by nature—while providing few benefits to employees—work for these teenagers is typically reduced (in analysts’ thinking) to economic need. That is why little research considers why teenagers would take up such positions. The lived experience of teenage employment from their perspective thus remains unexplored.

Although a rich sociological literature exists on teenage employment, it focuses on the effects rather than the causes of employment. The studies of these effects have included analyses of teenagers’ development (Finch et al. 1991; Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Mihalic and Elliot 1997; Paternoster et al. 2003), school performance (Bills, Helms, and Ozcan 1995; D’Amico 1984; D’Amico and Baker 1984; Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Marsh 1991; Mortimer and Finch 1986; Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991), acquisition of human capital and skills (Gardecki and Neumark 1998; Mihalic and Elliot 1997; McNeal 1997; Pabilonia 1997; Ruhm 1997; Smith and Rojewski 1993), and deviant behavior (McMorris and Uggen 2000;
Mihalic and Elliot 1997; Paternoster et al. 2003). While many sociologists have explored the effects of teenage employment, its causes have been left to economists. Coming from this perspective, researchers have studied the causes of teenage employment through macrolevel economic factors such as governmental policies (Neumark and Wascher 1992), minimum wage regulation (Gustman and Steinmeier 1988; Card 1992; Wellington 1991; Neumark and Wascher 1992), and fluctuations in supply of, and demand for, teenage labor (Pease and Martin 1997; Card and Lemieux 1997).

While extensive work exists on the causes and effects of teenage employment, stemming from both sociology and economics, the most central actors of teenage work—teenagers themselves—have been left out of the study of teenage employment. Interestingly, along with the near exclusion of teenagers, the work experience has also received scant academic attention. Although teenage employment has been studied extensively from the perspective of many individuals and institutions such as the parents, teachers, and employers, the perspective of teenagers has been neglected.

To bring this viewpoint into focus, my article looks at the lived experience of these “bad” jobs from the viewpoints of the teenagers who do them (Wacquant 1995). It also identifies the mechanisms through which they define their work activities and studies what these seemingly exploitative jobs mean to the actors.

Many sociologists consider these jobs to be exploitative, highly automated, alienating, and requiring no skill (Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Tilly 1995; Ritzer 2000), concluding that the only reason to take them is to make money. While these jobs are not attractive for adults and are considered exploitative and bad from an objectivist perspective, the very same jobs are
considered acceptable from the perspective of the teenagers. It is not surprising that
corporations would want to employ teenagers, especially ones from affluent backgrounds.
Unlike the adults who would otherwise fulfill these positions, affluent teenagers are less
concerned with having benefits, and the less than full-time hours are less problematic for teenagers. Therefore, low wages and lack of benefits that are typical characteristics of exploitive jobs are not necessarily considered exploitive by the teenagers who come from affluent backgrounds with ample allowances and health benefits through their families.

My article looks at the everyday experience of these “bad” jobs and argues that, from the perspective of the actors, they are not simply jobs to be endured for economic reasons. Rather, I have found that these jobs, ironically, provide opportunities for workers to have fun and exercise their individuality, control, authority, and power.

Methods

This article is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork I carried out in 2001 to 2004 in two branches of a national coffee franchise in two affluent suburbs of a large city, both of which are predominantly white with a median income of $70,000. With their economic and ethnic-racial composition, these suburbs offer representative examples of white, affluent suburbs. While my research sites are not representative of all teenage jobs and it is important to acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of all jobs, I believe they provide useful examples as well as sources of inspiration for future research. The coffee shop I studied is probably similar to many teenage jobs, but other occupations—such as those involving fast food rather than coffee, or those that are found in urban areas—may differ substantially and also deserve ethnographic attention.
My main source of data stems from two sources. First, I draw on a vast body of nonparticipant observations collected at the two branches. Throughout the duration of my ethnography, I observed workers in 1- to 8-hour shifts, taking detailed fieldnotes. My notes focused on the detailed description of the tasks performed, recording of the interaction and dialogue between the coworkers throughout the shift, and capturing their interaction with the customers. My observations included both weekday and weekend shifts; morning, afternoon, and night shifts; opening and closing shifts where the managers are present, and other shifts where they are not; as well as shifts where teenagers are scheduled to work together and ones where they work with older employees. I started to record these observations first as a researcher sitting at a close table at the beginning of my ethnography, but with the help of key informants and time, I gained the confidence of the teenagers and started to “hang out” at the counter with other friends of the teenagers who were working, sometimes just observing from the side and sometimes going behind the counter to help them. Such mobility allowed me to try to capture the work experience from different perspectives.

In addition to nonparticipant observations, I have relied heavily on semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with 40 college student employees of the two coffee shops. The teenagers I interviewed were all students who worked part-time or full-time at the coffee shop. Sixty percent of my subjects were female, and 40% were male. The majority of the subjects were white (except for one Asian American employee and one of Indian American origin), and all subjects identified themselves as middle or upper-middle class. The subjects were all employees of the coffee shop during some or all of the duration of my ethnographic study. Every employee who was a student (full-time or part-time) and who was also a teenager was
interviewed in several waves. I had secured contacts with two key informants through the
university, both of whom worked at the coffee shop. These key informants have provided me
access to the other workers.

My face-to-face interviews varied in length from 1 to 2 hours. Most of the respondents
were interviewed again at different intervals. They are complemented by innumerable informal
conversations, most of which took place in various corners of the coffee shops and at the
teenagers’ schools. I interpret the interviews and the conversations in light of my extensive
fieldnotes.

In the following six sections of this article, I highlight central dimensions of workers’
experiences with their jobs, comparing their interpretations with those of objectivist
researchers and theorists. Then, I discuss the issue of exceptions before proceeding to my
conclusion.

Power and Control

Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) characterize typical teenage jobs as requiring no skills
and creativity, highly mechanized, and low paying. Ritzer (2000) argues such jobs leave virtually
no space for creativity. The coffee shops in which I carried out my research seem to fit that
description, at least at first glance: the teenagers who work there are required to be at their
shift on time and not leave the premises during their shift, save for a 15-minute break during
which they are allowed one drink. Their tasks for each shift are strictly codified, described in
detail in the employee handbook. Even what they are supposed to say to the customers is
scripted. From an objectivist perspective, it would seem that the detailed scripts and
organization of this occupation, like other service sector jobs, mean that the individual workers hold little power. However, from the perspective of the teenagers, work at the coffee shop is “not like that.” The meaning of these jobs, therefore, is not inherent (Blumer 1969), as with other situations that sociologists define as unequal or exploitive (Harris 2000). Amy, a 19-year-old college student, describes a typical shift where she is in charge of the whole place. For her, getting to the coffee shop on the day of a blizzard despite her 4-hour commute and missing school was extremely important: she felt that if she didn’t show up, the shop could not function and serve coffee to customers on a cold day. “No one notices if I miss a class or two,” she says, referring to the large university where she is a freshman, “but it’s different here—they need me.” The fact that her tasks are specifically spelled out does not lead her to feel constricted, but rather gives her the feeling of being needed and being in charge of that specific task.

The sense of control over tasks does not come solely from the strict definition of those tasks, but also from the relative power the teenagers have over their work environment. Josh, a 19-year-old student, tells me he feels “in control of everything” throughout the shift because he gets to make the “important decisions.” Important decisions, according to Josh, are not the ones concerning the business of the shop: coffee or operating the cash register. He doesn’t mind those being strictly defined: in fact, he is happy that those “unimportant” things are clearly defined, so he does not have to spend his time worrying about how to make coffee or what to say to the customers. Rather, he finds freedom and control in the decisions concerning his clothing, appearance, shift schedules, and music. One of the reasons he chose to work at the coffee shop was that he could dress in almost the same way he normally does—in casual khakis and simple T-shirts. If you ask Monica, a fashion-conscious freshman, the uniforms are so
fashionable that it’s like a “GAP commercial.” If she had to wear nylon uniforms, she tells me, she wouldn’t want to work there at all. Unlike workers at some fast-food establishments, who do not want to be seen in their uniforms, Monica says she wears her work clothes even after her shift is over. Besides, she adds, “we can accessorize.” One of the reasons why Monica wanted to work at the coffee shop was the freedom she had with her accessories: in her case, long nails and her signature South Asian jewelry showcasing her ethnic identity. None of these were things she wanted to give up for a job. Josh agrees that work is a place where he feels accepted. In most places, his tattoos and numerous piercings—on his eyebrow, lip, and ears—were constant sources of conflict. “School, parents, friends,” he says, were not too happy about his appearance. When he came into the coffee shop as a customer, however, he felt right at home: the girl who served his coffee had similar piercings.

In addition to the freedom to express themselves through their appearance and clothing, many of the teenagers who work at the coffee shop feel that they are in control of their activities during the shift. While the activities throughout the shift are described in detail in employee manuals and are often highly scripted, from the perspective of the workers, they become creative acts. Josh tells me he doesn’t mind that the job is so well defined and scripted: that means that it doesn’t leave much time for worrying about the job, so you can actually enjoy your shift. “We can pick out any CD we want,” he adds. The collection of music and their freedom to choose from the collection are very important to these teenagers because the music decision is, as Josh puts it, “the important stuff.”

“We can also schedule the shifts however we like,” Kelly says. Kelly is an 18-year-old student who just started college. For Kelly, scheduling her shifts with her friends was a
paramount concern. She says that she and her two best friends, Kirsten and Mel, who also work at the coffee shop, try to schedule their shifts so they are able to spend time together while at work. Because of their hectic schedules, they often have trouble getting together, so working at the same shift is an opportunity for them to socialize. “Sometimes,” Kelly adds, “I schedule my shift to see Ben,” referring to her boyfriend who works at the pizza place next door, so that they can spend time with each other while she is at work.

Decisions about clothes, the accessories they use to express their personalities, music, and shifts are the issues that matter to the teenagers who work at the coffee shop. Thus, their lived experience of a work shift full of scripted responses and routinized button pushing is not experienced as one of rigid restrictions, but as one where they make the decisions—or at least the decisions that “matter.”

Lack of External Authority

Rigid rules and restrictions, repetitive work, and detailed, scripted interactions with customers are often presented as characteristic features of service sector jobs (Tilly 1995). Implicit or explicit in such analyses is the idea that workers are subjected to external sources of authority and control, usually represented and enforced by on-site managers and quality-control inspectors. Contrary to these preconceptions, the teenagers at the coffee shop characterize their work experience as being absent of domination, control, and authority. While there is a “supervisor” scheduled to work during every shift, Josh tells me that “she is not really like that.” That is because the supervisor is Jenna, an 18-year-old college student, who is also one of his closest friends. The “manager”—who is usually (but not always) an older and longer-
term employee for whom the coffee shop is a career—is present only during opening and closing shifts. The remaining shifts are supervised by Jenna and Anna, another 19-year-old college student. Because the supervisors are their peers and, in most cases, their friends, most of the teenagers who work at the coffee shop do not feel like there is a boss on the premises. “It’s more like hanging out with friends,” Jenna says. “I’m technically the supervisor, but . . . they’re my friends, you know.”

Among themselves, Jenna tells me they don’t feel like there is a hierarchy: she says they all “hang out.” “No one is assigned to one task,” she says, and hence no one is singled out to be in a separate place. Rather, they all hang out behind the counter at what they refer to as the “bar” area. Because there is no physical separation and restriction, the teenagers feel free to move about the shop.

The absence of formal occupational authority in the workplace is not the only form of freedom at the coffee shop. The workers feel that the coffee shop is a safe haven insulated from other forms of authority as well. As Josh says, it’s not only a great hangout place, but also “my parents are OK with it.” Like most teenagers who work at the coffee shop, Josh says one of the advantages of working is that the workplace is insulated from parental restriction and authority. He complains that his parents “always tell him what to do,” but when he works at the coffee shop, they do not ask any questions. Chores and even homework become secondary considerations when Josh has a scheduled shift. “Even the teachers are nicer,” Josh explains, referring to his professors. Because Josh spends so much time at the coffee shop, he often misses classes and, on occasion, tests—like many of the other workers at the coffee shop. However, he observes that his professors are much nicer to him because he had to work. Work,
therefore, offers a space absent of authority—employer, parent, and teacher—and provides
the workers with a feeling of control over their activities.

Creativity

The feeling of control and authority also stems from the use of creative skills in these
jobs. Traditional accounts characterize these service sector jobs as requiring minimal skills at
best (Ritzer 2000), but this is not how the workers see it. While credentials, experience, and skill
requirements are limited in these jobs, from the perspective of the teenagers there is more to it
than pushing buttons. Teenagers at the coffee shop do not perceive their work experience as
one where they lack skills but rather as a space where they can make use of their skills and their
creativity. Jenna tells me there is a lot more to coffee making than simply the button pressing
described in the employee manuals. “It requires a lot of skill and concentration,” she says,
adding that they have informal foam-making competitions. Throughout the shift, they compete
to see who can make the best foam: a good cup is a matter of pride. They all agree Anna makes
the best foam. Anna takes this task very seriously: “Your milk has to be the perfect temperature
and amount,” she says as she elaborately describes how she goes about making ideal foam.
Tasks like topping coffee with foam may appear to require no skill to an objectivist analyst.
However, these teenagers define this (along with other aspects of their job) as something that
utilizes their skills and concentration. “It’s not just the foam,” Anna asserts. Even the most
straightforward tasks, like making regular black coffee, require engagement and creativity.
“Anybody can make coffee, but making good coffee requires a lot of skill.”

Individuality

By working at the coffee shop, these teenagers not only feel like they’re engaged in
creative activity, but also feel that work is a way for them to express their individuality.

Although typical service sector jobs are portrayed as jobs where employees are expected to look uniform and standardized (Ritzer 2000), for many teenagers, work is a way to express their individuality. Monica says that she feels anonymous and alienated at school, as she goes to a large state school with big classes. At school, nobody knows who she is: she is just one of the students. However, working at the coffee shop distinguishes her; among her friends from school, she is the girl who works at the cool coffee shop. Not only does her work provide her with a distinct identity, but it also gives her and her friends something to talk about. Before she started working, Monica often felt left out because her friends all worked and wanted to talk about their jobs. One of the reasons why she got a job was to give her something to talk about that was “hers.”

Work provides these teenagers with a sense of identity not only at school and with their peers, but also throughout the work shift. According to the teenagers who work at the coffee shop, the uniforms they have to wear do not take away from their individuality. “This is what I normally wear anyway,” says Josh, referring to the khakis and casual T-shirt that serve as his uniform. Moreover, employees’ accessories and personalized items like Anna’s manicured nails, Josh’s piercings and tattoos, and Monica’s ethnic jewelry act as important signifiers of the teenagers’ identities. In displaying these symbols, the workers at the coffee shop inform customers and employees of their interests and hobbies. Josh, for instance, is a first-year theater major and wears a necklace that resembles tragedy and comedy masks. These kinds of symbols are indicators of the teenagers’ personalities and serve to smooth social interactions by giving information about themselves to everyone who comes into the store. Jenna tells me
that these personality makers help workers meet people with similar interests. They also have developed other ways to communicate their interests. “Sometimes, instead of carrying or wearing your symbols, you can write them on personalized coffee cups,” Jenna says.

**Fun and Friendships**

Through these signs and symbols, workers define and use the coffee shop as a place where they can meet new people. While the work experience is traditionally portrayed as being endured rather than enjoyed (Adorno 1994), for these teenagers work provides the opportunity to meet others in the area and socialize with friends (Besen 2004, 2005). Josh was only 17 when he moved to town for college, and remembers that although he was coming to attend a large university, it was difficult for him to meet new people. A university, he says, was too big and impersonal. He didn’t feel as though his school provided much of an opportunity to meet new people or to hang out with his peers. He decided to go to college because everyone in his family did and “it’s something he has to do.” But socially, he didn’t think the university would offer him many options. “I didn’t know anyone,” he remembers, “so I thought work might be the best way [to meet new people].” Interestingly, even though he knew he wanted to work to meet people, he didn’t plan it. As he explained, “I just came in to get coffee one day and I got a job with it.” Instead of going through job listings, searching for contacts, and filling out long applications, he came in to get some coffee and the “manager,” another college student, asked him if he wanted a job. The supervisor who hired him, Jenna, later remembers the day she talked Josh into getting a job at the coffee shop. She says that with his piercings, tattoos, and Radiohead T-shirt, he looked like a cool person, the sort that she would want to hang out with. After she saw his theater-mask-shaped accessories and chatted with him about his passion for
acting as she served his coffee, she realized they were very similar and asked him if he’d consider working at the coffee shop. “You always want cool people to work here,” she tells me.

The conversations in the shop are centered on trivial matters and consumption; in general, talk in the coffee shop is loud and is accompanied by endless laughter and giggles. Not only are the conversations loud, but they are also expressive: they involve waving at friends and hugging and kissing whenever the teenagers arrive or leave.

Throughout a typical shift, these teenage employees—dressed in casual clothes, standing at the bar under spotlights, and holding cups filled with legalized stimulants—laugh, giggle, and engage in endless, loud talk about trivial matters. As they make shopping lists, they shuffle through music with the teenagers who come into the shop as customers, deciding what to play over the store’s stereo system.

The other teenagers they hang out with at the coffee shop are a heterogeneous group. It consists of the peers they meet at the coffee shop, the friends they are scheduled to work with, and other friends who stop by to visit with the workers. The coffee shop provides the social space for the teenagers in the suburbs to meet new people. John, a 19-year-old full-time student who moved to town for college, remembers when he started working at the coffee shop. “I’d just moved [here], and I didn’t know anyone. So, I got a job.” Like Josh, he remembers being intimidated, feeling lost in the large university and lonely in the suburbs. When John moved here, from all the way across the country, he barely knew anyone. He moved away from all of his family and friends and found himself in the suburbs, where teenagers lacked space for social interaction. John didn’t know where to meet people and find friends, and says that this motivated him to work. He says that he believed that the teenagers
who worked there would be “just like him.” He not only made a lot of new friends there, but also met his boyfriend, Chris.

Most people there are from the same age group and share similar interests. Furthermore, the workplace gives them the opportunity to interact with each other in a small, personal space and get to know each other better. This is further facilitated by their clothing and accessories, which are geared toward introducing themselves and marketing themselves to their peers. John and Chris were working at the same shift and, like many other teenagers working at the coffee shop, used their accessories to share their interests.

Similarly, Josh says that he met most of his good friends, like Rachel, Jen, and Joy, through his work at the coffee shop. These four are not just coworkers, but also have become close friends over the time they have worked at the shop. They make sure to schedule their shifts together and spend a lot of time before and after the shifts. “They’re not just colleagues or something, you know: we hang out all the time.” As John says, “Where else can you meet people?”

Donna Gaines has characterized the lives of youth in the suburbs as a “teenage wasteland” (1990). Gaines justifies this label by referring to Satanism, suicidal tendencies, and so-called troubled teenagers. However, I found that for my respondents, suburbia was a “wasteland” because it was unable to provide opportunities for socialization and meeting new people. “You also get to meet other people,” John said about his work at the shop. For the teenagers working at the coffee shop, coworkers are not the only friends to be made. There is a large group of premed students who regularly come to the coffee shop to study. This group of friends generally stops by the coffee shop at around 2:00 p.m. and sits in the “lounge” section
to study and socialize. “That’s how I met Dave,” Kristen, a 19-year-old student, tells me. Kristen, with her endless chatter and jokes, has a very outgoing personality. Despite this, she says that she didn’t have many chances for meeting people before she began working at the coffee shop. She says there is a constant flow of people into the shop and she enjoys being surrounded by so many different people. Dave, a 19-year-old student who spends almost every afternoon at the coffee shop and is Kristen’s best friend, is a regular at the coffee shop. He usually takes a seat close to the bar, where Kristen works, and chats with her throughout her shift. During the breaks, they take smoking breaks outside together and often enjoy day-old pastries behind the counter. They are also joined by their friend, Joe, who brings leftover pizza at the end of the day from the pizza place where he works after school. In addition to the lack of opportunities to meet new people in the suburbs, the suburbs are also defined by workers as a social wasteland because of the limited space they offer for social interaction. At the shop, however, a typical shift is characterized by a constant movement of friends stopping by to hang out with the shop’s employees. “It’s such a convenient location, with my boyfriend working upstairs at the bar,” says Kristen, whose boyfriend works as a bartender during shifts scheduled to coincide with hers. They see each other throughout their shifts and during breaks. With her boyfriend working upstairs, with her friends Joy and Jen working with her at the coffee shop, and with her best friend Dave visiting throughout the shifts, the coffee shop is for Kristen more a space for sociable interaction than it is a space for monotonous, oppressive work.

Among those who visit, there is a pattern, a set of informal norms, governing where the visitors stand in relationship to the employees. Usually, acquaintances who stop by for a quick chat hang out by the side of the counter and chat with the workers as they enjoy their drink.
This resembles hanging out at a bar or a club. Closer friends not only hang out by the side of the counter but also sit down in the lounge area, where the workers on shift come by periodically to talk and hang out with them. The closer friends like Dave, or boyfriends like Chris and Ben, are seated adjacent to the bar, so that they are free to join in the conversation and mingle with the workers, in front of and behind the counter. Although he is not an employee, Dave often goes behind the counter in order to help Kristen lift a heavy box or make coffee.

“Sometimes, we go out afterwards,” Josh tells me, referring to Saturday night outings to clubs or parties, usually with Kristen, Joy, Rachel, and Jen. Right after the shift, the teenagers all go out, and the coffee shop provides a great place for meeting and preparing beforehand. This was evident at the shop during Halloween 2001. Jen, Joy, and Rachel all dressed up in their Halloween costumes, and not just during their shift: even those who weren’t working that night were there to prepare, dress up, and make plans regarding a party after all of them were off work. Their friends, who stop by throughout the shift to get more information about the party, join them. “Which party are we going to?” asks a teenage boy in a Radiohead shirt as he stops by to get coffee. “The one at Gina’s or Melissa’s?” He hangs out by the side of the counter, chatting with Jen and Joy for 10 or 15 minutes as he finishes his coffee. “Gina’s party is going to be better,” Jen says. “Everyone’s going to her [Gina’s] party, but Melissa’s party has a band.” After extended deliberation, a number of phone calls, input from a number of friends and acquaintances grouped around the bar, and input from a number of acquaintances stopping by to ask about the party, they decide to go to Gina’s party. “Great,” the teenager in the Radiohead shirt says. He takes out a pen, scribbles something on a napkin, and hands it to Jen. “Would you give this to Michelle?” he asks. “She’ll stop by later to ask about the party. Just tell
her I’ll be at the party at 9. She is around 5 foot 4—blonde with blue eyes.”

As this example illustrates, the coffee shop is not only a sociable space for peer-to-peer interaction in the “social wasteland,” where space for meeting people and social interaction is limited, but also a center for distributing information and leaving messages. The employees at this low-wage, service sector job are doing more than making lattes; they function as information brokers, making the shop a center in the centerless suburb. From my observations, it is no wonder that teenagers accept what objectivist analysts view as a bad job: in a very real way, it places them at the center of their peer group’s social universe. “It’s not just the parties,” Josh tells me in reference to the importance of the shop in coordinating social activities. Most of the time, there are no house parties hosted by friends, and being at the shop becomes a social activity itself. The suburb does not provide many places where they can all go and hang out: so, after the shift, the workers often stay at the shop. There, they continue conversations with the employees coming on the next shift and with friends visiting the shop; they even occasionally perform odd jobs that would be part of their responsibilities if they were still “on the clock.” For these youth, going to the coffee shop is not experienced as a negative or exploitive situation. Rather, it is one of the few ways for teens in the area to engage in social interaction, the employees as well as the visitors.

Consumption and Pay

For these teens, work is more akin to a leisure activity, like going to the movies or to a club, than it is an economic activity. Work, traditionally viewed as production oriented, is also a form of consumption in the context of suburban teenage labor. While this work facilitates consumption—the workers and visitors eagerly examine the merchandise for sale in the shop,
and compare notes on what they will buy—the work itself becomes an object of consumption.

Few of the employees came to the shop looking for a job; they came, instead, for social interaction, and the money and benefits are almost irrelevant. Rather than spending their money—though they do that—they spend their time in order to interact with their peers, in the same way that their parents might have gone to clubs or lodges. Rather than work being a means to an economic end, the time they spend at work is an end in and of itself. These jobs are consumed along with other products teenagers consume and allow them to be associated with brands they desire. Jenny tells me she does not just work for money to “buy stuff.” It does not mean that she does not buy stuff, though: she tells me “of course” she has a car and the latest-style cell phone and fashionable clothes, but she says the money she earns cannot possibly pay for all her consumption: her parents, she says, pay or help pay for all those things. It’s one thing to purchase a branded item, but being associated with a “cool brand” though employment is priceless.

While objectivist analysts are correct that these jobs are typically associated with low pay and a lack of benefits, the low pay does not seem to be defined as an inequality or a problem for the teenage workers. There are two main reasons for this. First, as noted before, any economic gains from their labor are almost superfluous, as the teenagers work more for social reasons than for money. Second, and parallel with this, most of the teenage employees in the shop come from affluent backgrounds. Jenna tells me she does not need the money—her parents are both professionals and quite wealthy—but she says she would pay the company for the opportunity to work at the shop and to be associated with “such a cool brand.” She says she could never work in a place if she didn’t like the brand or enjoy its products. As she tells me, she
was going to get the products anyway, and “it’s good to get the discounts.” For Jenna, working is no different from consuming the products of the workplace. As she puts it, “When you work somewhere, you are seen with the products,” referring to the free coffee beans the store gives out every week to the employees or the one drink they are allowed per shift. For Jenna, it has to be a product she is proud to use and possibly show off.

Monica, a close friend of Jenna who started at the coffee shop just a month before I spoke to her, is also into shopping—not just clothes but stuffed animals, mugs, and coffee as well. Whatever she buys is from the brands she enjoys and sells to others. She tells me that her first paycheck went straight to buying stuff from the shop.

I would argue that the consumption element of the job is also present in how positions are marketed to potential employees. Rather than focusing on the benefits, pay, hours, or opportunities for advancement or experience, the ads ask customers if they “want a job with their coffee.” In these ads, and ones like them, the job itself is marketed as a product, as an enjoyable experience to be consumed by the teenagers. Also, the marketing of these jobs is designed to reinforce the potential employees’ consumption patterns. A job becomes a mean to obtain the goods sold at the store. The discounts for the coffee beans, chocolates, coffee mugs, travel cups, and stuffed animals sold at the coffee shop become an incentive to work. The job is marketed as a way to consume and associate oneself with the shop’s brand name, something teenagers feel happy rather than exploited to do.

**Exceptions**

While my findings suggest a pattern of enjoyment and fun among the teenagers I studied at the coffee shop, there are some instances where workers complained. During
periods when work obligations increase—such as when overtime or double shifts are
required—some teenagers do grumble, especially if these requirements interrupt their social
interaction. When the coffee shop has unusually long lines that get in the way of chatting with
friends, there is temporary uneasiness. However, just like other aspects of work, these
obligations that hinder fun are reinterpreted to create a continuous meaning. For example,
when I asked John how he handled his required double shifts one busy holiday season, he said
this was an excellent opportunity to spend more time with friends! Therefore, while I
acknowledge that teenagers’ daily work experiences are not devoid of what objectivist scholars
refer to by “bad jobs,” I would argue that even these “bad” qualities tend to be perceived in a
positive light by the teenagers, as they imbue even the most inconvenient qualities with
positive, social meanings.

Another exception to the pattern of widespread contentment involved a less affluent
worker who was not a teenager. Joann is a slightly older employee from a relatively lower
socioeconomic background compared to the other students working at the coffee shop.
Especially when her mother got ill and quit her job, she felt a greater need for money and
started to be more concerned with getting benefits and working more hours. However, because
the dominant culture of the coffee shop centered around fun (and related meanings), she
defined her job along the lines of the other teenagers and started another job to earn money,
keeping this one for social reasons.

Conclusion

My ethnographic study of two suburban coffee shops explored teenagers’ lived
experience of work. While these jobs are often portrayed from an objectivist perspective as
exploitive with no control and authority, limited opportunities to use skills or express individuality, and low pay and restrictive shifts, from the perspective of the teenagers the lived experience of these jobs differs substantially. Teenagers who work in the coffee shop define their everyday work experience as one of free space—free of adult supervision where they can socialize, make important decisions, and be creative. The teenagers en-joy their jobs, in the interpretive sense of that word. They define and treat their work as fun—as a situation of consumption rather than mere wage-earning production. Thus, the simple but larger point that I draw from my analysis is this: situations that appear (to analysts) to be clearly unequal and exploitive may not necessarily be experienced that way by the persons involved. Daily experience of work is socially constructed—that is, created through people’s interactions and interpretations. Teenagers act based on their perceptions of the job: in this case, these jobs are not perceived as “jobs” but rather as social spaces of interaction, devoid of external adult supervision, where they feel they have discretion and control. These findings regarding the suburban teenage workers of the coffee shop provide a necessary corrective to some of the taken-for-granted objectivist perceptions of work.

As Blumer (1969, 3-4, 11-12, 68-69) argues, meaning is not inherent. Accordingly, nothing is inherently equal or unequal. Power, exploitation, inequality, and similar qualities are meanings that people must define into being if they are to exist for those people. Borrowing from Blumer, Harris (2001) outlines a constructionist approach to studying inequality. He argues that a fundamental premise of this approach should be that “[p]eople act on the basis of their perceptions of inequality, if and when it is a relevant concern to them” (Harris 2001, 457). From an objectivist perspective, the jobs I studied lack power, control, creativity, and
individuality, and are monotonous and dehumanizing. In short, conventional scholars define these jobs as “no fun.” However, a constructionist perspective alerts us to the fact that the very same occupations may not be interpreted or viewed as such by the teenagers. The teenagers who work at the coffee shop interpret and define their jobs as fun and social, with copious authority and freedom to express their individuality. Moreover, the coffee shop functions as an important center for social interaction and is central to the flow of information between teenagers in their centerless suburbs. In addition to pushing buttons and making coffee, the employees of these shops distribute information, however trivial it may seem to an objectivist scholar, about which party is going to be better, which products and brands are in favor, and who is going to be where, and when. In this function and others, teenagers find their work is creative and engaging. The routinized button pushing is often extraneous to what they see as their really “important” functions, just like the money they receive for doing so.

My research shows that these jobs are not inherently “bad” or “exploitative,” but that the actors transform these experiences into a different reality: one of social enjoyment, power, control, and creativity. From their view, the teenage workers do not feel exploited by the employers, but ironically feel like they are using these jobs for their own purposes. They are hired to push buttons and pour coffee, but fill their time instead with social interaction. They are paid, essentially, to do something that they would aspire to regardless: serve as the center of an otherwise centerless suburb. As such, the teenagers’ experience of these “bad jobs” differs considerably from the objectivist understandings of exploitive jobs.

The enjoyment of these “bad jobs” by teenagers, however, does not mean that fun is really what those jobs are, or that there’s really no need to improve those jobs. I am not using
the idea that “Meaning is not inherent” to imply that “Everything is morally OK just as it is.”

Instead, I am using that constructionist premise to draw attention toward meaning making, toward how inequalities come (or not) to be defined, perceived, and experienced as such. I am arguing that in the study of work, too many scholars have imposed objectivist meanings, and that more attention could be given to the lived experiences of these sorts of teenage workers. Thus, constructionist research like mine does not necessarily undermine or discount the contributions of conventional research and the proposals for reform that emerge from it.

However, my work does complicate the sometimes “totalizing” narratives that scholars such as Ritzer (2000) tell.

Implications, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

It is important to acknowledge that not all employed teenagers come from backgrounds as privileged as my respondents’. The employees of the coffee shop were predominantly white and identified themselves as middle to upper-middle class. The marked absence of race and working classes from the coffee shop obviously places limits on my study. Teenage workers in the inner cities may be less likely to define their jobs as my respondents did. Moreover, the workers I studied were employed by a brand that is widely considered to be “cool.” Clearly, not all service sector occupations share this trait. Hence, even in affluent suburban settings, it is likely that many teenager workers do not experience their work as my respondents did.

Representativeness and generalizability are important questions that can be raised about every ethnographic study; in the case of this project, I believe that the coffee shop portrays a useful example of the kind of jobs that teenagers take in the suburbs. It may be possible to generalize from the coffee shop to some other service sector jobs in the suburbs. If
more researchers look, they may find what I have found. However, it is important to acknowledge that teenage workers in other kinds of businesses and in other areas (e.g., rural or urban) may or may not imbue their jobs with different meanings than what I found. It is an open empirical question. Unfortunately, my sense is that sociologists are not disposed to seeking out data that suggest that “workers may not experience their jobs to be as exploitive as we think they are.” This is why studies such as mine can be helpful. It is necessary to round out the sociological portrayal of work by respecting and studying workers’ lived experiences—even (or especially) those experiences that may be inconvenient to sociologists’ accounts. On the other hand, there is a way in which my study can be used to complement and buttress conventional accounts of inequality. My findings suggest another way in which “the poor get poorer.” There can be important consequences when affluent teenagers consider work a fun activity and choose to spend their after-school hours hanging out in these “bad jobs”: their less affluent counterparts find it more and more difficult to find jobs.

This has important implications for the creation and reinforcement of existing inequalities, viewed from an objectivist perspective. Because “bad jobs” are enjoyed by teenagers who don’t need money or benefits, employers may prefer them over their counterparts who are concerned with material benefits. Less affluent teenagers are less privileged in finding jobs, as available jobs tend to be located in the more affluent suburbs and not in the inner cities. However, even when they travel long distances, they are often turned down and replaced by their more affluent counterparts (Besen 2005; see also Newman 1999).

Thus, by understanding the work experience of these bad jobs from the perspective of the actors, we can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perspective of the actors, we can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perspective of the
employers. By employing this particular group, they have the advantage of having a body of employees who do not mind the low pay and long shifts and who truly enjoy the atmosphere and the products of the coffee shop. Understanding the work experience, therefore, increases our understanding of the creation and reinforcement of “objective” inequalities and allows us to see the mechanisms through which employees give consent to working under such conditions (see also Burawoy 1979).

While constructionist analyses can be made to serve such conventional sociological ends, the constructionist perspective must be used carefully and not overly selectively. In the study of work, where work has been taken for granted as a set of activities performed for monetary gratifications, the constructionist perspective teaches us to be cautious of meta-narratives. When objectivist scholars characterize entire employment sectors with broad generalizations, they risk obscuring and distorting the lived experiences of the people they write about. In contrast, a constructionist perspective encourages scholars to investigate putatively unequal experiences to discover what they mean to participants themselves. In the case of my study, the inequalities that sociologists decry were not experientially relevant features of participants’ lives. This critique is possibly true of many other occupations and many other social situations. Therefore, a constructionist view can benefit the understanding of work as well as many other sociological arenas that haven’t yet fully been studied from the perspective of the actors.

References
Notes
1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Although one of the suburbs houses a large state university, the suburb itself cannot be described as a college town because an overwhelming majority of the undergraduate population commutes. The other suburb, on the other hand, does not house a university, and the in-depth interviews with teenage working at both these branches show no differences in terms of their experience of work.

Scholarly Example Reading Questions

Writing Strategies
1) Audience: Who is the biggest audience for “Exploitation or Fun?” Why?
2) Purpose: What do you think is Besen’s purpose in writing this article about her qualitative research? Why?
3) Abstract
   a. What is the purpose of the abstract for its audience?
   b. While thinking about the purpose of the abstract, what do you think is the most important part of the abstract for its audience? Why?
   c. What do you think is the least important part of the abstract for its audience? Why?
   d. What is the most detailed part of the abstract in “Exploitation or Fun?” Why do you think this is?
   e. What is the least detailed part of the abstract in “Exploitation or Fun?” Why?
4) Literature Review. The purpose of the literature review is to create context for your research. It establishes what research related to your own has been published in the past. However, most importantly, the literature review is also an argument. By establishing what has been published in the past, the literature review also gives you room as the writer to argue for ways in which your own research is new, original, and badly needed. Arguing for how your research is new is also called creating a research gap.
   a. What is the research gap(s) in “Exploitation or Fun?”
   b. Why is it important in writing about your qualitative research to establish a research gap? How does a research gap influence the primary audience of this article?
5) Methods
   a. Why is including a methods section important to the primary audience of a qualitative study?
   b. What are important things to mention in a methods section for a qualitative study? Why?
6) Results/Discussion
   a. Why are headings important in showcasing data in a qualitative research study? How do they help the audience read the article?
   b. How is the research data in “Exploitation or Fun?” organized? Why do you think it is organized in this way for its audience?
c. Is the organizational structure used for the data in “Exploitation or Fun?” effective to read? Why or why not?
d. In what other ways could you have organized this data?
e. How were sources used in “Exploitation or Fun?” to interpret the data? Was the data interpreted effectively for its audience? Why or why not?
f. In what ways was the data in “Exploitation or Fun?” interpreted like a text?

7) Conclusion
   a. The conclusion argues for the significance of the research. In other words, the conclusion very clearly answers the question “So what?” Why is it important for the primary audience to see the significance of the research at the very end of the article?
   b. What was the significance of “Exploitation or Fun?”
   c. Why are using sources to show the significance important?
   d. How are the sources used?

8) Limitations
   a. Why is including a limitations section at the end of a qualitative study important to the audience?

Research Methods
1) Methods
   a. What are the two types of qualitative research that Besen is undertaking in “Exploitation or Fun?”
   b. What are the benefits of using these types of research methods?
   c. What are the drawbacks or limitations of using these types of research methods?
   d. What other types of qualitative research methods could Besen have undertaken?

2) Limitations
   a. What were the study limitations for “Exploitation or Fun?”
   b. What were some other potential limitations for this study that were not mentioned?

Students as Scholars

The qualitative study below was written by a first-year writing student. It is organized a little bit differently than the previous scholarly example. In addition, there is no commentary on it. So, as you read it, compare it to what you have already learned about how to write a qualitative study. In particular, compare it to Besen’s scholarly article that you have just read. Although some of the sections are not titled like they are in Besen’s paper, think about where you would include an abstract and methods section as you read. Also, try to find the introduction, literature review, results, and discussion sections. As you read, consider how each of these parts are structured. Finally, think of what you would potentially use and do differently from this example when you write your own paper.
Sara Ziffer wrote her ethnography as a first-year writing student at the University of Denver. Her assignment was to write an ethnography about some cultural or social phenomenon in her local community of Denver. Sara was given eight weeks to complete this ethnography.

The Importance of Positive Employee-Customer Relations

Sara Ziffer
University of Denver

Introduction

Employee-customer relations are very important in a business. If customer satisfaction goes down, the business declines. Typically, when an employee is negative, the customer will have a bad experience and may not want to return to the company. In contrast, when an employee seems positive, the customer will have a good experience with the company and will be likely to return. A study on customer satisfaction by Dubé et al. showed that customers’ pleasure increased when the company would have tastier food, have a larger menu variety, be attentive, be helpful, and had a quiet, private atmosphere (Dubé, Renaghan, & Miller, 1994). The results also showed that business opportunity increased with these beneficial qualities towards customers.

By observing a local Jamba Juice, I was able to study these important employee-customer relationships. Jamba Juice was an ideal place for observation because it provided an environment in which the employees and the customers came in contact frequently, therefore giving me plenty of opportunity to note their interactions.

In a letter to Jamba Juice customers (see Appendix A), the managers state that they intend to make their customers feel included in their “Jamba Family,” greet their customers and have them feel welcome, and have their customers “feel better than when they walked in” (C. Martinez & M. DePaul, personal communication, April 28, 2008). Often, when I walk into a
store or a restaurant, someone at the front will say hello and offer to help in some way. I wanted to know how and why employees interact with their customers in certain ways, such as saying hello when customers walk through the door or putting on a smile when communicating with them.

The questions I wanted answered are follows: why do employees emit positive attitudes when dealing with customers, and how do the employees exhibit these positive and friendly attitudes?

In order to find the answers, I observed Jamba Juice employees and customers and noted what actions employees take when dealing with a customer. I observed their interactions on different days of the week, for one to two hours at a time. By observing for at least an hour, I was able to observe the actions of employees through their shifts. These observations also helped to convey the overall picture of these employee-customer relations. An interview I held with the store manager helped to answer some direct questions I had about employees and their positive attitudes with customers. This interview gave an inside perspective on the employee-customer relations in Jamba Juice. The interview also provided insight on other behind-the-scenes work employees do in order to ensure their customers have a positive experience.

By using an interview with a Jamba Juice manager and taking observations of Jamba Juice’s employee-customer relations, I was able to conclude how and why employees act positively when dealing with customers.

Study
Jamba Juice is a national chain of smoothie shops founded in 1990 in San Luis Obispo, California (Guttau, 2007). Jamba Juice specializes in smoothies, which are made with fresh fruit along with sherbet, yogurt, or fruit juice. The company focuses on fresh and healthy food choices. The Jamba Juice store observed is next to a college campus. The store recently opened in November 2007 and was designed to be modern, comfortable, and fitting for its customers in the campus’s area (Guttau, 2007).

The overall atmosphere of Jamba Juice provides both the customers and the employees with a fun and colorful environment. In the letter to Jamba Juice customers, it is stated that the people, sights, sounds, and smells of the store should emit a positive energy. In an interview with Cristal Martinez, the general manager of the local Jamba Juice, Martinez stated that the employees, the appearance, the lighting, the music, and the smell of the store should provide for the customer’s satisfaction. She explained that the employees squeeze fresh oranges throughout the day in order to give the store a pleasant, fresh smell. During research it was also noted that upbeat music was constantly playing in the store, the chairs were in neon colors, the menu was set into different color-coded sections, and the employees all wore bright orange, yellow, or green hats. Even the names of a Jamba Juice smoothie sound fun and exciting, such as Strawberry Surf Rider, Caribbean Passion, and Orange Dream Machine. Paul Clayton, the CEO of the Jamba Juice Company believes that Jamba Juice should look colorful and exciting. He says, “One criticism I have about the New York City stores is that they are beige. We are not a beige brand – we are vibrant and colorful. (Boyle, 2007)” Martinez also explained that, in order to optimize the appearance of their stores, Jamba Juice builds different, full-size store models in a warehouse so that they are able to test certain characteristics of the store. The company
brings in customers and asks them about their satisfaction with the store model. Jamba Juice clearly strives to create an enjoyable environment for their treasured customers. A study shows that the atmosphere of a restaurant is one of the most important factors in determining where people want to eat (InSook & BongSoon, 2004). Producing a positive environment improves customer satisfaction because the customers feel comfortable and have a great experience.

Throughout the day, Jamba Juice employees kept their stations clean. Chairs were pushed in and kept organized, dirty blenders were brought to the back for washing, trash was picked up off the floors and tables, and the tops of tables and counters were wiped down with a cloth. This was mostly done when customers were not being served or not many customers were in the store. Cleanliness is an important factor in where customers eat, as one study shows (InSook & BongSoon, 2004). When customers see a clean environment to eat in, they feel comfortable knowing that the employees take care of their restaurant and their food, and will therefore take care of their customers.

Verbally welcoming customers also seemed to be an important factor in Jamba Juice's customer service. As soon as a customer walked into the store, at least one employee would give a pleasant greeting along with a cheery smile. When the customer reached the register to order, the employee would say a quick “hello” and possibly a “how are you?” or a “what can I get for you?” as well. Towards the end of a customer’s visit, the employee would hand the smoothie to the customer and say something like, “here you go! Have a nice day!” These greetings can leave the customer feeling special and welcome because the employees acknowledge them when they enter and leave the store. Without a greeting a customer may feel like they go unnoticed, causing their overall pleasant experience to decline from the
moment they walk in. A quick smile and a warm welcome can go a long way in brightening a customer’s day.

Jamba Juice employees use a customer’s name in order to make the customer feel unique and important. Martinez says that the employees try to use customers’ names as much as possible. It was observed that names were used the most when an employee had finished making a smoothie and wanted to let the customer know it was ready. Other times that names were used include when a customer was getting charged (“your total Rachel is $4.70 today.”), when a customer had finished an order (“Thank you, Rachel.”), and when a customer was receiving a smoothie (“Rachel, here is your Pomegranate Paradise.”). Research has shown that personalization is regarded highly important by customers (Walsh and Godfrey, 2000; Mittal & Lassar, 1996). Mittal and Lassar explain that customer satisfaction is greatly influenced by personalization and that “personalization emerges as the most important determinant of perceived service quality (Mittal & Lassar, 1996).” By personalizing a customer’s visit, a customer knows that the employees consider them as an individual and that each and every person is highly valued as a customer.

Free smoothie products seem to lead to a customer’s positive experience as well. Free smoothie boosts were given to each customer, and it was common to see an employee hand out free samples to their customers. By walking around giving free samples, employees gave customers a chance to try other options on the menu. Customers seemed joyful when they were able to try a “Granola Topper”, a thick yogurt-smoothie with granola on top, without having to purchase it. When handing out the samples, the employee would tell the customer about the organic granola and other fresh ingredients blended into the Granola Topper. Passing
out free samples gives the employees a chance to communicate with customers about their products, and it lets the customer know that the company wants them to try more of their products and come back for more.

During observation it was noted that Jamba Juice employees would do small things to support customer satisfaction. Before a smoothie was given to a customer, employees would always put a straw in the drink, with the top part of the paper still on. Customers would not have to bother with putting a straw in but would not be turned off by a stranger touching the top of the straw. When a customer had trouble deciding which smoothie to purchase, the employee working the register would help out and give advice on which choice might be best. When customers received this type of assistance, they would see that employees liked to help customers in choosing which smoothie they wanted. Martinez also explained that Jamba Juice employees “go above and beyond” in order to help out customers in any way, such as opening the door for customers or helping a customer carry a large order to the car. Assistance of any sort adds to the overall positive experience of a customer because the customer sees that the employee cares.

Conclusions

Based upon the research, it is determined that employees express positive attitudes by creating a lively atmosphere, keeping a clean environment, greeting customers, using a customer’s name, distributing free products, and assisting the customer whenever possible in order to make customers feel comfortable, welcomed, special, and appreciated.

Due to the fact that not all companies are the same, the way employees emit positive attitudes may be different and might be carried out for dissimilar reasons. Other companies
may also find one of the methods found to express positive attitudes more useful than another, and may therefore apply this preferred method more frequently. However, it is clear than any business, customer satisfaction is critical to sustaining a company.

Although valid results were found, the limited amount of research and observation may restrict the overall reliability of the conclusions made. Only one store location was observed, so conclusions were drawn from this one example. More interviews with multiple ranks of employees and more time spent observing the actions of employees would provide for more stable findings. In addition, the view of customers was not taken into account.

Researchers interested in this topic are advised to get more interviews and additional views of positive attitudes and customer satisfaction, such as the employee’s view and customer’s view, as well as observe other store companies and locations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Jamba Juice Customers

Dear Jamba Juice customers,

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves. My name is Cristal and I am the general manager of your Jamba Juice store near DU. My name is Maureen and I am the district manager of your store. We are very passionate and committed to ensuring that you have a great, consistent experience each and every time you visit us. The expectations and intentions we have for ourselves and for you are as follows:

- We intend to greet all of our Customers and make them feel welcome.
- We intend to identify and acknowledge new Customers and help them through their first Jamba Journey.
- We intend to know all of our regular Customers by name and make them feel part of our Jamba Family.
- We intend to serve you within 3 minutes of ordering.
- We intend for our store energy to be very positive. (People, sights, sounds, and smells).
- We intend for our store to be immaculate, well organized and safe.
- We intend to serve you a perfect smoothie every time.
- We intend for our Customers to feel better than when they walked in.
We strive for perfection with every Customer, but we recognize that we are not there yet. If for any reason you are not completely satisfied with any part of your Jamba Experience, we would like to know about it. Each and every team member is empowered to make things right for you and if we fail to do that... we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to make it right.

You may reach Cristal at 303-722-1625 and you may reach Maureen at 1-800-545-9972 ext 5901. If we have made a difference in your life, please let all of us at Jamba Juice know by emailing www.jambajuice.com and click on the “Talk To Us” section.

We are proud to have you as a Customer and we look forward to the next time we server you.

Sincerely,

Cristal Martinez
General manager
Jamba Juice Company
University Evans
303-722-1625

Maureen DePaul
District manager
Jamba Juice Company

Appendix B: Interview with Cristal Martinez, store manager of local Jamba Juice

What do you do to make customers feel welcome?

Hi when come in, name at register, call at smoothie, thank you Sam, name at register cust.

Names are very important!!

Are employees supposed to do anything when a customer walks through the door, orders their smoothie, gets their smoothie, or leaves the store?

See above

How do you think you handle your customers differently from other companies?

Modify smoothies, number for smoothie, speed of service 3 minutes, memorize right products, same at all stores
What is the employee uniform (hats?) and do you believe it helps with customer satisfaction?

Green is management, orange yellow team members, studies done build stores in warehouse bring customers in

Some like it some are confused by new menu

Why do you set up the menu in a certain way?

Company tries out different stores and sees which is best

How do you satisfy a dissatisfied customer?

As soon as they know they’re dissatisfied, verbally tell them we’ll make it correctly (smoothie), free coupons give us another try, if customer leaves and calls corporate talk to customer – call up store

Do you believe the all natural ingredients affect customer satisfaction? What you offer?

Because it’s healthier? Because it tastes better?

I think so, look at healthy fruit, canned strawberry and syrup is gross. Benefit not treat or after a school snack

And finally, is there anything else you think I should know about your employee-customer relations?

Encourage team to go above and beyond, open door big order carry to car, store clean smell orange juice throughout entire day for smell, music, lighting create lively place instead of ignore them or respond

References


Observation Notes of Jamba Juice

Thursday, April 24, 2:04 – 3:10

“here’s your x”

Short black hair girl “sara I have your carribean passion”
   Here ya go. (thank you) “your welcome!” smiles

All hanging out and talking, no customers 2:07
“Hi!” leader gets ready at register. Smile.
Tattoo girl orders, leader, would you like anything else?” 73 is your change.

Two guys
Green shirt “Can I have a x ....” Don’t seem very excited
Blue shirt, “I’ll have strawberry pb...” leader seems concentrated, hard to hear? Loud music
leader-“thank you!”

michelle! Heres your strawbeery surf rider smiles
leader goes to tables and gives blue his food

lady jean jacket “i’d like to get a mango, excuse me, a pomegranate paradise, and ..”
leader, would like an original, “points to it”’’ smile”

M preparing free samples.
Short hair and long black pony tail preparing smoothies

M friend would you like to try the mango peach topper?x2 to other people
Goes up to people, to sandals and to jeans

Man orders
lady jean .. leader smiles.....thanks

brown haired sandal girl

short hair your smoothie is ready. here ya go. Sandals is eating sample

phone rings short hair picks up this is xx smiling on phone how can I help you

pony preparing smoothie
short hair smiles at sandals
both give her smoothie/food

man chillin on couch drinking small smoothie watching employees

emps. Hanging out not doing much, fixing things, cleaning things? Laughing

blond guy emp. Shift at 2

leader cleaned up trash (straw wrapper) on table. Fixing chairs
comes over, “did your computer come like that?! It caught my eye!” yea ◎ its different short
laugh “its different” still fixing chairs.
short hair to guy sunglasses “which free boost would you like with that ..”

m cleaning counter. Sunglasses looking outside walking around . looking at book behind. Man finishes smoothie goes to bathroom Leader gets more bananas for front of register. Gets more bananas half green bananas....

Shoulder bag guy walks in. no acknik. M goes up and gives him and mom and girl samples”

To Sunglasses “x... your welcome”

Hi smile points to original again (to shoulder bag) Laughing to each other behind counter ran into eachother. Blond comes back out. Singing

Pony tail about to leave

Lady with sash belt “can I get two x” “ok” “repeats yea” leader explaining something Pony bye on phone .

Shoulder bag walks up to counter “m here ya go” “thank you”

Leader smiles again when sash done

Mom orders girl reading hand menu Talking leader smiling and nodding Leader talking to girl, explaining both laughing smiling “leader- no you’re fine!” Smiling eye contact to girl short laugh

“thank you” taking money from mom “thank you very much” gives money back

Sweatpants “thanks receiving money”

Big guy with earring Leader “hi”

M gives sash smoothie “laura your x” “thank you” “thank you” “have a good day”

Bald guy and camouflage walk in M”heres your strawberry wild smile” 2both thank you! Sweatpants and earring waiting not smiling Friends (bald and camo) on couch laughing

“here ya go” sweatpants
M preparing other smoothie
Friends still talking, don’t seem impatient.

Smiling a lot short hair to earring guy waves bye thank you

Tall shoes and rose shirt
Leader cries “y’all set?”
(ready)

Blonde red skirt

M prepares both friends smoothies “Jason” strawerry wild takes it
Here ya go thank you

Hi . how are you.x.
Talk “yea absolutely”

Hat and glasses walks in goes up to counter “m hello!” short “we are” hat and glasses takes application

Yoga girl

3 preparing smoothies m, short hair, and always here guy.
M preparing more samples?

Hi hi keys “how are ya” good how are you today?” leader.

“Amy!” short hair to ?
Guy still filling out application

Christine goes to get smoothie

Blond comes back out laughing with leader
Ble

(amy) Blonde red skirt comes back in “short hair youre all set!”

Leader leaving always here guy takes over register
Thank you when taking money

Always here waits at register when polka dots comes in

Short hair talking to application guy
Always here guy smiling
Glasses red shirt walking up “enjoy it” “have a good day” “you too!” m

5 people walk in
Always here guy walks to register short hair giving directions to blond

Interview with hairpony? Short hair will brb

“Julie pomegranate paradies” “here ya go enjoy thanks”

Orange hats: always here, blond, and m
Green hats/visor: short hair and leader

Blond making smoothie “nick here ya go have a good one” smile (boardshorts)

Original strawberry whirl x?

Short hair talks to hairpony and walks in back again. Something about a picture? Girl applying for job?

“Alex mega mango” puts straw on takes off half “here ya go enjoy”

Short hair and m talking short hair smiling

Music sounds fun upbeat beats.

“hello” “someone else hey” “hows it goin? M... (walk up to them) (backwards sunglasses and e shoes) would you like to try the x?”

(230 leader leaves?)

“can I get your first name. did you want your receipt?” there ya go

Hey hows it going

High pony walks in “hi!”

Hi (red glasses asks question) what *leans forward* ? Oh don’t worry about it
Red glasses with open polo guy

M offering samples again

Annie? –annie!- aniiiee (annie finnaly goes up) high pony
Blond and always here guy talking and laughing by register

Leader comes back 305

Interview and her friend still here waiting at benches
E shoes and backwards sunglasses on couches

M in front, only one not doing anything walking around, lookin at stuff
Shrot hair (visor) and leader (hat) by register looking and discussing about something

M seems bored rubs face

2 minutes later can I take this for you? Walks up to table how was it *talks*

Short hair takes hairpony for interview outside and leader takes friend for interview inside

END

Saturday, April 26, 11:41 – 1:12

Visor employee dude, halls girl, long pony tail girl
All wearing yellow visors

When we walked in visor dude said hi really loud
He is now making a smoothie. Looks relaxed, not bored to be here.
“Dan” mouthing words to song a little bit.

Vest guy walks in. halls girl takes order. “would you like a free boost in that?”
Repeats order, doesn’t smile, seems to explain things to him a little bit (probably never been here?) long ponytail making smoothie. And halls girl mixing it. Vest guy went somewhere, not in store. Comes back from bathroom. Takes food and two smoothies.

3 girls walk in. hello (long ponytail). Halls girl takes order, just going through the motions, not being rude or anything. Not smiling, just normal.
(leader comes back into area)
“I have an original caribbean passion” “there ya go”

Interesting music playing. Fun upbeat music, a little loud but not too much.

Girl and guy with sock hats walk in. halls girl talking to them, laughing a little. They go over to counter. Halls girl takes order. X “do you want a sixteen or a twelve”. “do you want a free boost with that as well?”

Later, other girl in 3-girl groups gets smoothie. “sarah” (long ponytail)
Sock hats still ordering. When guy gives card to halls girl, makes a funny face- can I get your card.

All black blonde with halls girl “your total today is 4.70” seems nice but not really smiling. Then goes to make smoothie.

9 customers total in store, all around. 11:58.
2 guys walk in. blond and brown with jackets and sweatpants. “can I get something for you guys today?” “free boost in any of those?” your name? your total is 9.82. x thank you. To brown guy, explaining the difference between two smoothies, says difference is lime sherbert, doesn’t look at list or anything to know whats in it.

Red glasses is here again.
Xx” your total Rachel is 470 today.”

11 people in store, on couches, chairs with tables and back bar. One table is open. Leader is smiling. Guy with red eyes walks up to counter looking for something to get. Halls girl walks up to register, smiles and says hi.
Two girls from gym. Halls girl smiles when walks up to coutner, right after red eye guy. 12:04. Two guys with jackets and sweatpants go up to get their smoothies. Its very busy in here, especially when its SNOWINGGG.
“kids in America” song is playing again.

Leader is wearing green hat. Another worker is here short piecy hair. She is making smoothies and such. A lot of people have just left. There are now 5 people total. Red glasses on couch and sock hats at back bar. Piecy is wiping off smoothie giving station. 12:10. Red glasses left (1212).

Weird song “the devils haircut in my mind”


Purple sweater guy. Buzz cut girl walks in. halls girl “how are you today?” smiles. buzz “good” Halls girl is sweeping the door rug. Purple sweater walks out, halls girl pushes door open for him. (doesn’t say anything?) visor dude finished order of buzz by the way.
Customers leave.
12:21
White hat walks in. orders. White puffy vest girl walks in. black trench and glasses guy walks in. visor dude comes out to put more waters in case. All the water labels are facing out. Special jamba juice water.

“I think im cool” guys walk in. josh and chris.
Halls girl is sweeping the rug again and opens door for customers from the inside. (door opens out. It is snowing.) halls girl is talking to cool guys. Hat one smiles, kinda laughs, she is casually talking (short conversation) with him/them. Leader is not in view, hasn’t been for awhile. Piecy and long pony are cleaning up/making smoothies. halls girl goes to register with broom to take order, since visor dude went in back. “did you need a copy of your receipt?” goes back to sweeping. 

Piecy “josh?” long pony “chris! here is your original berry fulfilling.” 12:31 
Guys are still here, “laurie, here is your original orange dream machine” places it on table with half open straw for her to get. Long pony. “Josh? Your original pomegranate.” Guys leave.

Piecy had made smoothie for “john” john left. Piecy took leftovers into a mini sample cup and ate it with a spoon.

Spiky hair lady walks in, looking at smoothie choices. Halls girl goes over to see if she needs any help. She explains what the things are, what a lot of people like, etc. the smoothie I think is for someone else. Then she goes to order, they walk back to register. Halls girl is sweeping again after finished sale. Puts a glove on to pick up trash off the floor. Fixes positions of chairs. Guys with hoods on walk in. halls girl goes to register. Guys talking to piecy girl.

Halls girl gets cleaner to wipe off tables, cleans table next to us. “how are you guys doing?” both good. I said how are you, but didn’t say anything back. Didn’t hear? Wasn’t listening? Hoodie guys still talking to piecy.

12:46 
Guy with two bags is waiting for smoothie (40s?). Hoodie guys are still here. I don’t think they ordered anything. Apparently they did because piecy girl just made them smoothies. Visor guy is talking to two bags guy about something, asked him a question. “so did xxx?” doesn’t seem to know him but seemed to ask about some place. Hoodie guys are talking to piecy in area by smoothie counter.

The music playing here is either upbeat music or chill “tropical” music.

Hoodie guys finish talking to piecy and leave. Red hat and sunglasses walks in. looking at smoothies. Leader says “hi how are you today?” “good” “good” 

Guy with green jacket walks in. says hey to piecy. She says “lovrerrr!” he walks into back, must work here. Goes to register really quick. Goes in back. Gets a badge of some sort and walks out. Big coat guy has walked in and orders, visor guy takes order. Leader is at the other register, she is smiling but not talking to customer. Visor guy smiles to big coat guy. Big coat goes to sit relaxingly on comfy chair couch.
Guy with green jacket comes back in, goes behind counter says something to leader both smile he goes in back. Long pony says name and order and big coat guy comes to get his smoothie. Leaves.

1:00. No customers besides us. Employees are all in back somewhere. Visor dude and halls girls comes out. And leader. Do something with register. Register opens, probably doing some money counting or paper work on register. Leader walks outside for 2 seconds but comes back in right away. Long pony tail not doing anything at smoothie station. Others not doing anything. Green sweater guy has changed into uniform (jeans and white collared shirt) with green hat. Goes in back.

Halls girl seems to be done with shift, she goes into bathroom, has her hat in her hand. 1:04. The employees are finding something to do whether its cleaning up or looking at the nutrition book or refilling the frozen food (?). halls girl has come out of bathroom and has changed from uniform. 1:08. Green sweater guy by register. Checkered vans girl walks in and orders. Piecy takes order. Green sweater had said hi.

“ryan” customer walks in and orders, piecy takes order. Really long hair dude walks in. piecy asks how he is, hes good. Green sweater employee and visor dude are talking while making smoothies.

1:12

END

Sunday, April 27, 12:40 – 2:12

Employees today: Lizzy, blue ribbon, long ponytail, and newgirl. Lizzy has her visor backwards. All four girls have yellow visors.

Newgirl is putting out the smoothies, but doesn’t speak very loud and doesn’t seem to be familiar with all the names of the smoothies. Lizzy just put her visor the right way. She is working the register right now. Blue ribbon and newgirl are making the smoothies, I don’t know where longpony is. There are a lot of people in here, 17 customers. Some are ordering some are waiting for smoothies or just sitting around.

Today, they offered if we would like a baked good with our smoothie for an extra dollar.

“I can help the next group” says lizzy when she is done with the customer ordering. They are two customers. There are 4 groups in line now, 6 people. group 4 is a mom and a young girl. Group 1 is a guy and a girl, probably college students.

Lizzy says some kind of hello for the next customer in line. Hello! I can help the next group. Are you ready?
The employees look very busy, things are now starting to die down though. They are not being overly nice, but not rude, just appropriate towards the customers.

1:00 a new employee, who hung out here a few minutes ago just changed into his uniform and clocked in. chris has a green hat. Also I think there is another employee in the back. Blonde ponytail, shorts. I think she cleans up all the stuff, etc. New girl is putting on gloves, chris is making smoothies, lizzy is taking orders. The only customers in here are us, two people ordering, a woman waiting for a smoothie, and a woman with two girls (on the couch).

No one is really saying hi all that much today. A girl was waiting in line. She walks forward when the previous customer is done, and chris (who is working the register) says heyy. He said it again to the next customer (guy). The customer said how are you and chris replied, “good how are you?”

Woman and girl: “heyy” (replied) “how are you doing today?” chris.
Chris says heyy to the customers when they arrive at the register.

They did not give Lindsay her snack right away. I think they cooked it? Its been about 5 minutes since she ordered, she went up while chris was dealing with a customer, he saw her and gave a motion that said it was coming. Its been about two more minutes and he hasn’t gotten it for her.

1:32 there is only one other customer in here, the employees have gone in the back.
Woman walks in, chris takes order, asks heyy how are you. Makes small talk with her (im not sure if he knows her).

All the employees (except for longpony, I don’t know where she is) are filling out sheets, I think that say what goes in which smoothie. More customers walk in, three guys. Chris puts his paper away and the employees move away from the register. Chris goes to take their order. Another guy has walked in.
Shorts is making smoothies now, and so is longpony and newgirl. Lizzy is done with her shift? and has left, with a smoothie snack. 1:42

Chris yawned and is waiting at the register. Two people are looking at the menu to see what they want, they are waiting by the door. Then chris went in the back. Three more customers came in and he walked to the register again. He is looking at them. Lizzy is back, she finished her smoothie and doesn’t have her bag with her. She gave her badge to chris when she passed him in the back. 1:46
Now there is a line of customers, 7-8. Blue ribbon comes to the other register and says “I can help whoever is next.”
Once blue ribbon helps the group of 3, she moves away from the register and eriv finishes with the line, there is only two people to help.
Chris is waiting at the register for the people to order. He smiles when a customer walks up, girl about 20.

New girl sees someone she knew, waves and says hi! They say hi and how are yous. Seems pleasant. Customer friend girl then orders and new girl finishes making her smoothies.

All the customers are sitting somewhere, either just waiting for a smoothie or relaxing. Long pony calls “bart?!” and bart gets up to get his smoothie. Then leaves. Someone, I think an employee, just walked in and went straight through to the back. She looked around and smiled while she walked quickly. She didn’t say anything to anyone. Blue ribbon is working the register for a customer at this moment. 1:58.

Some of the employees are filling out the paper again. The girl who walked in now has her uniform on, green visor, clocks in, and makes some smoothies. Shorts is doing something with the other register.

Blue eyes = employee who walked in
Blue is smiling slightly but not towards anyone. 2:07. Eric is smiling too, looking out window? Then takes customers order when he, customer, is ready

Working now: chris, new girl, longpony, blue ribbon, and blue. And shorts in the back.

“peach perfection no boost and pomegranate paradise no boost” blue ribbon. Places it on counter as customers walk over to pick it up. Blue is cleaning up the counter. 2:11. Eric is talking to blue about something. She is talking laughs, smiles. Answers. Something about a test tomorrow. 2:12.

Tuesday, April 29, 3:35 – 4:48

(free cone day at Ben and Jerry’s, not that busy)

Blue is taking orders and making smoothies today, blond and leader are here too. Smiling a lot, seems cheerful. Leader is putting out straws, blue is taking orders since customers walked in, and blond is making some smoothies. Blue’s friend came in and is talking to her at the counter, leaves her alone when she is dealing with customers. Blond made a smoothie for someone. When he took it, he muttered “thanks have a good one.” Leader is putting out new grass for the front of the smoothie station.

5 customers walked in, gets kinda busy. To 3rd customer said hi. 4th “what is your name?” (for order)
“what size do you want”
X is your total, x is your change ... reaches over register to give change to customer.

Leader green hat, blue green visor, blond yellow hat.
Customer walks in, leader projects “hi how are you today?!”
I think the customers at the register asked which smoothie was better, etc. she said I prefer such and such. Smiling.

Blond “Margaret” “Jordan”
“did you want a boost in there at all” “it’s a powder, it doesn’t taste like anything”.. “and what’s your name?!” sounds cheerful.

And are you guys sharing that? Do you want it in two cups? N what’s your name?
Two more customers walked in, “hi guys” blue
A customer is dancing a little while waiting in line (to the music).

To them: “and would you like a boost in there? “umm”.. girl looks up (for boost options?)
“theyre right there” blue points to them.

Other customers are kinda dancing too....
Blond is making someones smoothie “chris” smiles when chris comes up then says “alright have a good one”

Dirty blenders are stacked (8) by counter. They are busy making smoothies.
Three customers walk in, one employee says “hi!” blue says “hey how are you guys?”

Blue “its really good..x...” smiles

3:57 short hair came back from break. Walked out at 3:30. short hair is now taking orders and blue is making smoothies. Short hair is wearing a green visor.

Blue says name, they walk up, says your peanut butter moo’d, etc. (smoothie).
Short hairs smiling, while customer is getting money, smiles to her as she takes it.
Something about a receipt, and shows it to him. X. “okay youre good” smiling.

And yet another customer is dancing.... .

Blue smiled when she gave a smoothie to a customer. Short hair just brought a tray with sample cups on it to the front in the smoothie making station.

Blue. “jenna? Have a wonderful day.” Blue just went on a break. 4:14 she was talking on the phone, said ill be right there with a smile (calm not urgent). Got bag and a smoothie and left.
Told short hair she would be right back.
Short hair passes out some mango peach topper samples.

Customer is trying to figure out what she wants, standing away from register. Short hair makes eye contact, says hi, customer smiles, walks a little closer but is still deciding. Walked away and
sat down, short hair comes over to her and says we’re making a mango peach topper sample, so you can see if you like it. Girl says okay and smiles.

Blond is dancing behind counter.

Leader is wiping down the counter and everything else in the front. I sneezed, she said bless you quietly.

Two customers walked in. short hair said “hello!” and the customers said hi. Leader is offering samples to the customers of the mango peach topper and is explain it and some other things on the menu. The customers are trying to figure out what they want, short hair is smiling. 4:26.

A customer walks in, leader says “hi how are you today?” Another guy comes in, short hair says hello. People are sitting on the couch and one group is at a table. The two customers have ordered or are waiting for something. Leader gives sample to these two. The lady customer was wondering what it was and the leader smiles and explained it and noted that there was another flavor as well. The customer laughed a little and smiled.

On the sample tray is a picture of the mango peach topper.

4:43 blue is back from her break. Walking briskly to the bathroom.

**Discussion and Practice**

1) a. In groups of three, annotate Sara’s article just as Besen’s article is annotated. To help you do this, try answering these questions: What are the features of Sara’s research article? In other words, what is she doing exactly or what does she include in the introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion sections? In addition, the questions below might give you an even more specific idea of what to include in your annotations for each section:
   - Introduction: What does she include?
   - Literature Review: What sources does she include? What is her research gap or is there one?
   - Methods: Where is the methods section? What research methods does she include? What explanation for these methods does she include?
   - How does she organize the results and discussion sections? Are the results and discussion sections combined or separated?
   - Results: What does she include in her results?
   - Discussion: What are her findings in the discussion? How are the findings supported and analyzed?
   - What is she doing in the conclusion section? In what ways does her conclusion compare to the traditional discussion section we have previously discussed?

b. Discuss your annotations with the rest of the class and compare notes.
2) a. Freewrite on your own for a moment and answer the following questions: 1) What writing strategies from Sara’s paper would you utilize in your own paper? 2) What would you do differently than Sara in your own paper? 3) How would you improve upon Sara’s paper? b. Discuss your freewrite responses with the rest of the class.

**Students as Scholars Reading Questions**

1) Audience: Who is the primary audience for this paper? Who is a secondary audience for this paper?

2) Purpose: What do you think is Sara’s purpose in writing this qualitative study on Jamba Juice?

3) Write a brief abstract for Sara’s study.

4) Although Sara includes a brief literature review, she does not clearly state her research gap. What is a potential research gap you could include in her study?

5) Did Sara do an adequate job of detailing her research methods for her audience? Why or why not? What else would you have added?

6) In her Study section, Sara includes a fairly detailed historical background of Jamba Juice as a company. Why do you think she does this? Does including this historical background make her study more credible and effective to her audience? Why or why not?

7) How is the research data in Sara’s study organized? Why do you think it is organized in this way?

8) Is the structure Sara used to organize her data effective to read? Why or why not? In what other ways could you have organized this data?

9) How were sources used in Sara’s study to interpret the data? Was the data interpreted effectively for her audience? Why or why not?

10) What was the significance of Sara’s findings? Did she do an effective job of stating the significance of her study for her audience? Why or why not?

11) Read through Sara’s observational notes. Do her findings follow from what she observed in her notes? Why or why not? What other findings could you draw from her notes?

12) What were the limitations for Sara’s study?

13) What were some other potential limitations for Sara’s study that were not mentioned?

14) Sara includes two appendices at the end of her study. How does including more data in the appendices help strengthen her credibility as a researcher?

15) Working in groups of two, include headings for her data analysis in the Study section.

**Popular/Public Example**

The next example of qualitative writing, “Serving in Florida,” is written for a popular audience and not an academic one. Specifically, this next example, written by journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, appeared in the *New York Times*. However, although this piece was written for a popular audience, Ehrenreich still used qualitative research and writing techniques. As you read
the next selection, compare it to the academic examples of qualitative research and writing you have just read, noting and similarities and differences. In particular, notice what writing strategies Ehrenreich uses to appeal specifically to her popular audience of *New York Times* readers.

“Serving in Florida” originally appeared in *The New York Times* but is an excerpt of the non-fiction book, *Nickel and Dimed: on (Not) Getting By in America*, published by Ehrenreich in 2001. Troubled by the difficulty many women faced making a living after the welfare reform of the 1990’s, Ehrenreich was dared by an editor of *Harper’s* magazine to actually try to live and work as these women—and do some in-depth, investigative reporting along the way.

**Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America**

Barbara Ehrenreich

*The New York Times*

**Serving in Florida (excerpt)**

Mostly out of laziness, I decide to start my low-wage life in the town nearest to where I actually live, Key West, Florida, which with a population of about 25,000 is elbowing its way up to the status of a genuine city. The downside of familiarity, I soon realize, is that it’s not easy to go from being a consumer, thoughtlessly throwing money around in exchange for groceries and movies and gas, to being a worker in the very same place. I am terrified, especially at the beginning, of being recognized by some friendly business owner or erstwhile neighbor and having to stammer out some explanation of my project. Happily, though, my fears turn out to be entirely unwarranted: during a month of poverty and toil, no one recognizes my face or my name, which goes unnoticed and for the most part unuttered. In this parallel universe where my father never got out of the mines and I never got through college, I am "baby," "honey," "blondie," and, most commonly, "girl."

My first task is to find a place to live. I figure that if I can earn $7 an hour—which, from the want ads, seems doable—I can afford to spend $500 on rent or maybe, with severe
economies, $600 and still have $400 or $500 left over for food and gas. In the Key West area, this pretty much confines me to flophouses and trailer homes—like the one, a pleasing fifteen-minute drive from town, that has no air-conditioning, no screens, no fans, no television, and, by way of diversion, only the challenge of evading the landlord’s Doberman pinscher. The big problem with this place, though, is the rent, which at $675 a month is well beyond my reach. All right, Key West is expensive. But so is New York City, or the Bay Area, or Jackson, Wyoming, or Telluride, or Boston, or any other place where tourists and the wealthy compete for living space with the people who clean their toilets and fry their hash browns. Still, it is a shock to realize that “trailer trash” has become, for me, a demographic category to aspire to.

So I decide to make the common trade-off between affordability and convenience and go for a $500-a-month “efficiency” thirty miles up a two-lane highway from the employment opportunities of Key West, meaning forty-five minutes if there’s no road construction and I don’t get caught behind some sundazed Canadian tourists. I hate the drive, along a roadside studded with white crosses commemorating the more effective head-on collisions, but it’s a sweet little place—a cabin, more or less, set in the swampy backyard of the converted mobile home where my landlord, an affable TV repairman, lives with his bartender girlfriend. Anthropologically speaking, the trailer park would be preferable, but here I have a gleaming white floor and a firm mattress, and the few resident bugs are easily vanquished.

The next piece of business is to comb through the want ads and find a job. I rule out various occupations for one reason or another: hotel front-desk clerk, for example, which to my surprise is regarded as unskilled and pays only $6 or $7 an hour, gets eliminated because it involves standing in one spot for eight hours a day. Waitressing is also something I’d like to
avoid, because I remember it leaving me bone-tired when I was eighteen, and I’m decades of varicosities and back pain beyond that now. Telemarketing, one of the first refuges of the suddenly indigent, can be dismissed on grounds of personality. This leaves certain supermarket jobs, such as deli clerk, or housekeeping in the hotels and guest houses, which pays about $7 and, I imagine, is not too different from what I’ve been doing part-time, in my own home, all my life.

So I put on what I take to be a respectable-looking outfit of ironed Bermuda shorts and scooped-neck T-shirt and set out for a tour of the local hotels and supermarkets. Best Western, Econo Lodge, and HoJo’s all let me fill out application forms, and these are, to my relief, mostly interested in whether I am a legal resident of the United States and have committed any felonies. My next stop is Winn-Dixie, the supermarket, which turns out to have a particularly onerous application process, featuring a twenty-minute “interview” by computer since, apparently, no human on the premises is deemed capable of representing the corporate point of view. I am conducted to a large room decorated with posters illustrating how to look "professional" (it helps to be white and, if female, permed) and warning of the slick promises that union organizers might try to tempt me with. The interview is multiple-choice: Do I have anything, such as child care problems, that might make it hard for me to get to work on time? Do I think safety on the job is the responsibility of management? Then, popping up cunningly out of the blue: How many dollars’ worth of stolen goods have I purchased in the last year? Would I turn in a fellow employee if I caught him stealing? Finally, “Are you an honest person?”

Apparently I ace the interview, because I am told that all I have to do is show up in some doctor’s office tomorrow for a urine test. This seems to be a fairly general rule: if you want to

Comment [RC59]: She has a clear preference for what she wants to do in her study, but she seems to ignore particular settings for her study. This can sometimes be accomplished in particular types of qualitative research because of resources or time constraints, but in Ehrenreich’s case, it is more personal. However, because of this personal statement, it makes a greater appeal to pathos when she, in fact, interviews at hotels and ends up with a job as a waitress.

Comment [RC60]: There is a great deal of description for the application processes including specific questions. Although clearly interspersed with her own commentary and analysis, she is providing many useful descriptive details as any qualitative researcher would.
stack Cheerios boxes or vacuum hotel rooms in chemically fascist America, you have to be willing to squat down and pee in front of a health worker (who has no doubt had to do the same thing herself.) The wages Winn-Dixie is offering—$6 and a couple of dimes to start with—are not enough, I decide, to compensate for this indignity.

I lunch at Wendy’s, where $4.99 gets you unlimited refills at the Mexican part of the Super-bar, a comforting surfeit of refried beans and cheese sauce. A teenage employee, seeing me studying the want ads, kindly offers me an application form, which I fill out, though here, too, the pay is just $6 and change an hour. Then it's off for a round of the locally owned inns and guest houses in Key West's Old Town, which is where all the serious sightseeing and guzzling goes on, a couple of miles removed from the functional end of the island, where the discount hotels make their homes. At The Palms, let's call it, a bouncy manager actually takes me around to see the rooms and meet the current housekeepers, who, I note with satisfaction, look pretty much like me—faded ex-hippie types in shorts with long hair pulled back in braids. Mostly, though, no one speaks to me or even looks at me except to proffer an application form. At my last stop, a palatial B & B, I wait twenty minutes to meet “Max,” only to be told that there are no jobs now but there should be one soon, since “nobody lasts more than a couple weeks.”

Three days go by like this and, to my chagrin, no one from the approximately twenty places at which I’ve applied calls me for an interview. I had been vain enough to worry about coming across as too educated for the jobs I sought, but no one even seems interested in finding out how overqualified I am. Only later will I realize that the want ads are not a reliable measure of the actual jobs available at any particular time. They are, as I should have guessed from Max’s comment, the employers’ insurance policy against the relentless turnover of the low-wage
workforce. Most of the big hotels run ads almost continually, if only to build a supply of applicants to replace the current workers as they drift away or are fired, so finding a job is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time and flexible enough to take whatever is being offered that day. This finally happens to me at one of the big discount chain hotels where I go, as usual, for housekeeping and am sent instead to try out as a waitress at the attached "family restaurant," a dismal spot looking out on a parking garage, which is featuring "Polish sausage and BBQ sauce" on this 95-degree day. Phillip, the dapper young West Indian who introduces himself as the manager, interviews me with about as much enthusiasm as if he were a clerk processing me for Medicare, the principal questions being what shifts I can work and when I can start. I mutter about being woefully out of practice as a waitress, but he's already on to the uniform: I'm to show up tomorrow wearing black slacks and black shoes; he'll provide the rust-colored polo shirt with "Hearthside," as we'll call the place, embroidered on it, though I might want to wear my own shirt to get to work, ha ha. At the word tomorrow, something between fear and indignation rises in my chest. I want to say, "Thank you for your time, sir, but this is just an experiment, you know, not my actual life."

SO BEGINS MY CAREER AT THE HEARTHSIDE, WHERE FOR TWO WEEKS I work from 2:00 till 10:00 P.M. for $2.43 an hour plus tips. Employees are barred from using the front door, so I enter the first day through the kitchen, where a red-faced man with shoulder-length blond hair is throwing frozen steaks against the wall and yelling, "Fuck this shit!" "That's just Billy," explains Gail, the wiry middle-aged waitress who is assigned to train me. "He's on the rag again"—a condition occasioned, in this instance, by the fact that the cook on the morning shift had forgotten to thaw out the steaks. For the next eight hours, I run after the agile Gail,
absorbing bits of instruction along with fragments of personal tragedy. All food must be trayed, and the reason she’s so tired today is that she woke up in a cold sweat thinking of her boyfriend, who was killed a few months ago in a scuffle in an upstate prison. No refills on lemonade. And the reason he was in prison is that a few DUls caught up with him, that’s all; could have happened to anyone. Carry the creamers to the table in a “monkey bowl,” never in your hand. And after he was gone she spent several months living in her truck, peeing in a plastic pee bottle and reading by candlelight at night, but you can’t live in a truck in the summer, since you need to have the windows down, which means anything can get in, from mosquitoes on up.

At least Gail puts to rest any fears I had of appearing overqualified. From the first day on, I find that of all the things that I have left behind, such as home and identity, what I miss the most is competence. Not that I have ever felt 100 percent competent in the writing business, where one day’s success augurs nothing at all for the next. But in my writing life, I at least have some notion of procedure: do the research, make the outline, rough out a draft, etc. As a server, though, I am beset by requests as if by bees: more iced tea here, catsup over there, a to-go box for table 14, and where are the high chairs, anyway? Of the twenty-seven tables, up to six are usually mine at any time, though on slow afternoons or if Gail is off, I sometimes have the whole place to myself. There is the touch-screen computer-ordering system to master, which I suppose is meant to minimize server-cook contacts but in practice requires constant verbal fine-tuning: "That’s gravy on the mashed, OK? None on the meatloaf," and so forth. Plus, something I had forgotten in the years since I was eighteen: about a third of a server’s job is "side work" invisible to customers—sweeping, scrubbing, slicing, refilling, and restocking. If it
isn't all done, every little bit of it, you're going to face the 6:00 P.M. dinner rush defenseless and
probably go down in flames. I screw up dozens of times at the beginning, sustained in my
shame entirely by Gail's support—"It's OK, baby, everyone does that sometime"—because, to
my total surprise and despite the scientific detachment I am doing my best to maintain, I care.

The whole thing would be a lot easier if I could just skate through it like Lily Tomlin in
one of her waitress skits, but I was raised by the absurd Booker T. Washingtonian precept that
says: If you're going to do something, do it well. In fact, "well" isn't good enough by half. Do it
better than anyone has ever done it before. Or so said my father, who must have known what
he was talking about because he managed to pull himself, and us with him, up from the mile-
deep copper mines of Butte to the leafy suburbs of the Northeast, ascending from boilermakers
to martinis before booze beat out ambition. As in most endeavors I have encountered in my
life, "doing it better than anyone" is not a reasonable goal. Still, when I wake up at 4 A.M. in my
own cold sweat, I am not thinking about the writing deadlines I'm neglecting; I'm thinking of the
table where I screwed up the order and one of the kids didn't get his kiddie meal until the rest
of the family had moved on to their Key lime pies. That's the other powerful motivation—the
customers, or "patients," as I can't help thinking of them on account of the mysterious
vulnerability that seems to have left them temporarily unable to feed themselves. After a few
days at Hearthside, I feel the service ethic kick in like a shot of oxytocin, the nurturance
hormone. The plurality of my customers are hardworking locals—truck drivers, construction
workers, even housekeepers from the attached hotel—and I want them to have the closest to a
"fine dining" experience that the grubby circumstances will allow. No "you guys" for me;
everyone over twelve is "sir" or "ma'am." I ply them with iced tea and coffee refills; I return,
midmeal, to inquire how everything is; I doll up their salads with chopped raw mushrooms, summer squash slices, or whatever bits of produce I can find that have survived their sojourn in the cold storage room mold-free.

There is Benny, for example, a short, tight-muscled sewer repairman who cannot even think of eating until he has absorbed a half hour of air-conditioning and ice water. We chat about hyperthermia and electrolytes until he is ready to order some finicky combination like soup of the day, garden salad, and a side of grits. There are the German tourists who are so touched by my pidgin "Wilkommen" and "Ist alles gut?" that they actually tip. (Europeans, no doubt spoiled by their trade union-ridden, high-wage welfare states, generally do not know that they are supposed to tip. Some restaurants, the Hearthside included, allow servers to "grat" their foreign customers, or add a tip to the bill. Since this amount is added before the customers have a chance to tip or not tip, the practice amounts to an automatic penalty for imperfect English.) There are the two dirt-smudged lesbians, just off from their shift, who are impressed enough by my suave handling of the fly in the piña colada that they take the time to praise me to Stu, the assistant manager. There's Sam, the kindly retired cop who has to plug up his tracheotomy hole with one finger in order to force the cigarette smoke into his lungs.

Sometimes I play with the fantasy that I am a princess who, in penance for some tiny transgression, has undertaken to feed each of her subjects by hand. But the nonprincesses working with me are just as indulgent, even when this means flouting management rules—as to, for example, the number of croutons that can go on a salad (six). "Put on all you want," Gail whispers, "as long as Stu isn't looking." She dips into her own tip money to buy biscuits and gravy for an out-of-work mechanic who's used up all his money on dental surgery, inspiring me
to pick up the tab for his pie and milk. Maybe the same high levels of agape can be found throughout the "hospitality industry." I remember the poster decorating one of the apartments I looked at, which said, "If you seek happiness for yourself you will never find it. Only when you seek happiness for others will it come to you," or words to that effect—an odd sentiment, it seemed to me at the time, to find in the dank one-room basement apartment of a bellhop at the Best Western. At Hearthside, we utilize whatever bits of autonomy we have to ply our customers with the illicit calories that signal our love. It is our job as servers to assemble the salads and desserts, pour the dressings, and squirt the whipped cream. We also control the number of butter pats our customers get and the amount of sour cream on their baked potatoes. So if you wonder why Americans are so obese, consider the fact that waitresses both express their humanity and earn their tips through the covert distribution of fats.

Ten days into it, this is beginning to look like a livable lifestyle. I like Gail, who is "looking at fifty," agewise, but moves so fast she can alight in one place and then another without apparently being anywhere between. I clown around with Lionel, the teenage Haitian busboy, though we don't have much vocabulary in common, and loiter near the main sink to listen to the older Haitian dishwashers' musical Creole, which sounds, in their rich bass voices, like French on testosterone. I bond with Timmy, the fourteen-year-old white kid who buses at night, by telling him I don't like people putting their baby seats right on the tables: it makes the baby look too much like a side dish. He snickers delightedly and in return, on a slow night, starts telling me the plots of all the Jaws movies (which are perennial favorites in the shark-ridden Keys): "She looks around, and the water-skier isn't there anymore, then SNAP! The whole boat goes ..."

Comment [RC74]: You have probably noticed by now that Ehrenreich has been building up the many ways she is connected with her co-workers and customers. She is trying to show her assimilation to build up her ethos. In other words, if we begin to see her as a "real" waitress, we will believe her argument more. Despite beginning this paragraph by separating herself from the "nonprincesses," she is identifying with them here (e.g. "we") and also generalizing about all waitresses across the country in the final moments of this paragraph.

Comment [RC75]: In the next two paragraphs, Ehrenreich is sharing more details of her experiences that identify her as a waitress. However, note that her descriptions are those of a college-educated writer. Would Gail describe Joan as a "militant feminist"? Would Timmy describe the music out of dishwashers as rich bass musical Creole?
I especially like Joan, the svelte fortyish hostess, who turns out to be a militant feminist, pulling me aside one day to explain that "men run everything—we don't have a chance unless we stick together." Accordingly, she backs me up when I get overpowered on the floor, and in return I give her a chunk of my tips or stand guard while she sneaks off for an unauthorized cigarette break. We all admire her for standing up to Billy and telling him, after some of his usual nastiness about the female server class, to "shut the fuck up." I even warm up to Billy when, on a slow night and to make up for a particularly unwarranted attack on my abilities, or so I imagine, he tells me about his glory days as a young man at "coronary school" in Brooklyn, where he dated a knockout Puerto Rican chick—or do you say "culinary"?

I finish up every night at 10:00 or 10:30, depending on how much side work I've been able to get done during the shift, and cruise home to the tapes I snatched at random when I left my real home—Marianne Faithfull, Tracy Chapman, Enigma, King Sunny, Adé, Violent Femmes—just drained enough for the music to set my cranium resonating, but hardly dead. Midnight snack is Wheat Thins and Monterey Jack, accompanied by cheap white wine on ice and whatever AMC has to offer. To bed by 1:30 or 2:00, up at 9:00 or 10:00, read for an hour while my uniform whirls around in the landlord's washing machine, and then it's another eight hours spent following Mao's central instruction, as laid out in the Little Red Book, which was:

Serve the people.

Popular/Public Reading Questions

1) Who is the audience for this article? How do you know? (Look for details in the text to support your answer.)

2) What is the purpose of this Barbara Ehrenreich piece? What is her research question? How do you know? (Look for details in the text to support your answer.)

3) Does Ehrenreich effectively achieve her purpose in this piece? Why or why not?
4) What research methods does Ehrenreich employ to conduct her research study? How can you tell?
5) How does Ehrenreich describe her research methods? Why does she describe her research methods in this way for Harper’s Magazine?
6) How does Ehrenreich analyze her observational and interview experiences? How does this analysis compare with the analysis in an academic qualitative study?
7) How is this piece similar to the academic qualitative research studies?
8) How is this piece different from the previous academic qualitative research studies?
9) In what ways do the differences between the Ehrenreich piece and the previous academic qualitative research studies relate to audience?
10) In what ways could you rewrite the Ehrenreich piece for an academic audience?
11) Ehrenreich is engaging in total participation for her research. What are some advantages to engaging in total participation for research? What are some disadvantages to engaging in total participation for research?
12) In describing her experience conducting her qualitative research, Ehrenreich writes, “to my total surprise and despite the scientific detachment I am doing my best to maintain, I care.” Is it completely possible for qualitative researchers to be detached from their research subjects at all times? Why or why not?
13) Are there any benefits for research in being emotionally engaged with your research subject? Why or why not?
14) What would you describe as Ehrenreich’s bias? How does this bias influence her research? Is this influence positive or negative? Why?

Qualitative Cases

A. Using Observational Data
1. Come up with a research question about the most popular hangout spot on your campus. This could be the student union, a local coffee shop, the commons, a restaurant, etc., but everyone in class should observe the same place.
2. Go to this popular hangout and take 15 minutes to observe what you see, writing observation notes using your five senses—what you see, hear, smell, feel, and (perhaps) taste. Also, note the temperature and time of day. Remember, not to interpret what you observe but just record.
3. When you get back to class, discuss what you observed with your classmates.
4. Free-write for 10 minutes about what your major findings were—how did your observations answer your research question?
   - What prominent impressions did you have about your observations? Why?
   - What specific patterns did you see?
   - Did you notice anything unusual or out of the ordinary?
   - What did your observations tell you about the place you observed?
5. As a class, discuss your findings.
6. In a paragraph, write about what the prominent findings were, noting similarities and differences between different researchers’ observations.

B. Using Interview Data
1. Interview two classmates to answer the research question of what writing strategies they use to write papers for their first-year writing class.
2. Ask the two classmates these questions:
   - What strategies do you use to come up with ideas for your paper?
   - How do you usually start a paper? Why?
   - When do you usually start a paper? Why?
   - What is your typical writing process in writing your rough draft?
   - What is the easiest part of the paper to write? Why?
   - What is the hardest part of the paper to write?
3. Free-write for 10 minutes about what your major findings were—how did your interviews answer your research question?
   - What prominent impressions did you have about your interviews? Why?
   - What specific patterns did you see?
   - Did you notice anything unusual or out of the ordinary?
   - What did your interviews tell you about the study habits of your classmates?
4. As a class, discuss your findings.
5. In a paragraph, write about what the prominent findings were.

C. Using Interview and Observational Data
1. After conducting your interviews with two classmates on what writing strategies they use to write papers for their first-year writing class, go to the library—or any other place on campus where students commonly write—and observe any students writing papers. Take 15 minutes and observe what you see, writing observation notes using your five senses—what you see, hear, smell, feel, and (perhaps) taste. Also, note the temperature and time of day. Remember, not to interpret what you observe but just record the details.
2. When you get back to class, discuss what you observed with your classmates.
3. Free-write for 10 minutes about what your major findings were from your observations of students writing—how did your observations answer your research question?
   - What prominent impressions did you have about your observations? Why?
   - What specific patterns did you see?
   - Did you notice anything unusual or out of the ordinary about students writing?
   - What did your observations tell you about the writing habits of the students you observed?
4. As a class, discuss your findings.
5. In a paragraph, write about what the prominent findings were for your observation.
6. Free-write for 10 minutes about how your findings from your observation compare and contrast with your findings from your two interviews.
• How are your findings from your observation similar to your findings from your interviews?
• How are your findings from your observation different from your findings from your two interviews?
• Together, how do the findings from your observation and interviews answer your research question?

7. As a class, discuss how your findings about writing from your observation compare and contrast to your findings from your two interviews.

8. In a paragraph, write about what the prominent findings were about student writing from both your observation and interviews.

D. Analyzing Raw Interview Data

1. The following raw interview data was taken from Nick Yee’s “The Daedalus Project,” a research project about online computer games. He originally used this data to analyze the reasons people get addicted to playing online computer games and the article is entitled “On Therapy and Dependency.” Analyze the following raw interview data with the research question of “What are the reasons that people get addicted to online computer games?” The brackets following the interview responses refer to the game, participant’s gender, and his/her age.

2. Organize (or code) the data around major patterns you see in this data. What are some recurring themes that you see? Why?

3. After organizing this data around major themes, what are the major reasons people get addicted to online video games? Why? Write up your conclusions in three to four paragraphs, making sure to organize your analysis around the major themes that you found. Support each finding with specific interview data.

• Logging into [World of Warcraft (WoW)] at the end of the day is a great stress reliever, as it’s one of the few times I’m not thinking (at all) about experiments, the future of my career, or anything like that. It allows me to relax, let things from the day go, and find a more healthy state of mind as the day ends. Also, although WoW gives me a list quests to do (sort of like work, in a way), I know I am in control of what I do, and I know that each task is, in the end, possible. Science just doesn’t work that way. [WoW, F, 33]

• I’m a dentist and my wife is the head of an insurance company claims department. These are 2 fairly stressful occupations - we use [EverQuest (EQ)] to unwind. Neither one of us cares for the trash on television and this is something we can do together in a cooperative spirit. [EQ, M, 70]

• There was a time when finances were tight due to a change in employment; this created a lot of pressure and stress until things smoothed out again. Having the game to escape into when I came home in the evening was very therapeutic. [CoH, M, 39]

• It provided a way to divide my attention so that I could engage with the game while another, less communicative aspect could chew on what was bothering it. Ultimately, the space provided in that exercise catalyzed some insight and paved the way for change. [WoW, F, 51]
• It was an area where I could concentrate on the mechanics of the game and my relation to the game (it was mostly a solo-based [massively multiplayer online game (MMO)] gave me some space to deal with the issues I was dealing with. [WoW, M, 28]

• Divorce, troubles with my children, friends and parents. Sometimes I found myself really alone and with a lot pain. The best escape or refuge I found at this time was to go into the game to play and forget all that real life and pain. [Vanguard, M, 43]

• Played a lot when my mother was diagnosed and shortly thereafter died of pancreatic cancer; the game was a way to escape from a harsh reality [WoW, M, 26]

• I had a really horrible break up with a long term boyfriend and focusing on in-game objectives prolonged the healing process but also seemed to dull the hurt and let understanding seep in as opposed to being overwhelmed with grief. All-in-all, I believe WoW to have ultimately helped me get through the hardest time I've ever experienced. [WoW, F, 26]

• In the past, I have used the game as a proxy for achievement and accomplishment when I felt myself to be at a stagnant point in my life. For example, if I feel aimless in my career, I play WoW for its clear-cut, achievable goals (ie. getting loot, reaching a new level.) I have felt this to be very beneficial. Though I could see how it might become a substitute for real life for some people, I've used it as a way to get past those 'humps' where I don't feel satisfied. It gives me a sense of forward progress. [WoW, F, 23]

• Working away several thousand dollars of debt away, for example, takes a long time, and it's hard to feel like one is making progress when one has rent and etc. to pay as well every month. By contrast, WoW seems engineered to make the player feel as though he/she is making 'progress', which makes me feel almost like my time is less 'wasted' because at least I made progress in the game, even when I'm not making a lot of progress in my personal life. [WoW, M, 23]

• I use Guild Wars (GW) as a way to escape the stressors of life. There is more control in game. It is much easier, in most cases, to set a goal and achieve it in game. [GW, M, 25]

• I hated my job and was constantly dwelling on several disappointments and poor choices I had made. Suddenly I found a world that allowed me far more control than I had in the real one, as well as a place where I could be admired and respected for my skills. I latched onto it strongly. [WoW, M, 36]

• During a period of about a year where I was working at a job and role where my work was not particularly engaging, the MMO served as my means to exercise my brain, problem solve and more importantly work with others on problems. In the workplace, I was essentially working alone on most tasks, and have very little background or expertise in the domain I was working in. In the MMO (Wow), it was the reverse, as I frequently grouped with others, socialized and solved challenging in game problems. My game play during this period was very high, often playing late into the evenings, doing dungeon runs, raids; I was essentially filling a void that my job was leaving me with everyday. [WoW, M, 31]

• This is a regular state of life for me. I am a worrier, a mother, a full time worker, a wife. I feel my regular life is very boring ... as is my work. WoW lets me feel as if I am doing something interesting. [WoW, F, 31]
• It gives a sense of belonging somewhere, when in the RL sometimes you don't know where you belong. And since all games have clear goals (or at least you make them clear) is easier to achieve them, compared to RL. [WoW, F, 27]

• I began playing because I had hours of free time, even with a full time job and a family, and I was bored and depressed. It really did make life more exciting and interesting at a time when I was feeling very disappointed in life, and gave me something to look forward to each day and especially on weekends. [LOTRO, F, 50]

• The people I met in game became an important support group for me (my only support group)--whether I talked to them about my issues or not. I don't know how I would have made it through that tough time without them. [WoW, F, 21]

• Once after an extremely painful breakup. It helped because the friends I had made online were more caring than most of the people I had called friends in real life, who blew me off. [Eve Online, M, 22]

• When I went through a depression it was a relief to have the online friends to chat with. For some reason it was easier to break the ice talking about difficult issues with online friends before talking with friends in real life. Once I had been warming up talking with online friends it was easier taking the step talking to real life friends. [WoW, M, 25]

• There is something about online friends that let you break through walls you normally put up with real life friends. You can be you without judgment and they give you advice the same way. Online people don't have to care about protecting your feelings as much so they give you the benefit of saying exactly what they think without regard to how it affects your relationship (as much). [WoW, F, 26]

• I live in a neighborhood where it's dangerous to walk out my front door, and yet I can log onto World of Warcraft and talk to friends who are there for me and are willing to support me. I can in-turn support them in the best way I know how. [WoW, M, 19]

• I have many good friends, but they live all over the world and it's hard to keep in touch. Part of my depression stemmed from having no good friends who I could be in consistent *regular* contact with, so I spent most of my days somewhat lonely, and at a loss how to start over making new friends. Gaming provided me with a more stable and satisfying social life. I ended up making many good friends and becoming a well-loved officer in a fun guild. [WoW, F, 33]

• Several years ago I lost my husband and my daughter in an auto accident, leaving me the only survivor of my family. The constantly changing world of the MMO and the comings and goings of real live people provided something I needed at the time--a whole world that I was part of, yet no one there knew of my pain. I could interact with real people and not have the pressure of being 'that poor woman who lost her family', which I hadn't realized was weighing so heavily on me in real life, and which well-meaning friends tended to put on me. [DAoC, F, 48]

Qualitative Exercise and Project Ideas

Observational Research – Observational research can take place in most any publicly accessible area that has some culture to observe. For this project idea, consider Yasemin Besen’s research on coffee shop culture, and then consider what you might study about similar coffee shop cultures in your area.
a. Observe people at a local coffee shop. While trying to stay as inconspicuous as possible, take notes of everything you can hear, see, smell, feel, and taste. Take note especially of the people around you. What are they saying? What are their facial expressions, tone of voice, body language? How are they sitting or standing in relation to each other? What are they wearing? What are they drinking or eating? Record as much detail as possible, even details that may seem irrelevant. Remember not to interpret what you observe but just record.

b. Analyze your observations. Look for recurring patterns in your observations. For example how did people’s facial expressions compare with how they were sitting or standing in relation to each other? Look for other patterns of comparison that could be relevant like gender or age.

c. Interpret your data. Why do you think you observed what you did? Refer to any lectures or anything that you have previously read to explain this. Also, you might want to do a quick library search looking at anything else that has been discovered about what you have observed. How does this material explain what you observed?

d. Write about your observations. What were your major findings? For each finding, be sure to include the specific observational data from your notes that supports it. Be as specific and as detailed in describing this observational data as possible. Also, be specific in offering an explanation to your observations, including any authors and quotes in support of your interpretation.

Participant Observation – Participant observation research, like Barbara Ehrenreich’s study of waitressing in Florida, involves researching an activity as an active participant. As a student, you are an active participant in many activities on campus, including going to class.

a. Observe a class which you are a part of. Take notes and record patterns in where people sit, how they interact, what they do during lectures or activities. Remember, not to interpret what you observe but just record.

b. Analyze your observations. Look for recurring patterns in your observations. For example how did people’s facial expressions compare with how they were sitting or standing in relation to each other? Look for other patterns of comparison that could be relevant like gender or age.

c. Interpret your data. Why do you think you observed what you did? Refer to any lectures or anything that you have previously read to explain this. Also, you might want to do a quick library search looking at anything else that has been discovered about what you have observed. How does this material explain what you observed?

d. Write about your observations. What were your major findings? For each finding, be sure to include the specific observational data from your notes that supports it. Be as specific and as detailed in describing this observational data as possible. Also, be specific in offering an explanation to your observations, including any authors and quotes in support of your interpretation. Consult with your professor in organizing and writing this for a particular audience, whether academic or popular.
Focus group – In a previous Discussion and Practice section, we had you consider researching a problem or issue on your campus for the benefit of the provost using a focus group. Develop that into a major research and writing project.

a. Pick a current issue at your college/university that is controversial and that you know people have varying opinions on.

b. Assemble a few people who you know may have varying opinions on this topic for a discussion on the topic. (Conducting a quick survey on this controversial topic could be a way of finding out exactly who has varying opinions on this topic and could help in selecting your group.)

c. Write a set of discussion questions about this controversial issue for your focus group. Remember to start with general questions first and then move to the most specific. Remember to ask the most important questions first. Remember to keep your questions focused on the issue at hand. Remember to make your questions clear and to the point. Finally, remember that you are moderating a discussion and not a set interview. Be prepared to deviate from your questions if the discussion is productive. (Refer to the previous section on focus groups in this chapter.)

d. Discuss this issue in your focus group, taking careful notes of what each person says about this issue and also how the group interacts and influences each other on this issue. Remember when conducting the focus group to keep your discussion focused yet casual. Also, make sure to get everyone to speak in the group. (Refer to the previous section on focus groups in this chapter.) Remember, not to interpret what you observe but just record.

e. Analyze, interpret, and write about your participant observations by following b, c, and d of the Observational Research exercise above.

Qualitative Survey – Qualitative surveys that ask open-ended questions are a good way of amassing a lot of descriptive data quickly.

a. Construct a qualitative survey asking what students’ favorite movies are. Include another question asking them to describe why they like that particular movie. Finally, ask them to include their major, year, and gender.

b. Pass out this survey to 40 random students on campus. Pass out your survey in a place frequented by many types of students who have many majors and where you will find an equal number of first year, sophomore, junior, and senior students. Avoid passing the survey out in places where you know just first year students hang out, for instance, or your sample will not be representative of the rest of campus.

c. Analyze your data. Place the favorite movies into logical categories. Make sure to clearly label these categories. Find patterns and similarities in your written explanations. Look for any interesting differences too. Notice any emerging patterns. Clearly label what these similarities, differences, and patterns are. For instance, is there a relationship between year in college, major, or gender and the type of movie students liked? How did the reasons students gave for liking a
movie compare to the type of movie they liked? How did their reasons for liking a movie compare with gender, year in school, and major?

d. Write 2-3 paragraphs about the patterns you found in your data. What did you discover about what types of movies students’ like? What did you discover about the reasons students gave for liking these movies?

e. Write 2-3 paragraphs offering possible explanations for why you discovered these patterns in your data.

Autoethnography – Autoethnographies are qualitative studies about yourself using artifacts, interviews, reflection, and analysis about your identification with a cultural history. They can look at your history as a writer, gamer, athlete, dancer, musician, and the list goes on.

f. Write a literacy autobiography about any aspect of your current literacy education in college. To get you started thinking about what you have learned about literacy in college, here are a few potential ideas, although please don’t limit yourself to only these ideas. How did you learn to write a term paper for college? How did you learn to use the computer to conduct research for college? How did you learn to find sources for college papers?

g. Jot down notes about anything you can remember about how you learned this particular literacy for college. During this brainstorming time, do not edit or change anything. Just write whatever comes to mind.

h. Analyze your brainstorming notes on your college literacy. Look for recurring patterns in your data. Also, look for anything that seems especially important to you. What to you are the most important parts of your literacy education?

i. Interpret your data. Why do you think your literacy education occurred as it did? Refer to any lectures or anything that you have previously read to explain this. Also, you might want to do a quick library search looking at anything else that has been discovered about your particular literacy experience. How does this material explain your literacy experiences?

e. Write about your literacy experiences in college. What were your major findings how you learned this particular college literacy? For each finding, be sure to include the specific data from your notes that supports it. Be as specific and as detailed in describing this data as possible. Also, be specific in offering an explanations of your literacy experiences, including any authors and quotes in support of your interpretation.

Interview for a public article – Writing qualitative research for different audiences requires different rhetorical strategies. For this project, write a story using interviews as a research method for your campus website or newspaper.

a. Interview several people associated with a controversial issue, exciting event, or interesting phenomenon on campus and use these interviews to write a feature article for the school newspaper. (Refer to the previous section in this chapter on how to interview people.)

b. Write a feature for the school newspaper using these interviews. When writing the feature, use the advice below:
1) Lead – The first part of a feature. It is designed to hook a reader’s attention with some interesting, surprising, or well-written idea. It also answers the journalistic questions who, what, where, when, why, and how.

2) Nut Graf – It is the “point” of the feature and comes at about the midway point. In some ways it acts like a thesis because it gives the point of the piece and focuses it. The nut graf can act like a summary of the whole piece. Make sure the nut graf is clear.

3) Kicker – The kicker can be a resolution to surprises presented earlier, a repeated idea, or an idea to leave the reader thinking. The kicker comes toward the end of the feature. The kicker should bring closure to the feature. The kicker acts like a more interesting conclusion that leaves the reader thinking further about the issue the feature previously explored.

4) Other tips to writing the feature – Language in a feature can be informal, although it should still be appropriate for its audience. Both sentences and paragraphs can be short. Sometimes a paragraph can be one sentence. A feature does not usually use formal academic transitions. However, the writing should still carefully lead the reader without letting the reader get lost. Finally, figure out exactly who your audience for the feature will be and write specifically for this audience. For example, if you are writing to other students on campus, you can use jokes and inside humor that you know students at your school will understand.

5) Refer to the feature article entitled “Survey Shows New Media Can Be Compatible with Old” in the chapter on quantitative research, Chapter 8, for an example of a feature. The side comments should give you an even clearer idea of what a feature looks like and what the writing strategies for a feature entail.