



Third Edition

The Practice of  
**Qualitative  
Research**



**Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber**





"Each chapter provides relevant, engaging examples that illustrate the selected method by including transcriptions, research studies, and personal accounts. Students will be required to read this text to learn about qualitative methods, but I predict this is one text they will actually want to read because it brings them stories of insights into the practice of learning the trade."

—**Susan L. Wortmann**, Nebraska Wesleyan University

"This lucid text covers nearly every aspect of qualitative research, with useful attention being paid to the thorny logistics and pragmatic problems often encountered by researchers in the field. It is a great introduction for students and a necessary resource for the more seasoned."

—**Brian Creech**, Temple University

"This is a practical and easy-to-use manual for doctoral students in our program. The book encompasses a thorough understanding of all the nuances and challenges of qualitative research with step-by-step approaches."

—**Jeanne L. Surface**, University of Nebraska, Omaha

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# Hesse-Biber The Practice of Qualitative Research



# The Practice of Qualitative Research

*Engaging Students in the Research Process*

Third Edition

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber  
*Boston College*



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The Practice of

# Qualitative Research

Third Edition



*This book is dedicated to my mother, Helene Stockert.  
Her remarkable spirit, wisdom, and love have been invaluable to me  
throughout my academic career.*

**SAGE** was founded in 1965 by Sara Miller McCune to support the dissemination of usable knowledge by publishing innovative and high-quality research and teaching content. Today, we publish over 900 journals, including those of more than 400 learned societies, more than 800 new books per year, and a growing range of library products including archives, data, case studies, reports, and video. SAGE remains majority-owned by our founder, and after Sara's lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures our continued independence.

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The third edition of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* continues to be committed to providing students and teachers with a practice model of qualitative approaches to research. Differing from other qualitative methods texts, it provides a problem-centric approach to engaging with qualitative research by linking the practice of any research method to specific research questions. Underscored is the importance of having a “tight fit” between the specific research question and the method or set of methods selected to answer a given research problem. Engaging with a qualitative approach to research that often calls for understanding the lived experiences of research participants requires a range of listening and reflexive skills that calls on the researcher, who is the data collector, to be reflective about the values and agendas he or she may bring into any given research endeavor. To practice research reflexively means to be aware of your own researcher standpoint, that is the set of values and attitudes you bring to any given research project, as well as an examination of those philosophical assumptions you have about the nature of the social world.

The third edition, while remaining true to these goals, also integrates the most current scholarly work in the area of qualitative approaches to research and integrates the use of online methods and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that can offer students new ways of collecting and analyzing data that allow for the asking of and addressing new questions.

The third edition continues to add to the pedagogical lessons garnered from the collective wisdom and feedback of the students and instructors who have used this book along with those insights I have gained in the teaching of qualitative research during the course of my teaching career.

## **Major Themes and New Features**

### **Creating a Pedagogy of Engagement**

My pedagogical experience in the research methods classroom has been that students need to be engaged with the learning of research methods. It is critical to provide them with a range of hands-on activities that allow them to take learning risks and to apply the more abstract ideas they have learned in the classroom setting in a more formal way. The in-classroom mini exercises in each chapter allow instructors to go “back and forth” with their students while engaging them in reflexive learning through small-group exercise engagements. Students then conduct their own small research projects as a way for them to put together the strands of their learning. Toward that end, the third edition contains a step-by-step process of engagement to offer guidance for students carrying out their research projects using a range of research



methods. There is also a chapter devoted to writing up an entire research project in a step-by-step format that offers students a general research methods project template to guide them through the research project as a whole.

I have observed how critical it is for students to share what they have found difficult in the application of concepts to their own research activities. The in-class mini exercises serve to solidify a student's knowledge and skills regarding a specific method. Each chapter also contains a set of discussion questions that serve to engage students and their peers in the nitty-gritty of issues involved in the practice of a particular method. Instructors and students also have access to methods-specific websites listed at the end of each chapter with an annotated description of each website for further enrichment.

All pedagogical features contained in the book are aimed at engaging students in a *dialogue* aimed to place them in a dynamic communication process whose goal is to challenge their preconceived ideas about how knowledge is built. Creating a dialogue among students involves asking them to interrogate their ideas by tracing their reasoning behind a given perspective or conclusion they reach as they go about learning and practicing new research methods skills. In addition, dialogue encourages students to work together by deeply listening to each other's points of view and to explore and engage with the course material as a whole.

## A Practice Model

The third edition continues to provide a *practice model* of learning about qualitative research. This means several things. First, the field of qualitative research is framed as a process. By emphasizing process, students are shown how researchers make decisions along the way that impact the research findings. Second, each chapter offers a *holistic approach* to research. A holistic approach emphasizes the foundations on which research as a whole is based—the text emphasizes the interconnections between research questions and methods. It presents clear examples that illustrate the linkage of theory and methods. Also retained are key features from the second edition. Inspired by Erving Goffman's notion of “back stage” and “front stage,” the book again presents “behind-the-scenes” boxes written by leading qualitative researchers. Each behind-the-scenes piece offers students a window into the real-world practice of qualitative research, which at times is messy and unpredictable. Like the other key features throughout the book, these pieces are also a part of our pedagogy of engagement.

## Ethical Decision Making

Differing from many research methods texts that only briefly address ethical practice, the third edition of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* continues to center

ethics in social research. The ethics chapter has expanded to include more examples of ethical issues that students are most likely to confront as they go about engaging in their own research projects. Additionally, because the world students live in is rapidly changing due to technological advances, the ethical issues that emerge as a result of Internet research and personal networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are addressed. Finally, issues regarding ethical practice are integrated throughout the methods chapters in the book. I note examples of places where ethical issues emerge in practice with respect to the different methods reviewed in the book.

## What's New in the Third Edition?

*The Practice of Qualitative Research*, third edition, presents a truly comprehensive review of qualitative and mixed methods research. Part I is restructured and renamed “Taking a Qualitative Approach to Research.” Chapter 1 presents an invitation to qualitative research. Chapter 2 focuses on approaches to framing qualitative research. For reader ease, I have categorized various approaches under two umbrella categories: interpretive and critical. Perspectives are given equal weight. Under the interpretive umbrella, I review symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, the Chicago school, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology. Under the critical umbrella, I review postmodernism, post-structuralism, feminism, queer studies, and critical race theory. Using clear tables for visual learners helps to illustrate the differences between these approaches. This also demonstrates a larger theme interwoven throughout the book: the integration of theory and methods. Chapter 3 presents qualitative research designs that provide students with an overview of the “nuts and bolts” of qualitative research designs, and Chapter 4 offers an in-depth review of ethical practice drawing on new technology-based examples.

Part II, “Qualitative Research Practice,” focuses on a range of specific research methods. Retained are many of the methods chapters from the second edition, and these have been updated to reflect the most current scholarship in the field of qualitative research. New in Part II is Chapter 9, “Researching Mass Media: Images and Text,” authored by leading communications researchers Dr. Lisa Cuklanz and Dr. Heather McIntosh.

Part III, “Tying the Strands Together,” retains our focus on walking students through the ins and outs of analyzing and interpretation of qualitative data and provides a range of specific examples to illustrate the process of meaning making. The text also provides a range of short exercises for students to practice their analytical and interpretative skills. A newly revised chapter on research writing provides tips for writing up student research projects and contains step-by-step specific illustrations and examples of this process.

The third edition of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* can be used in research methods and qualitative research methods courses. In fact, given the new material, this book can serve as the primary textbook in a survey of research methods course with a smaller supplemental text on purely quantitative methods such as survey research and quasi experiments.

### **Online Resources**

A companion website at [study.sagepub.com/hessebiber3e](http://study.sagepub.com/hessebiber3e) offers PowerPoint slides and suggested exam questions for instructors, as well as full-text SAGE journal articles and quizzes for students.

*Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber*  
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# Acknowledgments

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The third edition of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* would not be possible without the assistance and support of many members within my academic community.

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Best wishes,

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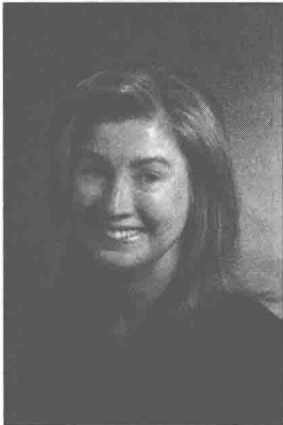
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# About the Authors

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Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, PhD, is professor of sociology and the director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. She has published widely on the impact of sociocultural factors on women's body image, including her book *Am I Thin Enough Yet? The Cult of Thinness and the Commercialization of Identity* (Oxford, 1996), which was selected as one of *Choice* magazine's best academic books for 1996. She published *The Cult of Thinness* (Oxford, 2007) and is coeditor of *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 2004) and *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (Sage, 2006).

She is editor of the *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (2nd ed.) (Sage, 2012), which was selected as one of the Critics' Choice Award winners by the American Education Studies Association and was also chosen as one of *Choice* magazine's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2007. She is editor of *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (Sage, 2014). She publishes widely on mixed methods research, and her publications appear in *Qualitative Health Research* (QHR), *Qualitative Inquiry* (QI), and *The Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (JMMR). She was appointed an associate editor of JMMR. She is coeditor of the *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (Guilford, 2008). She is author of *Mixed Methods Research: Merging Theory with Practice* (Guilford, 2010). Her most recent coedited book is titled *The Oxford Handbook of Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry* (Oxford, 2015).

She was recently recognized by Alpha Sigma Nu, the honor society for Jesuit higher education institutions, with a 2015 Alpha Sigma Nu Book Award for excellence in publishing in science, for her monograph, *Waiting for Cancer to Come: Women's Experiences with Genetic Testing and Medical Decision Making for Breast and Ovarian Cancer* (University of Michigan Press, 2014).

She is codeveloper of the software program HyperRESEARCH, a computer-assisted program for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods data, and the new transcription tool HyperTRANSCRIBE. A fully functional free demo of these programs is available at [www.researchware.com](http://www.researchware.com). This website, [www.researchware.com](http://www.researchware.com), provides links to a free teaching edition for both programs.

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