Qualitative Data Analysis

Prof. David Morgan
Soc 510/610, Fall 2014
Office Hours: Tues. 12-2:00 & by appt.
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This course will introduce you to three techniques for analyzing qualitative data: software-based analysis using ATLAS.ti, Grounded Theory, and Thematic Analysis. The course will have a practical orientation, emphasizing hands-on experience with these techniques.

Please note that we will be working with data that I supply to you, so there is no requirement that you have already collected data before you take the course -- although the course will probably be of most value to those at least engaged in data collection at this point in your project.

Readings

The rest of the readings will be articles and book chapters that I will distribute to you via email.

In addition, we will be using video tutorials on ATLAS and Dedoose. The set of ATLAS tutorials can be found at:

http://www.atlasti.com/videos.html

The Dedoose video tutorials are at:

http://www.dedoose.com/resources

Assignments and Grades
There are five short assignments for this class that are primarily based on using the three basic data collection techniques. There is no final paper.

Due Dates
Oct. 7 Your experiences as a first year graduate student Credit/No Credit
Oct. 21 Coding your own essay 25%
Nov. 4 Evaluating ATLAS.ti and similar software 25%
Dec. 2 Open coding and categorizing 25%
Dec. 9 Describing your own analysis process 25%
## Course Outline

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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Oct. 7</td>
<td>Orientation to ATLAS.ti</td>
<td>ATLAS video tutorials: #1 - #6, ATLAS Quicktour</td>
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<td>Oct. 14</td>
<td>Codes, coding and codebooks in ATLAS</td>
<td>ATLAS video tutorials: #8 - #13</td>
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<td>Oct. 21</td>
<td>Analysis strategies in ATLAS</td>
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<td>Oct. 28</td>
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<td>Nov. 4</td>
<td>Qualitative Content Analysis</td>
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<td>Nov. 11</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Braun &amp; Clarke 2006, 2013</td>
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<td>Nov. 18</td>
<td>Grounded Theory: Coding</td>
<td>Charmaz, <em>Constructing GT</em> chapters 1-5 (skim chapters 2-4)</td>
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<td>Nov. 25</td>
<td>Grounded Theory: Conceptualizing</td>
<td>Charmaz, <em>Constructing GT</em> chapters 6-9 (skip pp. 192-212)</td>
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<td>Dec. 2</td>
<td>Grounded Theory: Additional alternatives</td>
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Assignments

1. Your experiences as a first year graduate student (Due Oct. 7th)

We often say in qualitative research that the researcher is the research instrument, i.e., you interpret what counts the data and you give it meaning. Of course, that means we need to know something about the nature of “research instrument.” That is particularly relevant for the present sample study because you will be analyzing something that you have all experienced: being a first-year graduate student.

Because you own experiences will implicitly influence how you approach the various analysis tasks related to our dataset about being a first year graduate, I want you to begin by explicitly describing what it was like for you to be a first year graduate student. In particular, I want you to write a 3-page (double spaced) essay titled “Being a first year graduate student: What I remember.” Since this is your story I don’t want to influence you too much with regard to content. My main request is that you try to cover as many different topics as you can -- in other words, breadth is more important than depth.

One very important element of this assignment is that at some point in the course, you will be sharing this essay with other students (see Assignment #4 below). So, please do not describe anything that you want to keep private.

2. Coding your own essay (Due Oct. 21st)

The codebook that we are using with ATLAS was designed to handle a specific dataset, but it did originate from a set of focus groups that produced very general lists of the “challenges” related to being a graduate student. That raises the question of how well these codes describe the overall experience of being a graduate student. To assess that, I want you to treat your essay as if it were a new piece of data on this topic, which we can code with this codebook.

[NOTE: If possible, I want you to do this coding using the ATLAS.ti software package, but that depends on the extent to which people can indeed get access to the software. If that proves to be a problem, I will provide alternatives means of coding your essay.]

Now write a memo (2 pages maximum) that summarizes how well you think the codebook captured the topics in your essay. Did it miss some things? Did it over- emphasize others? And going beyond just the “marking” of topics, how well did this kind of coding capture the overall content of your essay? If this were the core of the analytic process that was applied to your essay, how effective would it be?

3. Evaluating ATLAS.ti and similar software (Due Nov. 4th)

Write a 3 page evaluation of software such as ATLAS as a tool for the analysis of qualitative data (especially interviews). Your audience for this paper should be qualitative researchers who are new to using software. Assume that they want to get a realistic sense of what software in general, and ATLAS in particular, can do to help them with the analysis of their data.

What are the strengths of such software? What are the weaknesses? When would it be most appropriate -- what kinds of goals would it match best? When would it be less appropriate? And looking beyond qualitative software in general, what can you say about ATLAS as a specific tool? How easy or hard is it to learn? Who is most likely to find it either easier or harder to learn? Are there any features that you especially like? Are there any features or anything else that you wish were here but is missing in ATLAS?
4. Open coding and categorizing  **(Due Dec. 2nd)**

   You will receive 2 of the original essays to code, using the open coding approach from Grounded Theory. One again, shift the margin to allow yourself at least 3 inches for writing, and then print out the two essays. Use line-by-line open coding to capture each significant aspect of each essay. Where possible, stay close to the original wording. Where possible, use action- and process-oriented words for your codes (gerunds are particularly useful for this purpose).

   Next, use a word processor to group your codes into categories. These categories should, once again, be as close to the data as possible. The goal is simply to organize and summarize your open coding in a way that makes its content more accessible.

   Write a 3 page memo describing your experience with this kind of coding. How easy or hard did you find it be, and why? Did you feel like you generated too many codes or too few? How easy or hard was it for you to generate the outline, and why? How useful was the outlining process?

5. Describing your own analysis process  **(Due Dec. 9th)**

   Write two drafts of the Analysis portion of the Methods section for your thesis project. First, write one for the thesis itself that would your analysis project at the typical length for either a Masters or a PhD thesis. Next, write a description at the typical length for a publishable article.