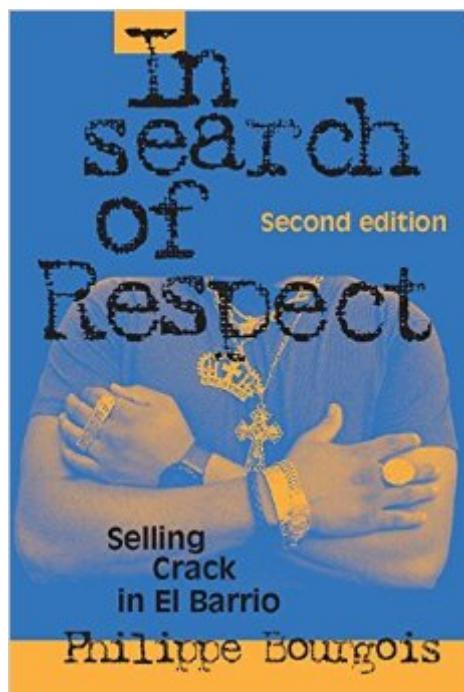


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# In Search Of Respect: Selling Crack In El Barrio (Structural Analysis In The Social Sciences)



## **Synopsis**

Philippe Bourgois's ethnographic study of social marginalization in inner-city America, won critical acclaim when it was first published in 1995. For the first time, an anthropologist had managed to gain the trust and long-term friendship of street-level drug dealers in one of the roughest ghetto neighborhoods--East Harlem. This new edition adds a prologue describing the major dynamics that have altered life on the streets of East Harlem in the seven years since the first edition. In a new epilogue Bourgois brings up to date the stories of the people--Primo, Caesat, Luis, Tony, Candy--who readers come to know in this remarkable window onto the world of the inner city drug trade. Philippe Bourgois is Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. He has conducted fieldwork in Central America on ethnicity and social unrest and is the author of *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). He is writing a book on homeless heroin addicts in San Francisco. 1/e hb ISBN (1996) 0-521-43518-8 1/e pb ISBN (1996) 0-521-57460-9

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## **Customer Reviews**

Almost everyone I know who has read this book agrees that it is a very well-written, as the author uses a plain, easy-to-read and understand style. This is a break with the usual, post-modern jargon that is common among anthropologists today. By the way, Bourgois is NOT a sociologist. He is an

anthropologist. Sociologists typically do not engage in five years of participant observation among their informants, but prefer instead to rely on quantitative data. Philippe Bourgois is a medical anthropologist at UC-San Francisco. A lot of those who have reviewed this book do not understand Bourgois's main argument. He is arguing that answers to society's most pressing issues are a lot more than mere blame-the-system or blame-the-victim approaches. It is far too common for liberals and conservatives, respectively, to blame society or to blame pathological, flawed individuals for social problems. As Bourgois shows in this book, the truth is often a combination of the two. Even his informants admit that they blame no one else but themselves for the situations they are in. Because Bourgois holds both individuals and larger social structures responsible for the epidemic drug crisis in America, he is bound to piss off both the left and the right with this book. Liberals will claim he is blaming the victim, portraying inner-city people as fundamentally flawed, and tarnishing the image of people living in poverty. Conservatives, on the other hand, will do a complete 180 - and claim that the author is making excuses for criminal behavior, drug abuse, and other social ills. Both the left and the right will accuse Bourgois of glorifying drug abuse and crime - which I strongly DO NOT believe he is doing.

In the spirit of Bourgois, let me introduce myself. I'm a suburban white woman with a background in history. I was assigned to read this book for an "Aspects of Deviance" Sociology class. Bourgois' approach to his research makes a lot of sense to me since I was taught (as a would-be historian) to take into account all backgrounds and prejudices of the author, the reader, and the characters (if applicable). Perhaps something that makes the read so easy is that the author so willingly points out his own thoughts and biases. This is not to say that our job as readers becomes only to sit back and enjoy the story, but it makes it easier to filter through the author's analyses in order to modify the conclusion for yourself. Importantly, he liberally uses transcriptions of actual dialogues with the East Harlem crack dealers whom he befriends over three-plus years. Having that kind of access to the source of his research is invaluable in judging the situation for yourself. As for the content, I can think of no better way for me to get a glimpse into that kind of life and neighborhood. One of the only other books that comes close is an autobiography by Nathan McCall called *Makes Me Wanna Holler*. This book covers his experience going from a gang member in the 1970's to "goin' legit" as a journalist and often revisiting the demons of his past. Because the author discusses the idea of objectivity and various definitions of it, I want to mention one movie for anyone interested in better understanding how biases affect otherwise factual accounts. *Courage Under Fire* is a good example of understanding how various views, motives, and biases color different people's accounts.

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