

# APPENDIX 2: WORKSHOP AGENDA

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Workshop on the Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research

Sponsored by  
NSF Sociology Program and Methodology, Measurement, & Statistics Program

Organized by  
Charles Ragin, University of Arizona

## AGENDA

FRIDAY, July 11, 2003

8:30 - 9:00 **Introduction**

Dr. Norman Bradburn, Associate Director, Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences  
Dr. Richard Lempert, Division Director, Social and Economic Sciences

9:00 - 10:30 **Session 1: Defining Qualitative Research**

A good definition of qualitative research should be inclusive and should emphasize its key strengths and features, not what it lacks (e.g., the use of sophisticated quantitative techniques). What practices and techniques define qualitative work in sociology and related disciplines today? A related issue is the question of goals: Is qualitative research defined by distinctive goals? Qualitative researchers often want to find out “how” things happen (or happened); a common goal is to “make the facts understandable.” Quantitative researchers, by contrast, are often more concerned with inference and prediction, especially from a sample to a population. An important issue to address concerns these differences in goals and whether they are complementary or contradictory.

Julia Adams, Yale University, “Qualitative Research...What’s in a Name?”

Eli Anderson, University of Pennsylvania, “Urban Ethnography”

Joel Best, University of Delaware, “Defining Qualitative Research”

David Collier, University of California, Berkeley, “Qualitative Versus Quantitative: What Might This Distinction Mean?”

10:30 - 10:45 Break

## 10:45 - 12:15 **Session 2: Qualitative Research and Theory**

Qualitative research projects are often framed as theory-building enterprises—as sources of ideas, evidence, and insights for theory construction, rather than as systematic techniques for theory testing. In this view, theory plays an important orienting function in qualitative research by providing important leads and guiding concepts for empirical research, but existing theory is rarely well-formulated enough to provide explicit hypotheses in qualitative research. Do qualitative methods have a distinctive relationship to theory, and can qualitative data be used to evaluate theory and test hypotheses? What are the logics of inquiry, relationships to theory, and strategies of research design of qualitative projects?

Andrew Bennett, Georgetown University, “Testing Theories and Explaining Cases”

Gary Fine, Northwestern University, “The When of Theory”

David Snow, University of California, Irvine, “Thoughts on Alternative Pathways to Theoretical Development: Theory Generation, Extension, and Refinement”

Sudhir Venkatesh, Columbia University, “A Note on Science and Qualitative Research”

12:15 - 1:15 Lunch

## 1:15 - 2:45 **Session 3: Designing Qualitative Research**

In much qualitative research there is no sharp separation between data collection and data analysis. Researchers analyze data as they collect it and often decide what data to collect next based on what they have learned. Thus, it is often difficult to specify, in advance, a structured data collection plan. Further, the “analytic frames” used by qualitative researchers (which define both cases and variables) often must remain flexible throughout the research process. Answers to such foundational questions as “What are my cases?” and “What are their relevant features?” may change as the research progresses. The relative fluidity of the qualitative research process poses important challenges to the design of qualitative research, especially at the proposal stage.

Vilna Bashi, Rutgers University, “Improving Qualitative Research Proposal Evaluation”

Terre Satterfield, University of British Columbia, “A Few Thoughts on Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods”

Susan Silbey, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “Designing Qualitative Research Projects”

Mark Turner, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, “Designing Qualitative Research in Cognitive Social Science”

2:45 - 3:00 Break

### 3:00 - 4:30 **Session 4: Analyzing Qualitative Data**

There are many different techniques being used by researchers to collect and analyze qualitative data. These range from broad, narrative description to specific, technical procedures. Many qualitative researchers view their evidence in a set-theoretic, as opposed to correlational, manner, and they search for invariant patterns and connections. The set-theoretic emphasis of qualitative analysis is apparent in techniques developed specifically for qualitative researchers. For example, capacities for performing complex “Boolean” (i.e., set-theoretic) searches are common in programs designed for the analysis of qualitative data. Such techniques must be “structured enough” to help researchers find patterns in their data, but not so structured that they build in assumptions that blind researchers or constrain inquiry. What are the available methods for analyzing various types of qualitative data, and what are the emerging technologies? What are the best practices for analyzing qualitative data? How can these new techniques best serve the needs of qualitative researchers? Is it possible to maximize both flexibility and rigor?

Howard Becker, University of Washington, “The Problems of Analysis,” & “A Danger”

James Mahoney, Brown University, “The Distinctive Contributions of Qualitative Data Analysis”

Katherine Newman, Princeton University, “The Right (Soft) Stuff: Qualitative Methods and the Study of Welfare Reform”

Eben Weitzman, University of Massachusetts, Boston, “Advancing the Scientific Basis of Qualitative Research”

SATURDAY, July 12, 2003

### 9:00 - 10:30 **Session 5: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods**

Researchers often use both quantitative and qualitative techniques in multi-methods research projects. For instance, qualitative methods may be used to obtain information on meaning, affect, and culture, while quantitative methods are used to measure structural, contextual, and institutional features of social settings. Other combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches involve hybrid strategies. For example, researchers may use qualitative methods to construct and typologize case narratives from detailed survey data and then use modal narratives as categories in quantitative analysis. Many combinations are possible, depending on the goals of the researcher and the assumptions, both theoretical and methodological, that structure the investigation. What are the most productive, feasible, and innovative ways of combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies?

Mitchell Duneier, University of Wisconsin, “Suggestions for NSF”

Victor Nee, Cornell University, “A Place For Hybrid Methodologies”

Charles Ragin, University of Arizona, “Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research”

Robert Smith, City University of New York, “Complementary Articulation: Matching Qualitative Data and Quantitative Methods”

10:30 - 10:45 Break

## 10:45- 12:15 **Session 6: Evaluating Qualitative Research**

Many users and consumers of social science research, even those who are not critical of qualitative research, find qualitative data suggestive rather than definitive, illuminating rather than convincing, “soft” rather than “hard.” Because there is often no clear separation of data collection and data analysis in qualitative research, the path from data to results is less clear. To articulate standards of proof or plausibility for qualitative research it is important to take account of its relation to theory, especially the fact that it is generally better suited for theory building than theory testing. What are standards of evidence for qualitative data and what constitutes “proof” or “plausibility” in qualitative research? How can we evaluate qualitative data and assess the results of qualitative analysis?

Kathleen Blee, University of Pittsburgh, “Evaluating Qualitative Research”

Linda Burton, Pennsylvania State University, “Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study”

Jack Katz, University of California, Los Angeles, “Commonsense Criteria”

Michele Lamont, Harvard University, “Evaluating Qualitative Research: Some Empirical Findings and an Agenda”

12:15 - 1:15 Lunch

## 1:15 - 2:30 **Session 7: Taking Stock and Setting an Agenda**

Patricia White and Joane Nagel, National Science Foundation, Sociology Program

## 2:30 - 2:45 **Concluding Remarks**

Charles Ragin, University of Arizona