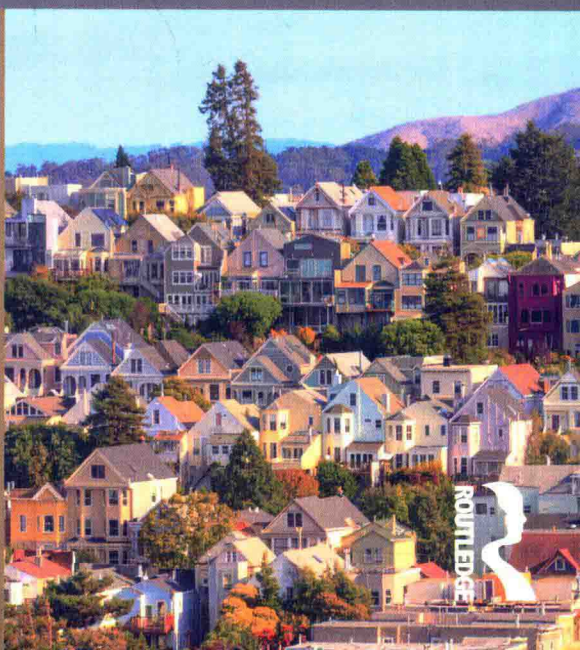
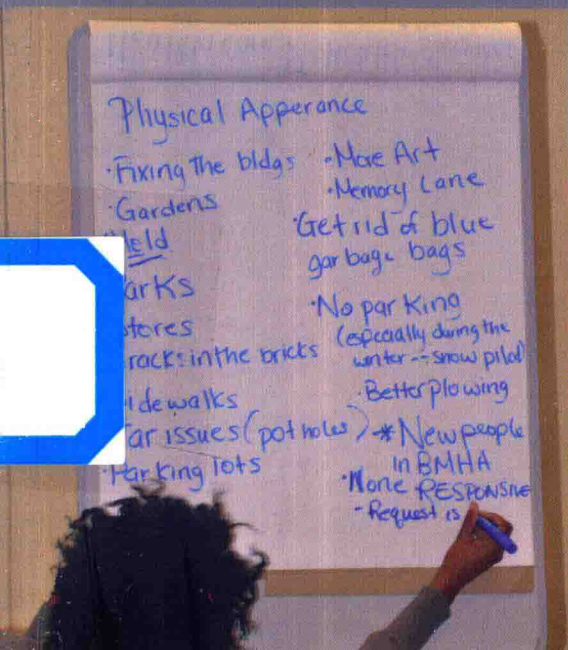




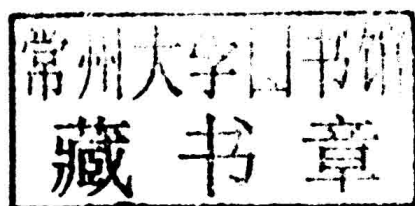
Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development

Robert Mark Silverman and Kelly L. Patterson



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Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development

Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development teaches the basic skills, tools, and methods of qualitative research with special attention to the needs of community practitioners. This book teaches students entering planning, community development, nonprofit management, social work, and similar applied fields the core skills necessary to conduct systematic research designed to empower communities and promote social change.

Focusing on the basic elements of qualitative research, such as field observation, interviewing, focus groups, and content analysis, *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development* provides an overview of core methods and theoretical underpinnings of successful research. The book provides examples from past research used in transformative community projects across multiple disciplines. From housing, community organizing, neighborhood planning, and urban revitalization, this book gives students the skills they need to undertake their own projects, and provides professionals a valuable reference for their future research.

The book serves as a primary text for courses in applied qualitative research, and as a reference book for professionals and community-based researchers. In addition to content detailing core methods used in qualitative research, it includes a chapter that provides guidance for the dissemination of qualitative results to a spectrum of audiences applying qualitative methods to action research and community empowerment.

Robert Mark Silverman is a Professor and the PhD Program Director in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo. He is co-editor of *Schools and Urban Revitalization: Rethinking Institutions and Community Development* (2013); and *Fair and Affordable Housing in the US: Trends, Outcomes, Future Directions* (2011).

Kelly L. Patterson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University at Buffalo. She is co-editor of *Schools and Urban Revitalization: Rethinking Institutions and Community Development* (2013); and *Fair and Affordable Housing in the US: Trends, Outcomes, Future Directions* (2011).

"Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development is an engaging and practical 'how to' guide in the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of qualitative research. Replete with numerous case examples and sections on topics such as underlying theoretical contexts, ethical concerns, and the use of new technologies, the book is an invaluable resource for community-based scholars, students, and practitioners."

*Anna Maria Santiago, Leona Bevis & Marguerite Haynam Professor of
Community Development, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of
Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University*

"At last! A qualitative methods text pitched to professional disciplines. The text provides an engaging overview of methods, followed by practical primers on collecting and analyzing qualitative data. A concise but clear data analysis chapter leads off the practical approach, unfolding the relationship between a researcher and his or her qualitative data and its sources: ethics, tools for coding and creating meaning, the importance of iteration, and the value of collaboration. The text teaches and shows by example how to communicate in ways 'interesting and memorable,' as well as oriented towards progressive change. It will be an excellent choice for students and professionals embarking on qualitative research."

*Gwendolyn H. Urey, Professor of Urban & Regional Planning,
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona*

"This book offers solid guidance to community development and social welfare students and practitioners on how to design, collect, analyze, and publish qualitative data for the purposes of improving services and empowering communities. Detailing rigorous standards while using approachable examples, it is well-organized, comprehensive, insightful, and a delight to read."

*Corianne Payton Scally, CEO, HOUSERS, LLC and
former Associate Professor of Urban Planning, University at Albany, SUNY*

**We dedicate this book to
Elijah and Emalyn**

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| AI | analysis of impediments |
| BNMC | Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus |
| CAT | Coding Analysis Toolkit |
| CDC | community development corporation |
| DHS | Department of Human Services |
| HUD | U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| IRB | institutional review board |
| LISC | Local Initiatives Support Corporation |
| MDOT | Michigan Department of Transportation |
| MOU | memorandum of understanding |
| MSHDA | Michigan State Housing Development Authority |
| NFTA | Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority |
| NIMBY | not in my backyard |
| PAR | participatory action research |
| PHA | public housing authority |
| QDAS | qualitative data analysis software |

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1 Qualitative Research for Students and Professionals

Dawn of a New Era

It is an exciting time to be a qualitative researcher. The need for qualitative and mixed-methods research in the applied professions has grown in response to new challenges confronted by community development practitioners. These challenges stem from: shifting population demographics, fiscal constraints in the public sector, growing demand for social services, increased experimentation with education reform, emerging concerns about public health, and heightened awareness of other factors impacting the quality of life in communities. The simultaneous ascent of these new challenges has raised our awareness of their interconnectedness and the need for comprehensive and inter-disciplinary analysis. In addition to the sheer volume of new social issues and policy questions professionals confront, there is growing demand for civic engagement and citizen empowerment in the community development process.

In part, demand for greater citizen input grows out of increased competition for scarce resources in society. However, it is also a reflection of the expansion of democratic institutions and values in the modern world. This progression is reflected by the emergence of new governance structures at the local, state, and national levels. It is also echoed in the growing demands for citizen participation and empowerment in public policy processes. Practitioners in the applied professions occupy a unique space in our changing world. They work on the front lines of policy implementation and have firsthand knowledge of the challenges institutions confront in our times. As a result, practitioners are often asked to identify community needs and interpret community development outcomes for policy makers and their constituencies.

We have witnessed the growth in practitioner driven research across the professions. Urban planners are increasingly asked to analyze, evaluate, and propose new models for community development that are responsive to the public. Social workers assess the needs of communities, design programs, and interventions, and evaluate their outcomes. Public and nonprofit administrators develop strategies to deliver services in communities and increasingly work with residents to ensure that these activities unfold in an equitable manner.

Reforms in public education have led to increased interactions between schools and communities, and a growing interest in studying the outcomes of new education policies. In the field of public health, professionals have increasingly focused on studying how to promote healthy communities and assessing the effectiveness of strategies adopted to achieve this goal.

We have also witnessed the integration of community development across the professions. The growth in inter-disciplinary work has increased the demand for the development of new methods for policy research and evaluation. Practitioners have increasingly turned to qualitative methods to analyze community development policies that bridge traditional disciplinary boundaries. Qualitative methods are particularly valuable to research focusing on social welfare and community development policies that bridge the professions. In part, this is the case because these policies increasingly focus on comprehensive approaches to community development that integrate: housing, social services, education, public health, workforce development, and other components. Qualitative methods allow researchers to examine the intersection of these components of community development policies and to generate a holistic understanding of them. Qualitative methods also provide practitioners from disparate professions with a common language to analyze and evaluate inter-disciplinary work. This is important since disciplinary specific tools for analysis do not always facilitate the synthesis of research results. Qualitative methods add an integrative dimension to multi-methods strategies for policy analysis. In addition to these attributes, qualitative methods and the results from qualitative research are accessible to a broad audience.

One of the primary advantages of qualitative research is that it makes data analysis and research results more accessible to a broad spectrum of individuals and groups in society. As a result, it is a truly democratic and empowering approach to data collection and analysis. Unlike their quantitative counterparts, qualitative methods are more accessible to constituencies affected by community development policies. Qualitative data are composed of: field notes, interview transcripts, photographic documents, audio recordings, film, archival records, and other data that are readily available to investigators and the general public. These characteristics make qualitative data transparent and relatively easy to replicate. The democratic and empowering nature of qualitative research is also reinforced by the use of appropriate technologies in the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Many of the tools used in qualitative research are found in everyday settings. They include paper and pencils, basic word processing software, digital cameras and recording devices, web-cams and video links, and related applications found in smartphone technologies. Even more advanced qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) packages require few prerequisite skills and are relatively easy to learn.

The democratic and accessible nature of qualitative methods add to their power as an approach to research that focuses on exploring emergent themes and advancing dialogue about pressing social problems. The qualitative approach

provides a broad spectrum of individuals and groups in society tools to engage in systematic research. Qualitative analysis applies a relatively universal set of analytic techniques to the various types of data collected during the research process. These techniques are: accessible to individuals with different levels of research experience, adaptable to a spectrum of research settings, and replicable across studies. Qualitative methods serve as a vehicle for the expansion of participants in the data collection and analysis processes. Methods are flexible. They allow research to be pursued in a variety of contexts by: sole investigators, research teams, and using participatory action research (PAR) designs. The dissemination of qualitative research results is equally flexible. Research findings can be targeted to multiple audiences and disseminated using multiple mediums. Qualitative research reports can be written for academic and professional audiences. Excerpts from qualitative studies can be incorporated into community newsletters and the popular media. The richness of qualitative data also allows for the dissemination of research using images, audio clips, and film on the internet and through social media.

Qualitative research is grounded in a long tradition across the social sciences and professions. This tradition has included a number of community studies focusing on neighborhoods and urban life, social movements, and the local public policy process. The impetus for many past qualitative studies was the rapid change in the social fabric of communities due to: mass immigration during the industrial revolution, economic disruption during the Great Depression, residential displacement caused by urban renewal, efforts to desegregate neighborhoods and schools beginning in the 1960s, and other multifaceted problems social welfare and community development professionals were called upon to address. Today, there has been a resurgence in the application of qualitative methods to professional practice. This resurgence is in response to similar challenges that prompted the adoption of qualitative methods in the past. In many contemporary communities: demographics are rapidly changing, poverty and economic dislocation are systemic problems, stresses on the built environment have produced a variety of negative externalities for the environment and public health, and residential segregation and educational inequality remain intransigent barriers to social progress. Qualitative methods provide professionals with valuable tools for the development and evaluation of policies aimed at addressing these problems.

Connecting Theory to Professional Practice

Qualitative methods are informed by theory that focuses on explaining new challenges faced by communities and generating a holistic understanding of them. There are numerous theoretical perspectives that inform qualitative methods. In this discussion we focus on a discrete set that inform professional practice. Our emphasis is on general theory that applies to applied qualitative research. The five perspectives discussed form a foundation for qualitative research in community development and social welfare practice.

They include:

- ethnographic research, which provides researchers with an orientation for observing the world and discovering underlying patterns in social and institutional relationships;
- the grounded theory approach, which provides researchers with a systematic framework for organizing and analyzing qualitative data, and generating new theoretical explanations for phenomenon observed in the field;
- the case study approach, which establishes a sampling framework for qualitative analysis, in terms of identifying both critical cases for analysis and criteria for comparative case research;
- mixed methods research, which argues for the incorporation of multiple methods in a single study; and
- PAR, which adds a focus on empowerment to the research process by transforming research subjects into co-investigators.

Our emphasis on these five perspectives is bound by a radical ethos that drives social welfare and community development. Within that ethos we view the professional practitioner as a transformational researcher who uses research as a tool to advocate for change, provide information and data to disenfranchised groups, and empower communities.

From our perspective, theory provides a foundation for research in professional practice and we see the researcher as a change agent in society. In essence, we see the role of the community development and social welfare practitioner in a similar light to Grabow and Heskin's (1973) description of the role of the radical planner in the planning profession. In the following quote from Grabow and Heskin (1973: 112) we substitute the words "community development and social welfare" and "practitioner" for "planning" and "planner" respectively:

In this radical definition of [community development and social welfare], who is the [practitioner]? In our definition the [practitioner] is active: a radical agent of change. He or she is not, as are so many of today's professionals, a creature of divided loyalty, one who owes as much or more to the profession as to the people. Instead, the job is to facilitate social experimentation by the people. The radical [practitioner] is a nonprofessional professional: no longer one with a property right entitled ["community development and social welfare,"] but rather an educator and at the same time a student of the ecological ethic as revealed in the consciousness of the people. Such an individual strives for self-actualization of oneself and of the others with whom one lives. Finally, he or she is not apart from the people: the ["practitioner"] is one of us, or all of us.

In this reformulation, we offer a radical definition of community development and social welfare that provides a normative framework for the application of qualitative research to community development and social welfare problems. From this perspective social action and advocacy is interwoven with the practice of qualitative research. Consequently, the five theoretical perspectives described here are elevated from relatively neutral instruments used in research to tools of praxis. The key contributions of each method and their links to professional practice and community empowerment are summarized in Figure 1.1 and then elaborated upon in the section that follows.

| <i>Method</i> | <i>Key Contributions</i> | <i>Links to Professional Practice and Community Empowerment</i> |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Ethnography | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • holistic analysis of social settings • insider's perspective • <i>theory of description</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical framework for analysis • focus on deconstructing power relations • reflexive stance |
| Grounded Theory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on theory building • theoretical sampling • constant comparative method | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem-based orientation • praxis applications |
| Case Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of thick description and narrative approach • depth of analysis • focus on critical cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tangible and accessible to a broad audience • pragmatic focus on a single case or set of cases drawn from the local context • use of appropriate technology |
| Mixed-Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows for the layering of data collected with multiple methods • flexibility in the integration of quantitative and qualitative data • facilitates the aggregation and summary of qualitative findings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost-effective and pragmatic use of available data • meets the data expectations of multiple audiences in community and policy circles • provides dimensionality and multiple measures of a common problem under investigation |
| PAR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduces a co-investigator's role for participants in the research process • non-hierarchical approach and inclusive approach to data collection, analysis, and dissemination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops community-based research capacity • transfers skills and technology to the community to facilitate future autonomous research • focuses on community generated interventions |

Figure 1.1 Methods, Key Contributions, and Links to Professional Practice and Community Empowerment.