



# Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research (Qualitative Research Methods)

By Jerome Kirk, Marc L. Miller

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Kirk and Miller define what is -- and what is not -- qualitative research. They suggest that the use of numbers in the process of recording and analyzing observations is less important than that the research should involve sustained interaction with the people being studied, in their own language and in their own surroundings. 'Qualitative research conducted as science should complement nonqualitative science,' they observe. 'Understanding the workings of scientific endeavour, whether it is of the natural or social variety, entails an appreciation of its objectivity . . . By this convention, the objectivity of a piece of qualitative research is evaluated in terms of the reliability and validity of its observations on culture.' After an introductory chapter on objectivity, the authors discuss the role of reliability and validity in the unfolding of science, and the problems that may arise when these two issues are neglected. They present a paradigm for the qualitative research process that makes it possible to pursue validity without neglecting reliability.

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### **About the Author**

The immune system must respond rapidly and efficaciously to microbial infection, yet this response must avoid becoming pathogenic to the host. In this context, regulatory T cells (T regs; CD4<sup>+</sup> CD25<sup>+</sup>, FoxP3 expressing T cells) play a central role in regulating adaptive immune responses to ensure that tolerance to host tissues is maintained. A case in point is that autoimmune disease develops in both humans and mice deficient in T regs. Conversely, depletion of T regs has been shown to augment the immune response to cancer. The regulatory action of T regs involves the cytokines IL-10 and TGF- $\beta$ . Moreover, cell-to-cell contact appears to be required for the suppression of T cell proliferation in vitro. However, virtually nothing is known about the cellular specificity, stoichiometry, kinetics or location of immunoregulatory events in vivo. With recent advances in multi-photon microscopy, complex cellular interactions can now be studied directly in native tissues. Our approach is to use single-cell imaging to assess T reg impact on antigen presentation, T cell activation and effector function. We are currently developing two complementary mouse models for this purpose. With the first system we will investigate the role of T regs in the rejection or progression of implanted primary tumors. In the second model, we will examine the regulation of T cell responses during *Listeria* infection. Our hope is that comparing and contrasting T cell regulation in these systems will provide useful insight for how tolerance and immunity are governed. A secondary interest in the lab is to use biophysical data obtained by multi-photon microscopy to develop tissue level models for T cell regulation. The potential synergy between imaging and computational biology is tremendous i.e., computer simulations will guide experimental design, and in situ imaging will provide solid quantitative data for model refinement.

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