



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF  
EDUCATION AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

**QualLab**

# Introduction to Focus Groups



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# QualLab

**See the QualLab website for a Dashboard of Resources, Events, YouTube Videos, etc.**

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# Data Collection

## Researcher Decision Point

What are various ways to collect data?

# Data Collection

- Structured Interviews
- Closed or Fixed-Response Interviews
- Semi-Structured Interviews
- Informal, Conversational Interviews
- Walking Interviews
- Standardized, Open-Ended Interviews
- Topical Interviews
- Life History Interviews
- In-Depth Interviews
- Evaluation Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Collect Artifacts
- Arts Based Interviews
- Photovoice / Photo Elicitation
- Draw a Picture
- Make a Meal Together
- Chose a Tarot Card
- Create RQ's with the community
- And many more...

# The Arch of an Interview & Focus Group



# Focus Groups

## Researcher Decision Points

- Focus Group Protocol Development
- Focus Group Participant Engagement
- Before and After the Focus Group
- Moderators Role
- Observers Role

# Focus Group Protocol Development

- Introduce yourselves and observers, including everyone's role
- Just like an interview, design the “arch of the focus group” conversation from low – to medium – to high - to low/medium risk questions, with concluding remarks at the end
- Ask open ended questions
- Ask one question at a time
- Ask clear questions and not leading questions

# Focus Group Participant Engagement

## Examples

- **Ranking Exercises** (rank individually then as a group)
- **Vignettes** (example – early childhood research study with Drs. Sarah Lang, Penny Pasque & team in Human Sciences, OSU)
- **Free Listings or Brainstorming Activity**
- **Rating** (watch a video, word, picture and rate it)
- **Pile Sorting** (sorting of cards or photographs)
- **Draw Pictures**
- **Artifacts** (For historical archive artifacts in focus groups, see Pasque, 2013)
- **Conversation between participants** (vs. moderator to participant 1, moderator to participant 2)



# Before & After the Focus Group

## Before:

- Recruitment, time, location, follow up, etc.
- Set up the room with the materials needed ahead of time (i.e., circle, easel, consent forms, accessibility)
- Welcome everyone, nametags (i.e., pick your own pseudonym), consent forms
- Introductions of everyone to each other

## After

- Thank everyone and share resources and/or gift cards (per IRB)
- Send a thank you note (via email or US mail)
- Member checking, if applicable

# Moderator Role/s

## Researcher Decision Points

- What is the role of a moderator?
- If two moderators – define the role of each (i.e., does one ask all questions and the other ask only probing questions; switch back and forth)?
- Create a list of engaging comments for moderator to use in the moment: “I appreciate your point. Does anyone else have a thought about that?”
- Who keeps the group “on track” and in what ways is going “off track” important for the study?
- What happens when one participant takes up more airtime?
- What happens when one participant does not speak?

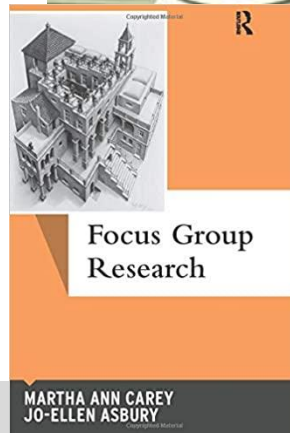
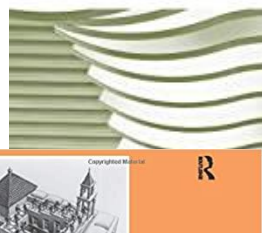
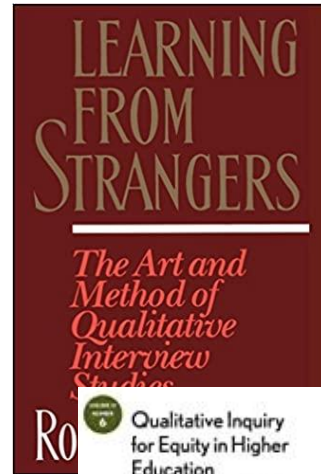
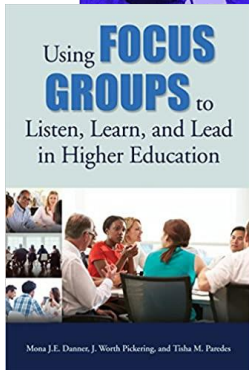
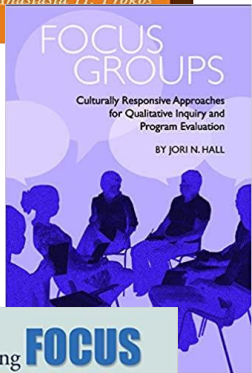
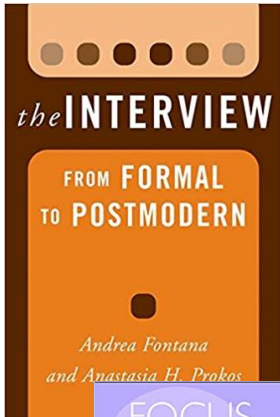
# Observer Role

## Researcher Decision Points

- What is the role of an observer?
- Are there different roles for different observers (i.e., turn on audio/video recorder, one focuses on nonverbals, another on verbal interactions, another on conflicts)?
- What are the ways the observer should take fieldnotes (i.e., only write on the left side of the paper, so the right side can be for notes later; draw the seating & participant pseudonyms; computer – is typing noise distracting)?

# Resources: Focus Groups

- Carey, M. A. & Asbury, J. (2012). *Focus group research*. Walnut Creek: CA: Left Coast Press (now published by Routledge).
- Danner, M. J. E., Pickering, J. W. & Paredes, T. M. (2018). *Using focus groups to listen, learn, and lead in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Fontana, A. & Prokos, A. H. (2007). *The interview: From formal to postmodern*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Hall, J. N. (2020). *Focus groups: Culturally responsive approaches for qualitative inquiry and program evaluation*. Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press.
- Pasque, P. A. (2013). (Re)membering and (re)living: A methodological exploration of postmodern and constructivist feminist approaches to interviewing women leaders in higher education. *Journal About Women in Higher Education*. 6(1). 99-126. [compares interviews vs. focus groups]
- Pasque, P., Carducci, R., Kuntz, A. K., & Gildersleeve, R. E. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry for equity in higher education: Methodological innovations, implications, and interventions*. ASHE Higher Education Report. 37(6). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, NY: A Free Press.





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