

A Practical Approach to Designing, Conducting, and Analyzing Focus Groups

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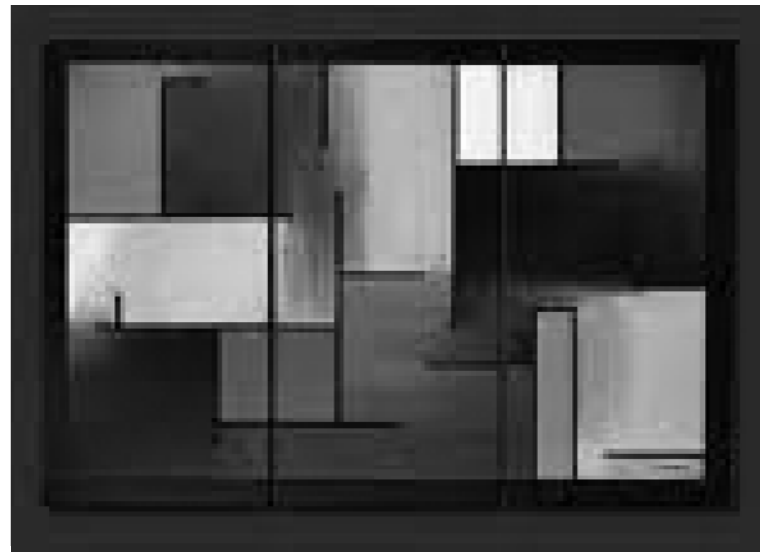
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Goal for the CyberSeminar

- Provide the practical details needed to collect and analyze focus group data.



Organization of the Seminar

1. Definition and design of focus groups
2. A step by step guide to conducting focus groups within the VA
3. The codebook construction and coding process
4. A brief mention of “virtual” focus groups

Audience Poll

Level of experience conducting focus groups:

- (1) No experience
- (2) Some experience
- (3) A great deal of experience



PART 1

DEFINITION AND DESIGN OF FOCUS GROUPS

Definition of a focus group

A form of data collection with the goal of “describing and understanding perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population to gain understanding of a particular issue from the perspectives of the group’s participants” (Khan & Manderson).

When to use a focus group

- **Choose a focus group over an *interview* when the goal is to:**
 - Discuss attitudes about products, devices, campaigns
 - Pilot test surveys or study designs
 - Generate new ideas on a topic
 - Gain competing viewpoints
 - Shed light on quantitative study findings
- **KEY: The goal is to gain something new that emerges through the interactions.**

When *not* to use a focus group

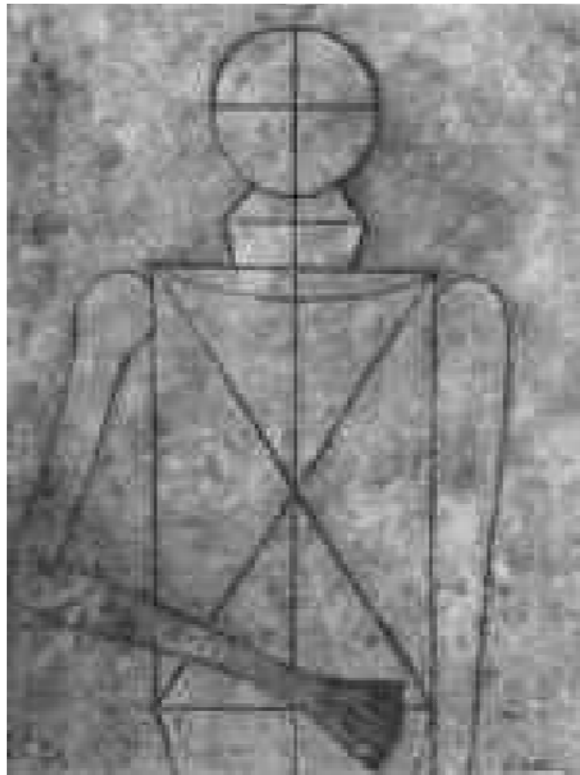
- **Choose an *interview* over a focus group when the goal is to:**
 - Collect views on private, stigmatizing or incriminating behaviors
 - Capture qualitative themes from each participant
 - When linking themes to individual outcomes (e.g. comorbidities, depression scores)

When *not* to use a focus group

- **Choose a *telephone interview* over a focus group when the goal is to:**
 - Recruit busy participants with demanding and/or conflicting schedules (e.g. providers, administrators)
 - Groups who are geographically dispersed
 - EX: diabetes educators from across the state
 - At-risk populations with limited transportation options, privacy concerns, etc.

When *not* to use a focus group

- When the goal is to reach a group consensus



Number of participants per focus group

- The ideal number of participants is 8-10 per group.
- The maximum number should be ~12.
 - The larger the group, the harder it becomes for everyone to talk.
- The minimum number should be ~3.
 - The fewer the people, the more it functions like a shared interview.
- Try to over recruit by 10-20% to allow for no-shows.

The length of a focus group

- 60 minutes is typical, but a discussion can extend to 90-160 minutes.
- Longer discussions should include a break.
- Inform the participants of the length during the ground rule stage to define expectations.



Decorum and the focus group

- Always begin and end on time:
 - Especially when fitting into a pre-defined timeslot, such as a lunch hour



"Today's meeting will be endless with a half hour break for lunch."

The Number of focus groups needed

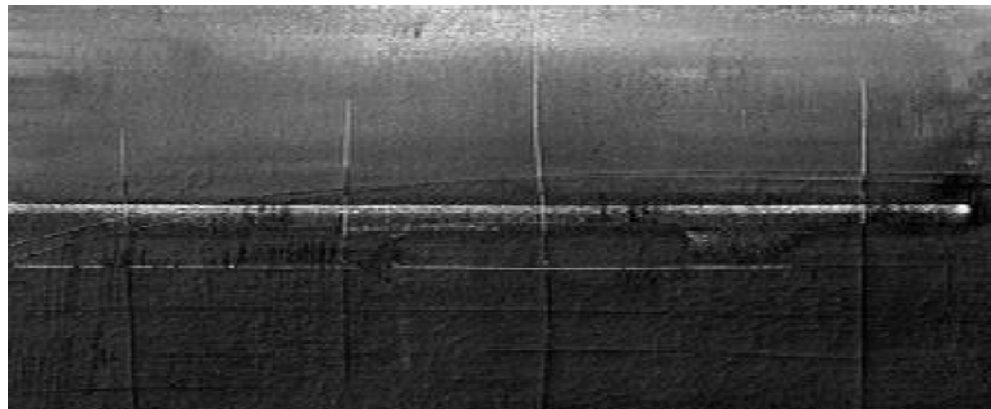
- 3-4 discussions for a single topic.
 - Budget constraints may bring the number down to 2.
- With group comparisons, double the number.
- If using different sites, conduct at least 2 focus groups per site.
 - Always avoid a single focus group; the group dynamics may skew the discussion.

The Number of focus groups needed

- The goal is to achieve “thematic saturation” across the focus group discussions.
- Thematic saturation is the means of determining sample size in qualitative research.
- Saturation is reached when new transcripts reveal no new themes.

Consistency of data collection

- To help achieve thematic saturation:
 - Keep the script questions in the same order for all focus groups.
 - This allows for comparisons across groups
 - If extra questions are needed for only a few groups, add them at the end.



composition of the Focus groups

- To avoid a chilling effect on the discussion, separate participants with:
 - Differing levels of power/authority
 - EX: MD and non-MD providers.
 - Participants with negative views of each other
 - EX: Management and union employees during contract talks
 - Participants with vastly different experiences/levels of training.
 - EX: Bioinformatics experts and members of the lay public

composition of the Focus groups

- When making *comparisons*, always separate the participants of interest into different focus groups.
- EX: Male/female, African American/white/Latino, control groups/intervention groups, etc.



Script Development

- Be clear on the information needed from the discussion.
- Ask fewer questions than is typical for an interview.
 - A 1 hour focus group will have ~4-7 questions.
- Develop probes to clarify and enrich the discussion.

Script Development

- Pilot test the focus group guide, first with team members and then with participants who are similar to the target population.
- Make revisions based on team feedback.



"Just got the script from the focus group. Fabulous!"

"Just got the focus group script. Fabulous!"

Script Development

- Avoid closed-questions .
 - EX: “Did you receive diabetes education?”
- Eliminate “double barreled” questions.
 - EX: “Do you understand how to take your medications and do you follow your doctor’s advice?”
- Make questions short and understandable.

Script development

- When including differing populations tailor the script to meet the lowest education level.



"May I offer a very different scenario?"

"May I offer a very different scenario?"

PART 2

**A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING
FOCUS GROUPS WITHIN THE VA**

The environment

- Choose a comfortable room with a table large enough to hold the participants.
 - Be sure the room is quiet and allows for privacy.
 - A round table is ideal.
 - When using a rectangular table, have the moderator sit in the middle (not at the head).
- Make certain that participants' electronic devices are turned off.

The forms

- Bring all informed consent documents to sign.
 - The VA requires a special consent form for the recording of voice.
- Other forms:
 - Demographics are typically completed before the discussion.
 - If a survey will bias the discussion, reserve it for the end.

The Refreshments

- All focus groups should provide food.
- Allow the participants time to eat before the focus group begins.
 - The more elaborate the food (e.g. box lunch rather than a cookie tray) the earlier the participants should be asked to come.
 - Some VA sites require advanced permission to purchase food with VA funds.

compensation

- Participants will receive \$25-\$45 per focus group.
 - Be clear with your IRB on what they defined as coercion.
- You may be allowed to pay for transportation, parking vouchers, etc.
- The VA typically does not allow providers to be compensated.
- Discuss whether VA providers are allowed to participate during work time or lunch breaks.

Audio Recording

- Use one or two digital audio recorders.
 - Some teams also use external microphones.
 - A new study is using a VA laptop to record.
- Be sure to check with the IRB about types of recorders allowed at your site.
 - Many require encryption and password protection.
 - There may be forms to complete and long lag-times before receiving it at your VA.

Audio Recording

- Tape recorders are transportable devices and must be kept secure at all times.
 - Check to see if you must carry them in a locked briefcase.
 - Check with the IRB about downloading the digital files.

Beginning the Focus Group

- Once the focus group begins, the moderator introduces her/himself along with the note taker.
- The introduction should include an explanation of the purpose of the study and the ground rules.

Ground Rules

➤ Add the following information into the introductory script:

- (1) How long the discussion will last
- (2) A disclaimer that the discussion will be audio-recorded
- (3) A statement that participation is voluntary

*"I was just going to say,
'Well I don't make the
rules'. But, of course, I do
make the rules."*

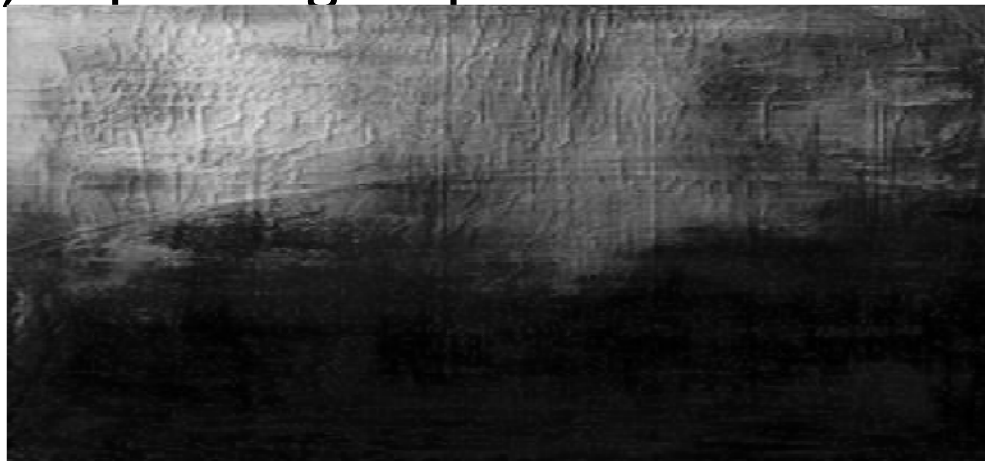


"I was just going to say, 'Well, I don't make the rules.' But, of course, I do make the rules."

Ground Rules

(4) A suggestion that participants write an identifier on a folded index card placed in front of them:

- A nickname, when privacy is important
- Their own name, when participants know each other
 - EX: focus groups with providers
- Either, depending on preference



Ground rules

- (5) Share that there are no right or wrong responses.
- (6) That the goal is to hear from everyone.
- (7) Respectfulness and turn-taking are required.
- (8) Staying on topic is important.
- (9) That participants must maintain confidentiality about the discussion.
- (10) Share logistical information (where the restrooms are, whether there is a break, etc.)

The moderator

- It is critical to have a trained moderator.
 - Avoid saving money by having an untrained research assistant.
 - Trained moderators can costs upwards of \$350 per focus group.
- Work for consistency of moderators across focus groups.

The moderator

- The job of the moderator is to:
 - Introduce the focus group topic
 - Establish the rules
 - Have the participants introduce themselves
 - Ask the focus group script questions
 - Draw the discussion to a close
- Moderators must complete the questions without running out of time.

The moderator

- The moderator should remain neutral so as not to bias the discussion.
- He/she should be encouraging.



"Geez, you're the worst focus group I've ever seen."

"Geez, you're the worst focus group I've ever seen."

Furthering the discussion

- Moderators use silence after questions to encourage participants to talk.
- Probes are used to continue and enrich the conversation.
- For non-talkers, the moderator should draw participants out by nicely asking them to share their perspectives.

Closing the session

- Once the final question has been asked, the moderator informs participants that the session is over and thanks them for their participation.
- He/she clarifies how they will be paid and welcomes them to the food.

Dealing with personality issues

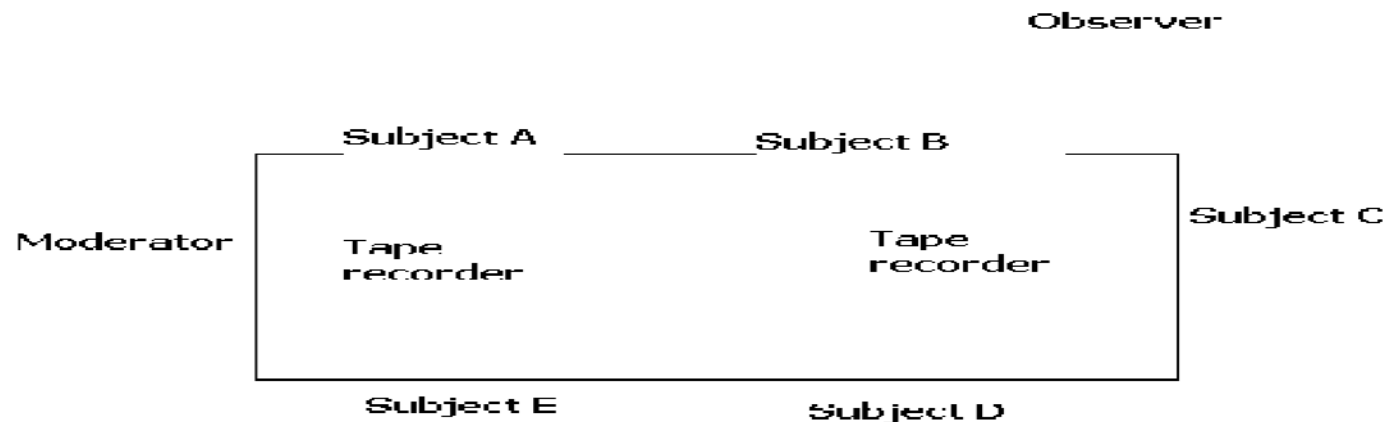
- For participants who dominate or who behave inappropriately:
 - The moderator should use body language to convey disapproval.
 - Look at watch, withdraw eye contact, physically turn body away from the participant

Dealing with personality issues

- Use language to discourage the inappropriate behavior:
 - “Let’s hear from someone else.”
 - “Let’s move on.”
 - “Remember that we need to be respectful to everyone.”
 - (If a confrontation is needed) “You appear to feel strongly about this. Can you share what it is about the topic that causes you to feel this way?”

The note taker

- The note taker is a member of the team trained to record content and non-verbal behavior.
- He/she develops a seating chart identifying participants by their selected IDs.



The Note taker

- The note taker writes notes as a back-up in case the audio recorder malfunctions.
- He/she records the first few words of a response to help the transcriptionist link the statement to a study ID.
 - EX: R3—“And my mom said to me...”
- He/she captures emotional reactions and body language during the discussion.

debriefing

- Begins after the discussion, once the participants have left
- Involves the moderator and the note taker.
- The debriefing focuses on the overall impression, the interpersonal dynamics, and the non-verbal communication that is not captured on the tape.

PART 3

**THE CODEBOOK CONSTRUCTION
AND CODING PROCESS.**

Transcription

- Coding requires a high-quality, verbatim transcription of the focus groups.
- Transcription is very expensive: \$15-\$40 an hour, depending on level of experience.
- Professional services exist, but they require going outside of the VA.

Transcription

- Focus groups are more difficult to transcribe as there are multiple participants to distinguish between.
- The transcriber must incorporate the note taker's notes to help determine which participant was speaking.
- Best to either use a highly trained transcriptionist for focus groups or to use the moderator or note taker (if trained).

Qualitative methodology

- All qualitative coding must extend from a qualitative methodology.
- Can include:
 - Grounded theory
 - Content analysis
 - Descriptive qualitative analysis
 - Editing style by Crabtree and Miller

the analysis

- Begin by reading the transcripts.
 - Get a feel for the data.
- All interpretations must be grounded in the text.
- There are two approaches to the final analysis:
 - A summary report
 - A qualitative analysis

Summary report

- From the debriefing, create a document describing each focus group.
- Create a summary report that synthesizes the main themes emerging from all of the focus groups.
 - Include insightful quotations
- The goal of the summary report is to convey information in a condensed format rather than seeking peer review publication.

qualitative analysis

- Qualitative team members read the transcripts (and other notes) and develop a codebook.
 - The final codebook will contain inclusion/exclusion criteria for each code with clear and borderline quotations.
- The approach described here focuses on a question-specific format.

Question-specific codebook

- *Examine a question and use its structure and the answers given by the participants to organize the coding.*
 - **EX: “Is anything missing in patient notes?:**
 - **ANYTHING MISSING – YES**
 - *Related diagnosis (MST),*
 - *How diagnosis came about in the 1st place, who diagnosed and why?*
 - *Reason for the appointment,*
 - *Treatment plan, future appointment,*
 - *title, contact information and discipline of note taker*
 - **ANYTHING MISSING – DON’T KNOW -**
 - **ANYTHING MISSING – NO**
- ***Codes are organized into categories in terms of how they answer the question and then are broken down into specific themes.***

Qualitative coding

- This approach allows for fine grained coding at the level of the question.
- Global codes that capture themes across the focus groups can also be used.
 - EX: “Discussion of suicide.”

Qualitative coding

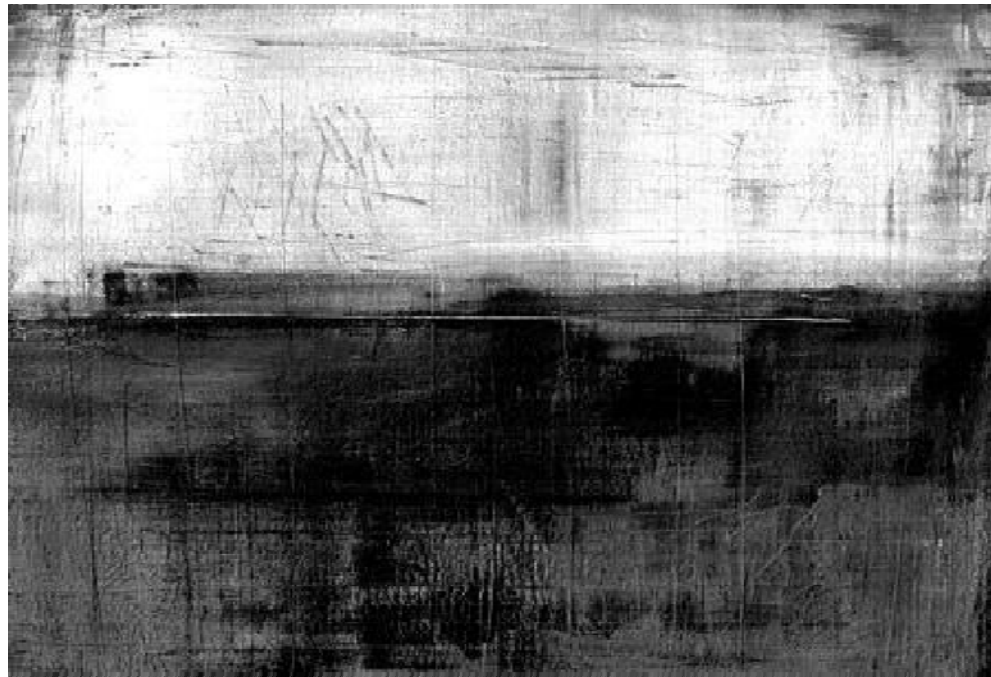
- Software such as Atlas.ti allows for the conversion of themes into a spreadsheet format (SPSS and Excel).
- The software also captures all of the quotations associated with a code.

Qualitative coding

- Two coders code the focus groups, with a likely 50% double coding.
 - Smaller studies will use 100% double coding.
- After independently coding each focus group, the coders discuss each code and adjudicate differences.
 - Adjudicated codes are added to a master coding file.
 - The separate coding sheets--prior to the adjudication process--are used to calculate intercoder reliability.

The Qualitative approach

- This qualitative approach is more time-consuming than the summary report, but can be used for publications.



Part 4

VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUPS

Virtual focus groups

- A new approach to focus groups uses computer technology.
- Chat sessions and teleconferencing (Skype) increases access for hard to reach populations (e.g. providers, administrators).
- How feasible it is within the VA—given data safety and confidentiality issues--is not clear.

Conclusion

- Focus groups can be an effective way to capture viewpoints from participants.
- Not all data is best captured using focus groups.
- However, when well designed and analyzed, focus groups can provide important insights into a subject.

Questions?

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Qualitative Research Web Resources, Updated

(Resources on Focus Groups and Qualitative Methods are in Bold)

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Selected Bibliography on Qualitative Research Design

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Introductory Survey Texts

Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

This is a good introductory text to five key areas of qualitative research—narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology [an technique that focuses on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world]—and describes factors to consider in selecting the appropriate approach.

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. First Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

This publication is now in its third edition [2005], but I find that the first edition remains the best at offering practical, introductory essays on the essential theories, methods, and techniques of qualitative inquiry. The introductory chapter of the third edition, however, provides an excellent historical overview of the practice of qualitative research in the social and behavioral sciences.

Flick, Uwe, Ernest von Kardoff, and Ines Steinke, eds. *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004.

A collection of essays covering a broad range of concepts, issues, and methods in qualitative research with a particularly European slant. As such, it offers a different perspective on a variety of topics. The essays are brief [no more than six pages] but they are very practical and can serve as a good introduction to a topic without being rooted too much in academic jargon.

Given, Lisa M., ed. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. 2 vols. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.

A useful source to consult that defines and explains core concepts, describes techniques involved in the implementation of a study using qualitative research methods, and presents an overview of qualitative-based approaches to research. Useful because imbedded throughout the text are practical examples of applying qualitative methods to research problems in the social and behavioral sciences.

Hatch, J. Amos. *Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002.

An accessible text that systematically describes the qualitative research process from deciding to do a qualitative study, to designing a study, collecting data, analyzing data, and methods of reporting data— all framed by how to perform the research in educational settings. The author takes a very practical approach to conducting a qualitative research study.

Merriam, Sharan B. and Associates. *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

A basic textbook on qualitative research methods that stands out because it grounds each concept in an example. Chapters begin by outlining an actual research study that applied qualitative methods and theories [e.g., an exploration of the relationship between cultural values and adult learning] followed by the same authors reflecting upon some aspect of their research experience [e.g., difficulty collecting qualitative data in another culture].

2

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2 ed. Thousand Oaks, nd CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

Another comprehensive, accessible textbook on qualitative research that takes the reader through various stages of inquiry, from asking the research question, to gathering data, to coding the data, interpretation, and reporting. As the title suggests, the work is framed within the context of Grounded Theory, best understood as an analytical approach by which theory emerges from the data rather than the other way around.

Symon, Gillian and Catherine Cassell. *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

Since most library research takes place within an organizational context, this can be a useful introductory guide to understanding the application of qualitative methods within complex organizational settings. Each of the twelve chapters covers a particular methodological approach. The long list of references at the end of each chapter lead to further readings on the topic. Needs a second edition, though, to bring organizational analysis into the 21st century.

Case Studies

Baxter, Pamela and Susan Jack. "Qualitative Case Study Method: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers." *The Qualitative Report* 13 (December 2008): 544-559.

As the title suggests, this is a good introductory essay that defines different types of case studies, factors involved in choosing which one, and key elements of study design and the reporting of findings. The table showing type, definition, and published study examples is particularly helpful.

Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. "Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 455-476.

The use of case studies in qualitative inquiry is constantly evolving, particularly as qualitative inquiry becomes more prevalent in core social science disciplines. This essay gets a little too analytical for my tastes but the authors do a good job, nevertheless, of bringing a sharper focus to the use of qualitative case studies in academic research as well as describing their limitations.

Gomm, Roger, Martyn Hammersly, and Peter Foster, eds. *Case Study Method: Key Issues, Key Texts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.

A collection of essays from leading qualitative researchers on the topic of generalizability of case studies in social research and an exploration of the underlying theoretical issues associated with their application. I found the essays on generalizability particularly insightful because this is an issue of concern in virtually all areas of qualitative inquiry.

Stake, Robert E. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995.

This is an excellent, comprehensive text on designing qualitative case study research. Particularly useful to the novice practitioner-researcher, the book systematically details each step in designing a case study research, including determining the appropriate research questions, data gathering techniques, analysis and interpretation of findings, and reporting of findings. For a briefer but equally helpful description, see Stake's essay in the third edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* [Sage, 2005].

VanWynberghe, Rob and Samia Khan. "Redefining Case Study." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 6 (June 2007): <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>

Understanding what a qualitative case study is has been a challenge for some time because no clear definition has emerged. Therefore, I thought this was a useful article for appreciating the challenges of defining case study as method and, by extension, their appropriate use in research.

3

Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research Design and Methods*. Applied Social Research Methods Series, volume 5. 3 ed. Thousand Oaks, rd CA: Sage Publications, 2003.

This is a commonly used text in social science methods classes on case study research design. It is a nice compliment to the Stake book noted above because Yin goes into more detail about the specific elements of case study design and a number of examples are included. However, at the same time, I think this also renders it less accessible to beginning researchers. The chapter on “Preparing for Data Collection” is quite helpful.

Content/Discourse Analysis

Fairclough, Norman. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge, 2003.

An accessible introduction to text and discourse analysis. Draws from a range of social theorists to present a form of language analysis with a consistently social perspective. The author relies on a variety of real texts, from political speeches and television news reports to management consultancy reports and texts concerning globalization, to illustrate key issues in discourse analysis. I found this to be the most accessible text on the topic.

Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. 2nd ed. New York, Routledge: 2005.

This work introduces the field of discourse analysis and presents a unique, integrated approach to it. Assuming no prior knowledge of linguistics, the author presents both a theory of language-in-use and a method of research. Clearly structured and written in an accessible style, this work demonstrates how language, both spoken and written, enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities. The author incorporates perspectives from a variety of approaches and disciplines, including applied linguistics, education, psychology, anthropology and communication.

Grant, David, Tom Keenoy, and Cliff Oswick, eds. *Discourse and Organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

This book analyzes the role of language and symbolic media in understanding of contemporary organizational issues. An introductory chapter examines the role and growing importance of discourse in the study of organizations and critically evaluates the contributions of various disciplines and defines organizational discourse as a subject area.

Insch, Gary S., Jo Ellen Moore, and Lisa D. Murphy. “Content Analysis in Leadership Research: Examples, Procedures, and Suggestions for Future Use.” *Leadership Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1997): 1-25.

The authors outlines how content analysis can be used to study leadership, including a practical outline of procedures. Although the authors incorrectly infer that content analysis can possess added validity because one can incorporate quantitative elements of analysis, such as word counts, it remains a useful introduction to the technique.

Kohlbacher, Florian. "The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7 (2005): <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/75>

This paper examines the application of qualitative content analysis as a method of interpretation method in case study research. A basic introduction is given to qualitative content analysis as an interpretation method for qualitative interviews and other data material. Useful for understanding how content analysis can contribute to qualitative case study research.

Mayring, Philipp. "Qualitative Content Analysis." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1 (2000):

<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089>

The author describes an approach of systematic, rule-guided qualitative text analysis, including the central procedures of qualitative content analysis, inductive development of categories, and deductive application of categories. The possibilities of computer programs in supporting those qualitative steps of analysis are shown and the possibilities and limits of the approach are discussed.

4

Morphew, Christopher C. and Matthew Hartley. "Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric Across Institutional Type." *Journal of Higher Education* 77 (May/June 2006): 456-471.

An interesting article that demonstrates the practical application of content analysis methods in educational research. In this case, the method is used to study the production of mission statements in higher education institutions.

White, Marilyn Domas and Emily E. Marsh. "Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology." *Library Trends* (Summer 2006): 22-45.

The authors present a helpful introduction to the method and its application within the field of librarianship. This is a particularly useful essay because the discussion is placed within the context of library practice.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

Coffey, Amanda and Paul Atkinson. *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996.

A straightforward description of the post-research gathering stage of analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The book is particularly useful for understanding how different methods generate their own particular form of data and, by extension, their own particular form of analysis and interpretation. The work also includes useful chapters on writing and reporting your data and employing strategies for computer-aided data analysis.

McLellan, Elanor et al. "Beyond the Qualitative Interview: Data Preparation and Transcription." *Field Methods* 15 (February 2003): 63-84. This essay discusses the need robust data collection techniques and the documentation of research procedures in qualitative inquiry, particularly as it applies multi-site studies. Outlines the consequences of inappropriate or inadequate preparation of transcripts from recordings and offers practical considerations that can help researchers systematically organize and analyze textual data.

Polkinghorne, Donald E. "Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52 (2005): 137-145.

A helpful article that provides an overview of using qualitative methods to gather data from interviews with participants, observations, documents, and artifacts. The author describes the transformation of data into written text for analytic use and the process for selecting interview participants and analytical issues such as awareness of the complexity of self-reports and the relation between experience and language expression. A useful look at the relationship between language and meaning and qualitative inquiry.

Ryan, Gery W. and H. Russell Bernard. "Techniques to Identify Themes." *Field Methods* 15 (February 2003):85-109.

Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research but has received little attention in the literature. Therefore, this is an especially helpful overview of theme development and its relationship to various techniques compared on six dimensions: (1) appropriateness for data types, (2) required labor, (3) required expertise, (4) stage of analysis, (5) number and types of themes to be generated, and (6) issues of reliability and validity. An important article that helps illuminate the process of identifying and coding themes [patterns of data] in qualitative inquiry.

Wolcott, Harry F. "Writing Up Qualitative Research...Better." *Qualitative Health Research* 12 (January 2002): 91-103.

The author presents his views for breaking from the traditional order of arranging research studies and the segregation of topics— literature review, theory, and method—in favor of integrating these components into a report only as needed. He urges researchers to consider alternative ways of satisfying the intent of a literature review. Interesting argument presented stating that engaging writing can result when qualitative methodologists are free to present their findings in "discovery-oriented ways."

5

Insider Research

Chavez, Christina. "Conceptualizing from the Inside: Advantages, Complications, and Demands on Insider Positionality." *The Qualitative Report* 13 (September 2008):

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-3/index.html>

The author provides an overview of the debate on insider/outsider positionality and the methodological advantages and liabilities between the two. The author present a new approach to training novice insider scholars that will help mediate between insider perspective and researcher position, particularly as it applies to studying underrepresented groups.

Edwards, Brian. "Deep Insider Research." *Qualitative Research Journal* 2 (2002): 71-84.

This paper outlines the general advantages and disadvantages of what the author describes as "deep insider qualitative research," which is defined by the author as insider research performed by individuals who have been a part of the organization they study for at least five years. A useful essay for those who want to study an organization that they have [assumed] in-depth knowledge of.

Labaree, Robert V. "The Risk of 'Going Observationalist': Negotiating the Hidden Dilemmas of Being an Insider Participant Observer." *Qualitative Research* 2 (April 2002): 97-122.

My attempt to make sense of insider research for a course I took in my doctoral program and subsequently revised as an article.

Sikes, Pat and Anthony Potts, eds. *Researching Education from the Inside: Investigations from Within*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

This work focuses on research projects that are undertaken by people who already have an attachment to the institutions or social groups on which their investigations are based [an issue of particular interest to the librarian/scholar]. The author shows that, in some cases insider positioning is important because it provides access to the particular people and/or the phenomena. However, at other times, aspects of one's own 'insidership' will, in itself, come under scrutiny. Extremely useful for anyone thinking of studying their own academic setting.

Interviewing

Fontana, Andrea and James H. Frey. "Interviewing: The Art of Science." In *Handbook of Qualitative*

Research. 1 ed. Edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), pp. 361-376.

Like most essays in the first edition of the Handbook, the authors offer a pragmatic overview of concepts and method that aren't cluttered with dense abstractions or heavy language. This is a good introduction to the history, application, and various techniques of qualitative interviewing.

Gubrium, Jaber F. and James A. Holstien, eds. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002.

A comprehensive handbook with numerous essays devoted exclusively to the research act of interviewing. Virtually all forms of interviewing are covered, with comprehensive footnoting that can lead you to additional sources of analysis. Illuminates the fact that there are numerous forms of interviewing in the social sciences.

Kvale, Steinar. *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996.

Considered a standard text in the field of qualitative inquiry. Kavale covers all aspects of the interview process, including the role of the interview in the larger research process, ethical concerns, data validity and reliability, and methods of analysis and interpretation. The text is readable and absent of a lot of jargon.

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Leech, Beth L. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35 (December 2022): 665-668.

The nice thing about articles published in disciplines like political science where the research paradigm is dominated by positivistic thinking is that, when a paper is written about a particular qualitative research method, it's generally very practical and basic [and a little defensive]. Here's a case in point focused on a particular form of qualitative interviewing, the semi-structured interview. The issue contains other articles on this topic based on a symposium on interview methods.

Morgan, David L. *Focus Group Kit, Volumes 1-6*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.

The six volumes in this series cover all aspects of conducting focus group interviews. I don't really like doing focus group interviews, however, the series provides a readable approach to the design, implementation, and analysis of focus group data. It remains a useful resource for anyone who wants to use focus groups as part of their research.

Hammer, Dean and Aaron Wildavsky. "The Open-Ended, Semistructured Interview: An (Almost) Operational Guide." In *Craftways: On the Organization of Scholarly Work*. Aaron Wildavsky. 2nd enlarged ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pp. 57-101.

A useful essay that examines the provisional nature of semi-structured interviewing and the underlying procedures associated with this type of qualitative method. There is a lot of useful discussion about the relationship between the researcher and the respondent.

Life Histories

Cole, Ardra L. and J. Gary Knowles, eds. *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001.

This is the best text I have found so far that takes the novice researcher through each step of conducting a life history study. I also like this work because it considers the process of conducting a life history study beyond simply interviewing but gives a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between the research and the researched. This was the inspiration for....

Labaree, Robert V. "Encounters with the Library: Understanding Experience Using the Life History Method." *Library Trends* 55 (Summer 2006): 121-139.

My contribution to an issue of *Library Trends* devoted to research methods. A life history project is one of the most challenging methods of qualitative inquiry there is, but it can illuminate ways of knowing that go much deeper than almost any other approach used to examine the experienced lives of others.

Literature Review

Armitage, Andrew and Diane Keeble-Allen. "Undertaking a Structured Literature Review or Structuring a Literature Review: Tales from the Field." *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 6 (2008): <http://www.ejbrm.com/vol6/v6-i2/v6-i2-art2-abstract.htm>
The author describes a systematic methodology for conducting a particular form of a literature review as it applies to management research. I just found it to be a good read because it gives a detailed outline of a structured literature review.

Hart, Christopher. *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.
This is a practical and comprehensive guide to researching, preparing, and writing a literature review. It's not focused exclusively on qualitative methods but does frame the process within the social and behavioral sciences. I just find it to be a really useful, practical guide.

7

Mixed Methods

Johnson, R. Burke and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie. "Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come." *Educational Researcher* 33 (October 2004): 14-26.

This article, among other things, provides a framework for designing and conducting mixed methods research. In so doing, the authors explain mixed methods research as following an eight-step process. A key feature of mixed methods research is its methodological pluralism or eclecticism, which, the authors argue, frequently results in superior research. I think that really depends on the research problem, but they don't spend a lot of time going over the deficiencies associated with this approach. Nevertheless, I found this to a useful analysis of how mixed methods can be utilized in social science research.

Mason, Jennifer. "Mixed Methods in a Qualitatively Driven Way." *Qualitative Research* 6 (February 2006):9-25.

The author makes an argument for a 'qualitatively driven' approach to mixing methods by focusing on the value of mixed-methods approaches for researching questions about social and lived experiences. The author also argues that mixing methods helps the researcher to think creatively about the research process and to enhance and extend the logic of qualitative explanation. The article concludes with a discussion of qualitatively derived principles for mixing methods. I think this a useful essay that helps move mixed methods to the qualitative side of analysis.

Tashakkori, Abbas and Charles Teddle, eds. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social and Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003.

Known as the third methodological movement in social research, this work discusses the strengths and weaknesses of mixed methods designs, and provides an array of specific examples in a variety of disciplines. The book provides a comprehensive set of essays on virtually all aspects of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods and how doing so can provide a more complete understanding of research problems.

Observation

Angrosino, Michael V. and Kimberly A. Mays de Perez. "Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2nd edition. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), pp. 673-702.

This chapter from the second edition of the *Handbook* is useful for its review of observation as a fundamental methodological technique and discusses the evolution of observation within qualitative inquiry. I found the chapter useful for its discussion of validity issues, contextual interpretation of meaning, and the ethics of observation.

O'Toole, Paddy and Prisca Were. "Observing Places: Using Space and Material Culture in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 8 (November 2008): 616-634.

The author attempts to bring to light the notion of analyzing the place and material objects that contribute to the interactions and in situ behavior of the participants in a particular setting. The article shows how an analysis of space and material culture contributes to an understanding of social and structural relationships in qualitative research. An interesting study of why it is important to observe not just people interacting with people in qualitative observation studies, but their interaction with the material culture around them.

8

Validity and Reliability

Riege, Andreas M. "Validity and Reliability Tests in Case Study Research: A Literature Review with 'Hands-On' Applications for Each Research Phase." *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 6 (2003):75-86.

This article reviews the literature to establish that the validity and reliability of qualitative data are important in order to determine the stability and quality of the data obtained. Although focused on the case study method in marketing research, the author presents useful guidelines for achieving high validity and reliability for each phase in case study research.

Cho, Jeasik and Allen Trent. "Validity in Qualitative Research Revisited." *Qualitative Research* 6 (2006):319-340.

Useful discussion about the problem of validity in qualitative research and explore new ways of addressing researchers' claims about the lived experiences of respondents and the reality they describe. The footnotes are particularly helpful for discovering further readings on the topic.

Selected Journals

Action Research, Sage, 2003-.

Discourse Studies, Sage, 1999-.

Ethnography, Sage, 2000-.

Field Methods, Sage, 1989-.

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Sage, 1972-.

Journal of Mixed Methods Research, Sage, 2007-.

***Qualitative Health Research*, Sage, 1991-.**

Qualitative Inquiry, Sage, 1995-.

Qualitative Research, Sage, 2001-.

Qualitative Research in Psychology, Taylor & Francis, 2004-.

Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, Taylor & Francis, 2009-.

Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, Taylor & Francis, 2000-.

Qualitative Social Work, Sage, 2002-.

Qualitative Sociology, Springer, 1978-.

Studies in Qualitative Methodology, Elsevier, 1998-. [book series]

The Qualitative Report [<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/>]

Web Directory

The *Qualitative Report Directory of Web Sites* [<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/web.html>]--- this is a very comprehensive, well-maintained site and a good place to start

Additional references noted in the focus group CyberSeminar

Analyzing and Reporting Focus Group Results (Focus Group Kit) and Moderating Focus Groups by Richard A. Krueger, Sage publications.

(There are several good books by Richard Krueger on focus groups.)

Crabtree and Miller, Doing Qualitative Research, Sage 1992

Greg Guest , Laura Johnson, How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability, Field Methods, Vol. 18, No. 1, 59-82 (2006)

Margarete Sandelowski, Focus on Research Methods: Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description? Research in Nursing & Health, 2000, 23, 334±340

Kuzel AJ. Sampling in qualitative inquiry. In Crabtree BF, Miller WL, editors. Doing qualitative research. Vol 3. Newbury Park, CA: Sage; 1992.