

Focus Groups: Strategic Articulations of Pedagogy, Politics, and Inquiry

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Objective & Definition

- To share the complex and multifaceted phenomena of focus group (FG) research
- At broadest possible level, focus group are collective conversations or group interviews.
- They can be small or large, directed or non-directed.
- Example famous used of FG: U.S (military intelligence), multinational corporations (market research), literacy activists & 3 waves of radical feminists scholar-activists, among others, all have used FG to help advance their concerns and causes.
- These different uses of FG have overlapped in both distinct & disjunctive ways, and all have been strategic articulation of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry.

Focus Groups a Unique Insights

- FG is a quasi-formal or formal instances of many kinds of everyday speech acts that the part and parcel of unmarked social life – conversations, group discussions, negotiations, and the like (Bakhtin, 1986).
- It allows us to expand and challenge the conscribed parameters of FG within qualitative enquiry
- Thus, there overlapping prescribes domains in which FG have proliferated: pedagogy, politics and qualitative research practice.
- All the three functions may be (and often are) present when FG are enacted in any domain.

Pedagogy

- Paulo Freire (1970/1993) most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, can be read as equal parts of social theory, philosophy and pedagogical method.
- Freire's pedagogical framework not within traditional education but rather important social movements within education.
 - eg., Using photograph in FG, of a drunken man walking past three other men in the corner
- FG become sites of or for collective struggle and social transformation (esp within marginalised communities for the purpose of helping these communities)

Analysis on Converging & Diverging Methods

- As converging and diverging methods and uses FG in these 3 domain and functions, hence, can conclude that FG are unique & important formations of collective enquiry where theory, research, pedagogy, & politics converge.
- As such FG with important insights & strategies for better understanding & working through practices & effects through moment of qualitative inquiry.
 - At the same time of this presentation, my research group is working on transcribing the qualitative inquiry, which using FG method; to enquire on financial institutions practices (this FG was conducted 3 month ago at Concord Hotel)

Research Experience in FG

1. Early 2000, PhD field work : To understand Gender Participation at Workplace (from Positivist point of view + richness of data)
Research Participants: Women & Men staffs at their Workplace)
2. FRGS research (2012) : To understand the meaning of Talent and Recruitment in Islamic Finance Industry (to explore)
Research Participants : HR from Islamic Banks (Place: Equatorial Hotel)
3. PRGS research (2016-2018): To Pilot Test & Validate the Questionnaire Instrument (to conform)
Research Participants : HR & Operation GM from Islamic Banks & Conventional Banks (Place: Concord Hotel)

FG as Political Practice: Feminist Consciousness

- Design within social justice agendas.
- Madriz (2000) focused on political uses of FG within qualitative inquiry.
 - Promoting social justice agenda within feminist and womanist traditions.
- Importantly, as a form of collective testimony, FG participation has often been empowering for women, especially women of colour.
- FG decanter the authority of the researcher, providing women with safe spaces to talk about their own live and struggles.
- These groups also allow women to connect with each other collectively, share their own experience.

Women Feel Intimidated

- Madriz (1997) used FG noting that these groups provided a context where women could support each other in discussing their experiences in sensitive issues.
- “When I am alone with an interviewer, I feel intimidated, scared. And if they call me over the telephone, I never answer their questions. How do I know what they want or who they are ?
- In contrast, FG afford women much safer and more supportive contexts within which they may explore their lives experience s with other women who will understand what they are saying intellectually, emotionally, and viscerally.

Quantitative and Qualitative

- In the methodological practice of Positivist, that cannot be exhausted by us, the otherness always exceeds us...(Lather 2001)
- The qualitative becomes a kind of richness for discovering the rules by which truth is produced
- FG can involve quantitative and qualitative inquiry
- The research is subjected to further quantitative tests
- Qualitative FG interviews were taken a sources of new ideas and new hypothesis
- FG helped to mobilize the collective energy of the group and to generate kinds and amounts of data that are often difficult, in ways that are not possible to generate through individual interviews and even observations.
- effects of ongoing social discourse
- Interviews strip away the critical interaction dynamics that constitute much of social practice & collective meaning making...access to new kinds of information.

FG as Research Practice

- Most research practice, the data yielded from answer “what” questions but not “why” questions about participants choices.
- They used FG in exploratory ways to generate new quantitative strategies or simply to complement the more quantitative findings of their research
- FG within qualitative research
 - (a) Capturing people’s responses in a real space and time in the context of face to face interactions, and,
 - (b) Strategically “focusing” interview prompts base on themes that are generated in these face to face interactions that are considered particularly important to the researchers

Layout of the FG Process

- Selecting groups members
- Facilitating group discussion
- Analysing focus group transcripts

- Many texts available for those are looking for FG as “instruments” of qualitative research (e.g., Bloor, Frankland, Tomas & Robson, 2001; Krueger, 1994; Morgan 1998; Shensul LeCompte, Borgatti, 1999)
- Denzin & Lincoln (2000); most of my PHD referral , my past research & also for this presentation.

FG Research Practice/Process

- Distribute the agenda or the reason of the FG
- Might start by discussing something every one has read, to get over the initial awkwardness.
- Try talking about what they expect or researcher expect.
- Personal histories / experiences pertaining to the agenda can be shared.
- Each participant can briefly describe their background
- One simple method is to “go around the room” Each participant talk in turn.
- Have a repertoire to conduct if it is a professional groups.
- Depend of research participants: some need gentler /tactfulness: need more art in the approach

FG Meeting Places

- FG meetings are nearly always held in safe spaces where women feel comfortable, important, and validated. This is particularly important consideration when working with women who have much to lose from their participation (at workplace, refugees, inmates, HIV/AIDS etc)
- It depends on the objective of the research & the participants.
 - At the workplace, organisations, clubs, hotels, community places, refugee centres etc

Several Obstacles in FG

- What to do when some women/participant dominate the group
- or
- Threaten each other
- How to protect each other privacy
- Emotional, going beyond the agenda (sensitive agenda)
- These limitations is common among most social where members tend to be 'alike' in many ways and where collective identities need to be overdetermined
- Indirectly, it is a selective sampling group not random.
- The generalisation, of course only describe the experiences of those who participated .

FG To Be Involved or Not To Be?

- FG can lead to kinds of “breakdowns”
- Lather (2001) : argued are essential to genuine understanding
- They can also serve as constant reminders that researchers should cultivate productive relations among description, interpretation, explanation in their work.
- Most important, the dialogic possibilities afforded FG help researchers against premature consolidation of their understanding and explanations
- However, on the hand, researcher not suppose to influence the research participants / “at a distance”

Conclusion

- FG are efficient in the sense that they generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in a relatively short time .
- In addition, because of their synergic potentials, FG often produce data that are seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation and that the result in especially powerful interpretive insights.
- In particular, the synergy & dynamism generated within homogeneous collectives often reveal unarticulated norms and normative assumptions.
- FG acting somewhat like a magnifying glasses, FG induce social interactions akin to those that occur in everyday life but with greater focus.
- These dynamics themselves become relevant “units of analysis” for study