


# Reflection/Commentary on a Past Article: “A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research”

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In 2009, my coauthors, Wendy B. Dickinson, Nancy L. Leech, and Annmarie G. Zoran (to whom I will be grateful always), and I authored an article entitled, *A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research*, which was published in the prestigious journal, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods (IJQM)*; (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). In this article, as our title suggests, we provided a new qualitative framework for collecting and analyzing focus group data. Our framework had three major components. First, we identified the types of data that can be collected during the conduct of focus groups. Second, we outlined qualitative data analysis approaches that are appropriate for analyzing these focus group data. Third, we introduced a focus group analysis approach that we labeled as a *micro-interlocutor analysis*. In a nutshell, micro-interlocutor analysis represents the collection, analysis, and interpretation of focus group participant-based data such as which participant responds to each question, how many participants respond to each question, the order in which each participant responds, who responds first to each question, response characteristics, and, most importantly, the nonverbal communication used by each participant. We contended that our framework represents a more rigorous analysis in focus group research than previous analysis approaches because it “goes far beyond analyzing only the verbal communication of focus group participants” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 1).

Our *IJQM* article fitted well with my career path and impacted my work because at the time, I had changed from being predominantly an instructor of statistics courses and quantitative-dominant research methodology courses at the University of South Carolina (1988–1994, as a graduate [i.e., master’s and doctoral] student and postdoctoral student), University of Central Arkansas (1994–1997; as an assistant professor), Valdosta State University (1997–2001; as an assistant professor), and Howard University (2001–2003; as an

associate professor)—to being predominantly an instructor of qualitative research and mixed methods research (with the occasional course in multivariate statistics)—at the University of South Florida (2003–2007; as an associate professor and professor) and Sam Houston State University (2007–present; as a professor). And as an instructor of qualitative research, I focused not only on the conceptualization and planning of qualitative research studies but also on the implementation of qualitative research studies. It was during that period that Nancy L. Leech (University of Colorado, Denver), with whom I had begun coauthoring works in 2003 (only a few months after she had earned her doctorate degree after meeting her at random at the 2002 American Educational Research Association conference), and who also was teaching qualitative research courses, and I decided to collaborate in designing our respective qualitative research courses. As part of our code-sign, we identified four major sources of qualitative data: talk, documents, observation, and visual/spatial (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). At the same time, we identified and described 18 qualitative data analysis approaches (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008; see also Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007) that could be used to analyze data that represent one or more of these four sources of data. And as Nancy and I increasingly immersed ourselves in the area of qualitative data analysis approaches, we came to the realization that “there is very little specific information regarding how to analyze focus group data . . . or

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what types of analyses would be helpful with focus group data” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 3), which is consistent with the conclusion of Wilkinson (2004), a few years earlier, that “there is relatively little in the focus group literature on how to analyze the resulting data” (p. 182). Therefore, we set out to code-sign a framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in focus group research, which led us to coauthor our *IJQM* article. We added Wendy B. Dickinson because of her expertise in quantitative data analysis, her status as an instructor of courses in geometry and visual mathematics (statistics and graphical display), her serving at that time as Contributing Editor for Anthropology News, her serving as a member of the American Anthropology Association (Society for Visual Anthropology) and Southern Graphics Council and Florida Printmakers, and her being a practicing studio artist producing both two- and three-dimensional works. Further, we added Annmarie G. Zoran who was a former doctoral student of mine and on whose doctoral committee I had served while being employed by the University of South Florida because of both her interest in focus group research and her use of multiple focus groups in her dissertation (consistent with my philosophy and passion of collaborating with present and past doctoral students).

The micro-interlocutor analysis that we introduced in our *IJQM* article motivated me and another doctoral student, Magdalena Denham, to focus more on the topic of nonverbal communication. And before long, we authored an article that we were fortunate to have published in *IJQM* (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013a). Around the same time, we were invited to deliver a microkeynote address at the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology’s (IIQM’s) 2013 Advances in Qualitative Methods (AQM) conference in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013b). Also, with two additional doctoral students, we had the pleasure of conducting a workshop on focus group research at IIQM’s 13th Annual Thinking Qualitatively Workshop Series (McAllister-Shields, Dickerson, Denham, & Onwuegbuzie, 2013), which took place immediately before the AQM conference at the same location.

While striving to advance the field of qualitative methods, I also attempted to contribute to the field of mixed methods. To this end, our *IJQM* article led Nancy and I to the realization that our micro-interlocutor analysis represented the analysis not only of qualitative data (e.g., verbal data) but also of quantitative data, such as the following:

descriptive analyses (e.g., consensus counts), univariate analyses (e.g., independent samples *t* test comparing number of words spoken by male and female focus group members), multivariate analyses (e.g., conducting a discriminant analysis to determine which demographic factors predict consensus vs. dissenters across numerous focus groups), analysis of group membership (e.g., using correspondence analysis to analyze relationships between the emergent themes and the focus groups participants within one focus group or across multiple focus groups; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2015, p. 288)

This led us to the conclusion that micro-interlocutor analysis transformed the analysis of focus group data from a qualitative analysis to a mixed methods analysis. In turn, this conclusion led us to develop a mixed methods research framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting focus group data (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2010). And this mixed methods-based reframing of focus group research inspired other articles in the area of focus group research. For example, I coauthored an article in which we developed a framework, wherein the focus group research participants serve as participant-researchers and manage the focus group research study themselves—collecting, analyzing, and interpreting their own focus group data (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2015). Most notably, our *IJQM* article has led to the coauthoring of a SAGE textbook on focus group research with three of my former doctoral students at Sam Houston State University (Onwuegbuzie, McAllister-Shields, Dickerson, & Denham, in press). And with approximately 700 citations to date and the distinction of being the 12th most-cited *IJQM* article at the time of writing, it appears that our *IJQM* article has impacted both the field of qualitative research and mixed methods research.

I have been pleasantly surprised how popular our *IJQM* article has been. Indeed, not only has this article been well cited, as mentioned earlier, but, over the years, I have received numerous requests for permission to reproduce the two figures and one table in this article. However, the biggest surprise that I received regarding this article was a request to translate this article to Spanish, which I gave after securing permission from the editor of *IJQM* (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, Dickinson, & Zoran, 2011). And this Spanish version already has been cited in more than 50 works.

One big change that has occurred since our *IJQM* article has been the significant increase of books in the area of focus group research. A quick perusal led me to identify at least 20 books related to focus group research in the past 9 years. However, the vast majority of these book authors frame focus group research as exclusively or predominantly a qualitative research process. Thus, I hope that our book (i.e., Onwuegbuzie et al., in press) will begin to fill the void. Only time will tell. However, in the meantime, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bailey Sousa, Director, IIQM, and Linda Liebenberg, Editor-in-Chief, *IJQM*, for inviting me to be a part of the *IJQM* Special Issue featuring updates on what are deemed to be the top 20 *IJQM* articles over the past 20 years, in celebration of the 20th Anniversary of IIQM. It has been a pleasant experiencing “travelling down memory lane.” Happy focus grouping!

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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