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# Crim 321: Qualitative Research Methods

## Study Questions for Hennink et al / Chapter 8

### Focus Group Discussions

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1. The title of the chapter contains three words: focus, group and discussion. Explain how each of these three words characterizes well the method that is the subject of that chapter.
2. What are some of the objectives that focus groups discussions are particularly appropriate for? Are there any where they are less appropriate?
3. In Case Study 8.1 the authors describe the use of focus groups in Europe by the government of the Netherlands. For what sorts of uses did they find focus groups particularly useful ?
4. The authors talk about using a “funnel” structure when developing your focus group discussion guide. What exactly is that, and how is it useful to do it in the order they suggest?
5. What is the purpose of the opening question in a focus group discussion? Your professor will add an important caveat to that in lecture. What is it?
6. When designing questions, are the types and wording of questions used in focus groups basically similar to the types of questions you would ask in in-person interviews? Explain.
7. On pp.147-8, the authors list eight different principles that you should keep in mind when designing questions for your focus group. You should understand why each of them is important and a good idea to follow.
8. When translating questions into foreign languages (and this is as true for interviews and surveys as it is for focus groups), the authors mention that a “back-translation method” is used to ensure accuracy of translation. What is that?
9. Why is it advisable to pilot test your discussion guide? And with whom should you do so?
10. The individual who runs a focus group is usually referred to as the “moderator” rather than as an “interviewer.” What are some of the skills that a moderator should have? Explain how each contributes to the success of a focus group.
11. What two aspects of group composition do the authors of your text say are especially important to consider?
12. When we were discussing sampling in qualitative research, the authors of your text and your professor were always emphasizing the value of having a diverse sample. Is the same true in research using focus groups? Explain. Would the same principle apply within a given focus group as well as across multiple focus groups for a given research question?
13. Let’s say you are going into a community or organization to do focus groups in order to identify priority issues for the community or organization to prioritize going ahead. You speak to the

gatekeeper who is giving you access and mention that you want to do focus groups, and they offer to help. Their first question is, “Would you prefer that the people in each group are strangers to one another? Or is it okay if they know each other ahead of time?” What are the advantages and disadvantages of using strangers? Of using people who know each other? You might find it useful to think of this as a table to fill in:

	Advantages	Concerns
Participants are strangers to one another		
Participants are familiar with one another		

14. What does your text suggest is the optimal range of the number of participants to have in a focus group? Why that range? Why not fewer? Why not more? How is the “right” number influenced by other factors like the topic under discussion, or the breadth of the topic, or participants’ familiarity with the issues under discussion?
15. What are some considerations to keep in mind when figuring out *where* to have your focus group discussions?
16. Why are focus groups typically run by two people? What are their respective roles?
17. On p.155, the text offers four general sets of roles that moderators need to fulfill when moderating a focus group. How would you compare the role that a moderator for a focus group has to the role that your TA has in your tutorial groups? How would you compare the role of moderator to an interviewer doing a 1-on-1 face-to-face interview?
18. On p.157, the text suggests that focus groups actually benefit most from “non-directive interviewing.” What do they mean by that? And what are the advantages of approaching it in that way?
19. I’ve heard focus groups described as “basically the same as doing multiple interviews.” Would your text agree? Explain.
20. On pp.159-60 the text lists seven different types of probes you can ask in order to promote further discussion in a focus group. You should know these and how they contribute to group discussion.
21. The text (on pp.160-1) list a number of different types of focus group members who are “problems” from the perspective of a moderator – (1) the quiet participant; (2) the dominant participant; (3) the self-proclaimed expert; and (4) the rambling participant. Why/how is each of these people a “problem” (i.e., how do they undermine what the moderator is trying to achieve?), and what does your text suggest you can do with each one to get the group back on track.

22. What are some of the activities that moderators can use to promote discussion among group members?
23. What is the “deference effect”? Why is it a problem and how can moderators avoid it?
24. What are some advantages of doing *virtual* focus groups (e.g., conducting a focus group over Zoom)? What are some of their limitations?