

## 2nd Workshop, part 1 – Qualitative methodology

# **Input concerning group discussion**

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# Group Discussions in Social Sciences

- Popular method in **various disciplines** from Political Sciences to Medicine and Economics
- More and more popular in Social Sciences yet **not as well established as e.g. interviews**
- Plenty of possible applications in Social Sciences due to **openness, flexibility, proximity to every day life situations, communicative nature** (cf. Lamnek 2005<sup>2</sup>: 83)
- Terminology (cf. Schäffer 2005: 304; Lamnek 2005<sup>2</sup>: 83)
  - Group questioning
  - Group interview
  - Group experiments
  - Group discussion/focus group

} focus on time economy

} focus on group interaction
- Different **degrees of standardization**
- Goals
  - Early forms: Focus on development of (political) opinions in groups and changing attitudes of individuals under group pressure (vgl. Schäffer 2005: 304; Bohnsack 2010: 370)
  - Market research: collection of opinions
  - Tracing of problem solving strategies (cf. Flick 2012: 252).
  - Tracing of development and articulation of collective orientations and wider discursive practices (cf. Schäfer 2005: 305)
  - Tracing of development and articulation of opinions as part of a communicative action

# Group Discussions in Social Sciences

## What can group discussions accomplish within the frame of empirical social research?

- Group discussions work as an **independent** as well as a **supportive** or a **complementary** approach.
- Group discussions are **similar to everyday communication situations**. They are communicative interactions and allow to capture the meaning of actions more easily than interviews.
- Group discussions are a good strategy to **explore attitudes, reasons, and opinions as a result of interactions**.
- Openly designed group discussions show **which issues are interesting and relevant** from the participants' perspective.
- The participants have to bring the issues to mind, reflect on the issues and argue about them. Afterwards, the statements have to be **analyzed** and **interpreted**.
- Group discussions stimulate spontaneous reactions that let the researcher gain insights into **deep-set attitudes**. The focus doesn't lie exclusively on individual opinions but **group opinions**.
- Group opinions expose **patterns for collective orientations** within a milieu/setting.

(cf. Lamnek 2005<sup>2</sup>; Scholl 2003)

# Working Definition

- „The group discussion is a data collection method that derives **data through the interaction of the group members**, while the topic is provided by the researcher.“ (Lamnek 2005<sup>2</sup>: 27, own translation)
- The discourses of the researcher and the research subjects become **entangled** in the process
- Therefore, a group discussion is a „**multi-lateral** conversation of group members in a relatively controlled environment under the researcher’s supervision.“ (ibid.)
- The group discussion form in both our approaches can be characterized as an „**ascertaining group discussion**“ (Lamnek 2010: 376) in which the focus is on „[t]he information that the participants provide in the course of the discussion, resp. the processes that lead to the articulation of a particular opinion [...]“ (Lamnek 2010: 376; own translation).

# Brave Other World

- **Dissertation:** Cornelia Grobner
- **Frame:** Television, entertainment and the (cultural) other
- **Object of study:** trivial fictional films with a white hero(ine), African setting, country of production is Austria and/or Germany (subgenre: “Africa films”)
- **Main research interest** concerns the strategies of the **staging of strangeness** in the films with a focus on the **othering** of black people and the **appropriation of the media contents by the viewers.**
- **Background:** The films are subsidized by public means. The underlying question is if (and how) the films reinforce racist stereotypes and attitudes.
- **Theoretical background:** Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Social Constructivism
- **Qualitative research design**
- **Methods:** Functional Content Analysis and Group Discussion



# Group Discussions. Why?

- Perception is **selective** and **individual**. And so are the **allocations of meaning**.
  - The strange or the other is always **bound to the perspective of the self** – it's not up to the researcher to define “strangeness” or “otherness”.
  - The construction of strangeness and otherness has a (media) history that unfolds between “the West and the rest”. It's about **power, identity** and **culture**. (cf. Hall 1994)
  - Further, the study is interested in **collective patterns of orientation** that structure opinions and attitudes. One focus lies on the processes **of giving significance to media content**. (cf. Paus-Hasebrink 2006, Weiß 2000)
- ⇒ Group Discussions function as an “upstream” method to start. The content analysis is “downstream”, because it requires the group discussions' outcome.
- ⇒ **The recipients' perspective** for the development of the categories is gained by group discussions. (other sources: theory, selected “Africa films”)
- ⇒ In such a way realized Content Analysis: Functional Content Analysis (cf. Kunczik/Zipfel 2006<sup>5</sup>)

# Group Discussions. How?

- **Two groups**, that are homogeneous regarding one characteristic: the existence of a **migration biography** (third country) or none.
- **Small groups** (4 resp. 6 participants) allow a deeper and more intense conversation than big groups.
- **Film screening**: Each group was shown typical scenes from four different “Africa films” to get the conversation started.
- **The moderation was reserved**, but if the participants wandered off the topic, it gave new input to discuss (prior defined questions)
- **Data**: Transcripts of the Group Discussions including information about nonverbal behavior and memory minutes from a so-called “man of few words”, who became silent during the discussion.
- **Supportive software**: MAXQDA for Qualitative Content Analysis
- Dismantling the data in **dimensions and categories** in relation to the research interest
- **Focused analysis** to gain information about specific aspects
- **Contextual analyses** to gain information about the inner coherences

(cf. Bause/Rullmann/Welke 1997<sup>3</sup>; Paus-Hasebrink/Hasebrink/Schmidt 2011<sup>2</sup>)

# Group Discussions. Benefits.

- **Lessons learned for the development of the categories:**
  - The protagonists and their behaviors and characteristics are a core theme.
  - The staging of stereotypes and biases is critically observed (nonetheless entertaining).
  - The film reality is an object of reflections about authenticity.
  - The setting in Africa is judged/classified as strange to Europe/Austria.
- The discussion in the migrants' group encourages an interpretation of the films as „**Africanized Heimatfilme**“ in tradition of the post-World War II *Heimatfilme*: ideal/idyllic world, traditions vs. modernity, urbanity vs. nature, love/family, sentimental tone, simplistic morality etc.
- Some interesting **contextual observations** emerged: The discussion within the migrants' focus group was very emotional and partly controversial. The discussion of the non-migrants' group was embedded in a relaxed and playful atmosphere. There was a lot of sarcasm and irony as well. This can be attributed to the fact that the people of the non-migrants' group were speaking in their mother tongue, but the different levels of concernment may have been an issue as well.

# Internet killed the Video Star?

- **Dissertation:** Jasmin Kulterer
- **Frame:** Relevance of MTV&related channels and their changing program focus (Reality shows and Cartoons instead of music videos) for today's youth culture.
- **Object of study:** Perception and usage of MTV&related channels by adolescents and young adults (14-29y) in Austria and the U.S.
- Main research interest concerns the uncovering of the role that MTV and related channels as well as their program play for young people in times of various alternatives online and on television against the background of their relevant developmental tasks.
- **Background:** Changing environment for accessing and using music and music videos through the Internet – dethroning of popular culture icon MTV?
- **Theoretical background:** Praxeology, Developmental tasks, Cultural Studies
- Predominantly qualitative research design
- **Methods:** Quantitative questionnaire (Austria, n=443), group discussions & in-depth interviews (Austria & U.S., n = 6 GDs and 22 in-depth interviews)
  - Different methods serve different purposes in the overall design

# Group Discussions. Why?

- No data on the topic available when the project began
- **Uncover of a variety of multiple points-of view on the subject**
- Get an idea of the **discourses about music television through the dynamics** of group interaction
- **Widen the perspective** for the relevant aspects of the topic as perceived by the target group
- Provide first ideas about the **role of developmental tasks**
- Open the **field of topics of interest for the in-depth interviews** and **facilitate the further sampling process** – function as a lens or magnifying glass to pick out the most relevant issues for further investigation & research

# Group Discussions. How?

- Six different groups (homogenous as well as heterogenous in terms of gender and education, homogenous in terms of age group)
- Focus on **small groups** that allow a deeper and more intense conversation than big groups.
- Moderation after the initial impulse only in case of deviation from the topic
- Data: Transcripts of the group discussions and additional observations of group dynamics
- Supportive software: MAXQDA for qualitative content analysis
- Thematical coding (Flick 2010) followed by focused analysis of themes across all groups
- Foundation for development of three types of using MTV/music television (further developed through in-depth interviews)

# Group Discussions. Benefits

- Revealed **interesting dynamics and discourses**
- Illuminating conversations that **revealed the importance of age and education**
- Opened the perspective on the **important aspect of “distinction” combined with (music) taste** that shapes the use of MTV and reveals collective structures and ideas of orientation that are at work in the background
- Pointed towards the many **functions** that the programs fulfil for younger participants
- Highlighted the aspect of **“nostalgia”** that shapes older participants’ attitudes
- Revealed interesting information about the **complicated relationship between music(videos)-internet-television** as perceived by the participants and about what contributes to the position of MTV in the participants’ media repertoires
- Some of the discourses might never have been uncovered in this form in in-depth interview alone -> **benefit of participants encouraging each other** to share stories, memories and opinions
- Foundation for developing **three types of using MTV/music television**

## Pros

- + Mutual response stimulation
- + Participants stimulate each other to react free-spirited
- + Emotions can be revealed
- + The similarity to everyday communication provokes spontaneous reactions and lures out deep-set opinions
- + High information level
- + Revelation of (surprising) new information that helps to further develop and improve the next step of analysis
- + Fast revelation of inconsistencies

## Cons

- Social barriers and language barriers can prevent participants from speaking and are contrary to equal participation.
- There is a danger of “(wo)man of few words”
- You have to consider the possibility that there are mechanisms that may prevent some participants to speak truth about their real opinions.
- Controversies may lead to digressions.
- Demanding in terms of sampling and organization.
- Higher rate of absence compared to interviews.

(cf. Lamnek 2005<sup>2</sup>, Scholl 2003)

# Literature

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