

Public Abstract

First Name: Timothy

Middle Name: Robert

Last Name: Biello

Adviser's First Name: James S. (Sandy)

Adviser's Last Name: Rikoon

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term: SP 2009

Department: Rural Sociology

Degree: MS

Title: A Case Study on the Use of Focus Groups as Participatory Research

Participatory approaches to research involve the commitment of a researcher, as well as those supporting the researcher (i.e., academic institutions, funding organizations), to the other people who are also involved in the process, to the subjects of conventional research. In this way, participatory approaches make explicit the relationships involved in a research process. Furthermore, they endeavor to make these relationships beneficial to all parties involved, yielding both insights on a topic of study for researchers as well as providing actionable and empowering information for participants.

This thesis explores the proposition that the focus group interview is a research strategy that lends itself well to the principles and promises of participatory research. Using a reflexive analysis, each of the stages within a specific focus group research process are isolated and evaluated against a selection of participatory research standards in order to assess how and why each was more or less successful in meeting those standards. This research concludes that focus groups are, generally, well suited to function as a participatory research strategy; however, contextual factors within any research process are deemed to be quite influential and can either augment or diminish the participatory qualities inherent to the focus group methodology.