

Introduction

As a qualitative research method, focus groups encourage respondents to give their own perspectives and input on a selected research topic. From the interactive discussion in the focus group, the participants can comment on the opinions of other respondents which can further engage the topic. Leading the focus group is a moderator who is responsible for asking a set of predetermined questions and ensures that each participant has the opportunity to speak. Further questions can be asked by the moderator to investigate issues in more detail as part of the discussion. In order to attract participants to a focus group, most researchers will offer an incentive, either monetarily or simply as refreshments, depending on the budget of a project. Compared to conducting numerous individual interviews, a focus group can save a researcher a significant amount of time. Data from focus groups is usually taken as written notes or recorded on audio or video tape and then transcribed into a word processing document. Once the data has been transcribed, it can be analyzed as discourse or coded by the researchers who are looking for patterns in the discussion. For many researchers, focus groups can provide in-depth points of view from the participants.

In the case of this study, it originated with an initiative from a couple of groups¹ at the University of Western Ontario who are looking to develop an information video to promote respectful behaviour towards women and minorities. Working with the Ombudsperson's office, several groups² from across campus were brought together to discuss the possibility of conducting focus groups for each constituent. However, due to time constraints, the focus groups were not possible in the time frame allotted for this

¹ These groups were Western's Caucus on Women's Issues and the Respect: Western Committee.

² Groups included Equity Services, Housing, International Students, First Nations, and Students Council.

research project. Instead, I conducted a pilot focus group with four graduate students from the Master in Library and Information Science Program at the University of Western Ontario. In terms of a topic, the focus group discussion centred on inappropriate behaviour and issues of safety on campus that could make an individual feel uncomfortable or threatened. The purpose of the focus group was to investigate what these graduate students perceived as issues with inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus at the University of Western Ontario. Their opinions and input can work as a building block for the intended focus and discussion groups planned for gathering data to produce an information video promoting respectful behaviour. Another part of this research project was to see how these research methods could be juxtaposed to conduct a focus group in a library setting. Although the topic would be different from a library study, the outcomes of the study are worthwhile examining in terms of their methodological contribution.

Literature Review

The term ‘focus group’ was first used in the 1920s to refer to a method of market research in which several individuals were collectively interviewed (Goulding, 1997). In the 1930s, researchers in the social sciences began to question the potential of the traditional close-ended, structured question style of interviewing. As an alternative, social scientists initiated less-structured and open-ended methods of interview questions which allowed a participant to express more freely their personal thoughts on an issue. During the Second World War, focus groups gained popularity in the United States with researchers trying to build the self-confidence of their armed forces (Connaway et al., 1997). After the war, focus groups were “used in the 1950s to examine people's reactions

to wartime propaganda” (Goulding, 1997). Nevertheless, the primary application of focus groups since the 1950s has been its use in marketing research. It would not be until the 1980s that social science researchers would begin to use focus groups more widely.³ Focus groups since that time have regained a reputation as a qualitative research methodology and these types of studies appear in social science literatures. Even with its popularity in market research, some would suggest that “the focus group interview is under utilized in the social sciences” (Connaway et al., 1997). Even with its lack of use, there are a number of prominent social scientists who have advocated for the use of focus groups as a research method.

Some significant works on focus group methods were developed during the 1980s and republished in recent years. One such book in particular is *Focus Groups* (2000) by Richard Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, a work that has become a widely accepted guide to working with focus groups. In their book, these authors outline focus group planning, developing questions, selecting participants, moderating skills, and analyzing focus group results. Kruger and Casey (2000) also discuss different styles of focus groups (market vs. academic) and how to adapt and modify focus groups for different representations of participants. Another important point found in *Focus Groups* (2000) is when “Richard Krueger notes that the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues is one of the major advantages of focus groups” (Massey-Burzio, 1998). Several researchers have acknowledged that potential for focus groups as a non-rigid form of qualitative research that can adapt as unexpected opinions from the participants can emerge during the course of the discussion. Kruger and Casey, although widely recognized experts on focus groups, are not the only distinguished proponents of focus groups.

³ Focus groups were used mainly in sociological research (Connaway et al., 1997).

Another prominent author of focus group methodology is David Morgan, who outlines the central social scientific applications for focus groups. In his book *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (1997), he considers focus group design and analysis, as well as the appropriateness of using focus groups in combination with other research methods such as surveys and interviews. According to Morgan (1997), the benefit of focus groups is that “participants interact with each other, and elaborate upon their experiences, opinions and attitudes in their own words, which is not possible with a questionnaire” (Ho & Crowley, 2003). Focus groups then, as Morgan (1997) suggests, are an effective method of investigating topics and gaining the outlook of the participants in order to evaluate possible solutions to problems brought up in the discussions. Morgan (1997) also identifies that focus groups have both strengths and weaknesses in their application. In terms of their strengths, focus groups do not require a lot of funding, and the group itself is simple to handle, even for someone new as a moderator. He suggests that conducting a focus group is simple because questions are structured as general topics which can be investigated in further detail by the moderator. As for weaknesses, Morgan indicates that the details available from an individual interview are lacking and that in a group setting, comments from a participant can shape the outcome of the focus group discussion. Although focus groups have been limited mainly to sociological research in the social sciences, other disciplines have utilized this qualitative research method such as library and information science.

Over the last fifteen years within the context of library and information sciences, focus groups have been conducted as a research method in a variety of library settings.

In order to understand how patrons' perceive collections and services, librarians have used focus groups in public, academic, medical, and government libraries (Connaway et al., 1997). Goulding (1997) notes that "in library and information services, the use of focus groups has largely been limited to gathering preliminary market research data before the study 'proper' takes place." Focus groups in library and information science are usually followed by surveys or questionnaires which are the main research objective. When focus groups were applied to studies in academic libraries, they have concentrated on a few main areas: exploring information seeking behaviour, and determining the needs of patrons (Goulding, 1997). An example of a focus group looking at information seeking behaviour is when "Massey-Burzio asked focus group participants how they go about retrieving information in libraries in a study designed to evaluate whether the library was providing the services that library users wanted and needed" (Young & Von Seggern, 2001). Other library and information focus groups have examined how online library resources contribute to information seeking behaviour. For example, as a means of improving an online catalogue, Connaway, Johnson and Searing (1997) used focus groups to gain input from library users. Besides information seeking behaviour, other focus groups by library and information scientists have examined the needs and viewpoints of patrons.

Much of the literature on focus groups in academic libraries is used for assessing patron needs and perceptions of public service. For example, "during the 1990s, studies were primarily concerned with investigating user satisfaction with library services" (Crowley et al., 2002). In her article about using focus groups in LIS research, Goulding (1997) suggests that it can be useful method for collecting data. In terms of literacy skills,

Morrison (1997) contrasts the different possible applications of individual interviews and focus groups. Norlin (2000) conducted a focus group to examine how students perceived the integration of electronic and digital resources into an academic library. As a measurement for improving library services, some LIS researchers have modified the marketing concept of focus groups to their studies. For example, examining a diverse number of reference services, Massey-Burzio (1998) uses focus groups to assess where improvements can be made in her library. She suggests that:

“Holding a focus group is good public relations for the library. Students and faculty really appreciate the opportunity to be heard and the library is viewed as being caring enough to solicit their experiences and interested in making their research easier” (Massey-Burzio, 1998)

However, a few researchers have looked at library staff to gain their perceptions of how their library is functioning. For instance, Rose, Stoklosa, and Gray (1998) investigate through a focus group how reference librarians are affected by ‘technostress.’⁴ Overall, it is the results from the discussion in the focus groups that is used to recognize and implement changes in a library setting.

In order to improve or transform services within an academic library, researchers look at the data retrieved from the focus group interviews. Nevertheless, “focus groups often detect ideas that can be investigated further using quantitative research methods, such as a questionnaire” (Rose et al, 1998). But rather than simply thinking of a focus group as a complimentary to other studies, they should be considered as an acceptable research method on their own. Professionals in library and information science however remain uncertain about focus groups even though other disciplines in the social sciences consider it to be a valid research method (Connaway et al., 1997). From its qualitative

⁴ Stress on library staff as a result of increasing amounts of new electronic and digital resources (Rose, Stoklosa, and Gray, 1998).

application, focus groups should “be defined as an effective method to identify feelings and convictions about situations, products and services, as well as how these motivations build people's behaviour” (Leitao & Vergueiro, 2000). Although focus groups are a subjective interpretation of discursive input, there are methodological guidelines for planning and conducting this research method.

Methodology

Focus groups require designing a methodological approach before being put into action. Several factors must be taken into consideration when planning a focus group: selection of participants; location; incentive; the moderator; the moderator’s assistant; and questions. The following section will examine each of the aforementioned factors in further detail.

Selection of Participants

Focus groups are a selection of individuals taken from a sample population who share a homogenous background. Although there may be similarities in terms of, say social context, there may not be “homogeneity in attitude toward the topics discussed in the interview” (Connaway et al., 1997). An area of disagreement amongst researchers using focus groups concerns the degree to which the participants are familiar with each other. In market research, it is typically desirable that the participants do not know one another. It should however be kept in mind that focus groups are not quantitative surveys that have statistical representation of the full population. Focus groups instead are developed to concentrate on particular segments of a population. Therefore, in social scientific research, it is often postulated that there is a benefit to having participants acquainted, so that they can remind each other of occurrences and illustrate situations in more detail.

Williams and Parang (1997) note: “there must be enough commonality within the group for members to be comfortable in the discussion, although a variety of participants is needed if a variety of questions is asked.” With controversial topics, it is often preferred that the participants are at ease enough with each other to discuss sensitive issues.

The sample population selected for this study was graduate students in the Master of Library and Information Science programme at the University of Western Ontario.

These participants were all fellow colleagues and I considered that the discussion would be enriched since they were all acquainted with one another. Since these individuals were familiar with one another, it would be more likely that they would feel comfortable talking about inappropriate behaviour and personal safety on campus. Organizing a focus group can be challenge since it requires co-ordinating the schedules of a number of participants. Individuals can be asked in person, by telephone, or by email to participate in a focus group (Krueger and Casey, 2000). For this study, I initially contacted six potential graduate LIS students by email to determine if they were available to participate or not. Once I had received a reply that an individual was able to participate, I contacted them by telephone to confirm attendance of the focus group. I arranged an evening focus group which was a convenient time for all participants. There were two female (G. and H.) and two male participants (J. and M.) in the focus group, ranging in age from 25-35.

Location

Having the appropriate location to conduct a focus group is essential for producing effective results from a discussion. One has to be able to book a room and have access to that space, which can be inconvenient out of regular business hours. A very formal setting in an office or board-room can intimidate participants who may feel reserved in

such a setting to express themselves freely. Consequently, one should “consider whether a neutral environment will reduce unwanted influence on focus group answers or discussion.” (Von Seggern & Young, 2003). Conducting the focus group away from the context of the discussion topic can enhance the outcome of the discussion group. The focus group for this study was held in an informal setting off-campus to provide a neutral space for discussion as well as for time and convenience of the participants.

Incentives

One of the main challenges in qualitative research is being able to find individuals to participate in a study. When conducting a focus group, which sometimes can take over an hour, “some type of incentive is necessary to repay participants for their time and willingness to discuss their experiences and attitudes” (Von Seggern & Young, 2003). Occasionally small stipends are provided to individuals to participate, but many studies using focus groups do not have budgets to give money as an incentive. Quite commonly, food is usually provided to attract participants to a focus group. Depending on the time of day, a small luncheon or simply coffee and donuts can be supplied for the participants. Another benefit of providing food is that it can act as an ‘ice-breaker’ between participants when served before or during the focus group. Overall, it can make them feel more comfortable with the group and open up to discussion (Kruger and Casey, 2000). In the case of this study, a small snack selection was provided for the group and was positively received by all participants.

Moderator

Selecting the appropriate moderator for a focus group is essential to obtain the best results from the focus group. As a research method, focus groups differentiate from interviews in general because:

“focus groups use a ‘moderator’ or ‘facilitator’, as distinct from an ‘interviewer’, in the course of the discussion. This distinction allows the moderator to participate or withdraw from the discussion as seems appropriate once the focus group is under way” (Kerslake & Goulding, 1996).

According to Krueger and Casey (2000), the moderator should exercise mild unobtrusive control over the group; have adequate knowledge of the topic; and looks similar to the participants.⁵ An effective moderator also has to be able to control reactions towards the participants, both verbally and non-verbally. Simple gestures such as head nodding and short verbal responses are acceptable; however it is advised to avoid terms such as “that’s good” and “excellent” as this can misguide the direction of the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Another role of the moderator is to use subtle group control to allow an equal discussion to flow between the participants. The moderator should keep control of experts, ramblers, and dominant talkers to allow more reserved participants to contribute to the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Involvement of the moderator can range from low, where the discussion is free-flowing, to high where the moderator intervenes to follow a pre-determined set of questions (Norlin, 2000).

Although a focus group may take less time than individual interviews, the process can be more demanding on the moderator. In most cases, a focus group will simply have the researcher conducting the study to act as the moderator (usually due to budget

⁵ For example, the moderator should not wear a suit when the participants are going to be casually dressed as they can perceive the moderator as intimidating.

constraints). However, some groups will bring in a member from the community such as a social worker to act as a moderator. In another case, Shoaf (2003) at Brown University hired a professional moderator from a marketing and opinion research firm to conduct a focus group in their library.⁶ He suggests that: “the person leading the focus group meeting must not only be skilled and experienced...but also must possess a knowledge of the subject under discussion and the ability to react quickly and change direction as dictated by the collective mood of the group.” For this study, since there was no budget, hiring a moderator was not feasible. Instead of bringing in an outside moderator, I acted as moderator for convenience and to gain relevant experience with focus groups. As moderator, I attempted to act as neutral facilitator, using examples from the university context to engage discussion and ensuring that each participant had an opportunity to speak to the issues.

Recording Sessions

Focus groups can be recorded in a number of ways including: written notes; audio-tape recordings; and video-tape recordings. When deciding how to record a focus group session, the effect of the recording device on the participants must be taken into account. Participants can be intimidated by audio or video recording which may inhibit their contributions to the discussion. An assistant moderator is typically used in a focus group to take notes and handle recording equipment while the moderator is asking the questions (Krueger and Casey, 2000). In most cases, “the recorder (is) responsible for writing everything down and summarizing the session in a one-to two-page report” (Norlin, 2000). Other tasks that the assistant moderator can help with are setting up the room, arranging refreshments, and welcoming the participants as they arrive. After the focus

⁶ “This was not an inexpensive endeavor: the cost was several thousand dollars” (Shoaf, 2003).

group, the assistant moderator can give feedback on the session, transcribe the discussion, and give input on the final analysis and reports (Krueger and Casey, 2000). In the case of this study, I asked a fellow LIS graduate student to volunteer as the note taker for the focus group. I decided to only use written notes for the session as not to intimidate the group with electronic recording devices because of the possible sensitive nature of the discussion. Since there was no budget for the project, I transcribed the hand written notes myself into a word processing document for further analysis.

Questions

A general opening question is used to start off a focus group session as it opens up the group and initiates discussion. But before asking the first question, Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest there are few steps to take which include: (1) welcoming the group; (2) giving an overview of the topic; (3) and laying out ground rules. Welcoming the group creates a more comfortable environment, while providing an overview contextualizes the topic for the participants. Ground rules include respecting the moderator when being asked to hold onto a thought and not interrupting other participants when they are speaking. The first question is general as “typically, focus group questions start broadly and then narrow to specifics within the area of interest” (Chase & Alvarez, 2000).

Between questions or clarifying questions, the moderator should leave a five second pause. If there is no response or further detail is needed on a question, some probes that can be used are: Would you explain further?; Would you give an example?; and I don't understand (Krueger and Casey, 2000). But before the questions can be developed, the research topic must be clearly defined.

Previous to the focus group happening, the researchers must decide what the research question is and what the intention of the discussion shall be. Knowing the research question will assist in creating a structured set of questions to ask the focus group and concentrate on a particular set of issues (Kerslake & Goulding, 1996). Nevertheless, “focus group interviews should not only address the issues the researcher has identified, but should also introduce new topics that the researcher has not anticipated” (Connaway, 1996). It is the group interaction that is the valuable factor in using this research method, as participants share their own points of view and may be less accessible in a standard interview (Massey-Burzio, 1998). In most focus groups, “a moderator asks three to six questions guiding the discussion but remaining neutral. The questions are open-ended, which gives the moderator the flexibility to probe and explore topics as they emerge from the interactions.” (Connaway et al., 1997). Questions in a focus group allow varying degrees for the participants to respond.

In terms of a research question, it was decided that the focus group would explore how the participants view personal safety and inappropriate behaviours at the University of Western Ontario. The general open ended questions used for this focus group were developed with the assistance of the project’s advisor, Dr. Gloria Leckie (see Appendix 1). I began the focus group by welcoming the participants and provided a general overview of the research topic. The next step I took was to inform the participants of the ground rules, primarily that everyone should have an opportunity to speak and not to directly criticize anyone else’s opinions. A general opening question began with asking the group how they would define what inappropriate behaviours are. After the focus group was concluded, the next stage in the project was to analyze the data.

Research Findings

A focus group is a qualitative research tool that produces in-depth discussions that reveal personal opinions and insight into a research question. Goulding (1997) suggests that “focus group data is said to be more ‘authentic’ than interview data because of the context within which it is generated. The data is high quality, interactive and much richer than that of more formal group interviews.” When analyzing data results from a focus group, the researcher has to look for certain patterns in the discussion. There are four factors that Kruger and Casey (2000) propose looking for in data analysis of a focus group, which include: frequency, specificity, emotion, and extensiveness (how many different people said the same or similar things). By reading and re-reading the transcribe notes, it is possible to find these abovementioned factors. Some researchers code the data from their focus groups which can be analyzed manually or with qualitative data analysis software. In addition to looking for patterns in the discussion, “attention should be given to the personal content of individual remarks by striving to obtain observations that give the researcher an understanding of the participants’ perspectives on the topics of interest” (Connaway, 1996). Due to time and budget constraints, a discursive analysis was conducted on the data from the focus group to look for patterns in the comments from the participants about inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus. From the analysis, several significant themes were identified.

Major Themes

The questions were open-ended and allowed the participants in the focus group to explore issues related to inappropriate behaviour at university and personal safety on campus.

Three major themes emerged from focus group discussion with the LIS graduate students:

- 1) Nature and impact of inappropriate behaviour at university
- 2) Graduate student inappropriate behaviour
- 3) Issues of personal safety on campus
- 4) Role of universities to address inappropriate behaviour and campus safety

Inappropriate behaviour

In the focus group, much of the discussion centred on defining and explaining the reasons behind inappropriate behaviour. The focus group agreed that inappropriate behaviours in general include overpowering conduct and abusive language. These behaviours can range from being cursed at, to physical assault, to rape. An example of provided by a male respondent was:

M. – It's standoffish behaviour. Typical male, aggressive body language, the up and down look.

A suggestion from some of the group's participants was that inappropriate behaviour at university is related to a 'culture' of drinking and machismo. When I inquired as to the nature of inappropriate behaviour, the two female respondents replied:

H. – Why do people do that? Binge-drinking.

G. – And macho culture to go with that.

A couple of the respondents mentioned that the social behaviours of binge drinking and machismo precede university and begin in adolescence.

H. – It starts earlier.

J. – It's from socialization earlier, yes. But there's maturity and intellectual leap to university.

Respondent J. noted that there is a transition in behaviour for some students coming to university. However, the group talked about how they consider that it is males that perpetuate inappropriate behaviours towards females.

M. – (referring to an undergraduate student) He acts like its grade school. You know, like punching a girl in arm if you like them

J. – Yes, I saw this undergraduate student was putting fellow female student down. But she didn't seem to care. It's symptomatic of that culture and society.

Interestingly, some members of the group suggested that part of the problem with inappropriate behaviour done by males is related to the fact that some females tolerate it.

M. – Part of attraction to guys is domination. Lots of girls play to that.

G. – Yes.

M. – If they do it for so long, they lose their independence.

When asked about the effect on a victim, the group offered a number of opinions. For example, a female respondent indicated there can be an isolating factor as a victim:

G. – It depends on the nature of assault. You could be ostracizing if you're known for reporting.

The other female respondent noted that intimidation itself is problematic:

H. – The radio has lots of news on bullying in schools, it's now more high-profile, more consequences, but it's not translated to universities.

A male respondent commented that there is a lack of seriousness taken about inappropriate behaviours:

M. – It's downplayed, the attitude is that it's 'just kids.'

One of the questions asked the respondents personal feelings about inappropriate behaviour. It is worth noting the difference in perception from the male respondent J.

H. – Uncomfortable.

G. – Angry.

J. – Reactive, but I don't because I'll end up bloody, which is also very boyish.

Relating inappropriate behaviour to their own program, two respondents indicated that:

G. – It's not very prevalent at FIMS though.

J. – It's also a graduate program.

Overall, the discussion from the focus group points towards a socialization problem as a source of inappropriate behaviour at university. From the opinions of the participants, it would suggest that a culture of binge drinking and machismo can create situations in which both males and females have their safety put at risk.

Graduate Student Inappropriate Behaviour

From the discussions with these participants, most of the inappropriate behaviours they had mentioned were in association with undergraduate students. Nevertheless, even though they had indicated that inappropriate behaviours were not highly prevalent in their graduate program, there were some incidents that had caused some concern for the respondents. One example in particular:

J. – There was a female LIS student and a male (non-graduate student).

M. – The male had an impression that he had relationship with female.

J. – This male came up to female in public place and said "I gotta talk to you." acting like a real 'guy.' (Male then confronts J.)

G. – The male was apparently violent, aggressive, and threatening.

M. – I don't know what happened in confrontation between the male and female, but in front of other LIS grad students he was verbally aggressive to female, then to J. Then J's partner told off the male who was pretty drunk. It stands out as 'exceptionally inappropriate.'

Other inappropriate behaviour concerns for graduate students are related to security and safety:

H. – I know (female) who was in computer lab and a person outside was ramming door to get in. This made her feel really uncomfortable as she didn't know who it was.

In the instance with the confrontation between the male and female, a common link of intoxication is associated with the inappropriate behaviours of undergraduate students. However, it is important to note that the aggressive male in this situation was not a graduate student but the incident occurred within the university milieu. The occurrence of the female in the computer lab is a situation where an individual is getting angry by not being able to gain entry into a secure space. Instances of where inappropriate behaviours emerge in relation to security issues are also apparent in discussions on safety.

Safety

Discussion in the focus group about personal safety on campus brought up some interesting points from both the female and male respondents. Inquiring about their safety coming to and from the university campus, the respondents suggested they feel intimidation from strangers, particularly when walking alone and someone is following behind them. Both of the male respondents said that they were concerned about his safety when passing a group of males, especially when they are intoxicated:

J. – I even feel intimidated anytime passing a group of guys.

M. – I agree. You know a group of guys in a 'dominating mode.' The herd/mob mentality, it's not explicit, it's under the surface, something 'could happen.'

In terms of safety on campus itself, the female respondents suggested:

G. – The campus is dark and there are isolated bus stops on campus.

H. – There should be a blue light at the North Campus Building and at the number 13 bus stop.

One of the respondents makes sure that someone knows her whereabouts if she is alone in a building on campus:

H. – I have called campus police to tell them where I was (in a computer lab in NCB late at night).

Even security features implemented to as safety devices can cause problems. For example:

M. – When using the proximity cards at night, people are waiting outside NCB to get in (that do not have a proximity card). But you have to say no (to let them in) when you're alone. But people can get belligerent.”

All of the participants in the focus group acknowledged that there is a problem with safety on campus:

J. – Is it clear what the reporting structure is? I wouldn't know what to do or who to call. There is no obvious structure in place. Western should make like at Carleton, at bus stops there is no isolation, make very well-lit, super-secure, like driving in the tunnels on golf carts.

G. – Carleton took action to admit a problem, and now has better lit bus stops. Blue poles are extreme – they're great if you are actually assaulted but that leaves no room for being 'uncomfortable.'

They were also critical of the walk safe program at Western:

G. – Trent University has a good one.

M. – The University of Toronto has a good campus police presence. Laurentian University has a good foot patrol too.

J. – There is way less presence of foot patrol at UWO.

During the course of the discussions in the focus group, some of the respondents brought up taking measures for personal safety:

H. – Even when she feels intimidated, she feels ok with extensive self-defence training. She keeps a key between fingers”

Other points on personal safety included:

H. – Be constantly aware of surroundings, lights, and buildings.

J. – If being followed, cross street, then again to let people know you're aware. Be very aware of what's behind you.

When being attacked, they suggested:

H. – Use self-defense or give up your laptop.

J. – Avoid a fight if possible. If not, get to him first.

M. – A bully sometimes can be coward. Try and step up to the plate to scare them off.

Similarly:

H. – If attacked, don't yell rape, people usually won't help; yell fire for a bigger response.

M. – Watch out for major drinking binges when they're smashing bottles in middle of the street.

From their opinions, they viewed safety on campus as an issue related to lack of a safety infrastructure at the University. In general though, for these participants, a feeling of being unsafe was not prevalent and is probably the case since they are graduate students and not involved in the undergraduate binge drinking culture.

Role of Universities

From the interaction between the focus group participants in their discussions about inappropriate behaviours and safety on campus, some points were raised about the role of the universities with regards to these issues. Many of the respondents felt that issues relating to the lack of safety and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are not discussed by universities. A couple of respondents felt that incidents are not being reported fully:

J. – Incidents are under-reported

One of the female respondents commented:

G. – There's under-reporting, lack of full awareness.

There was also criticism of university policies about inappropriate behaviour, but an acknowledgement that it may be difficult to manage:

J. – University culture can say 'we don't condone this, we don't accept it', but look at incidents in frosh week (rapes) even with no drinking policies, it's two-faced.

G. – But how can they control them?

One of the respondents suggested that universities may under report incidents of inappropriate behaviour and poor safety is because:

M. – They want to attract students.

When asked what can be done as some solutions to the problems of inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus, the participants indicated:

G. – I'm not sure what is done, I'm not in touch with undergrads. They should probably step up awareness programs. The problems the same as 15 years ago, men don't know how intimidating they are.

M. – The University needs to admit it happens (inappropriate behaviour). These problems start with frosh week which teaches aggressive behaviours (like between colleges/residences).

Additionally:

M. – They need education (about inappropriate behaviour). The university and frosh week: they should explain what can happen, like punishment, the police.

G. – But they are adults, they can't be chaperoned.

H. – A progressive policy creates getting at the issues.

G. – And make people feel more comfortable reporting assaults.

Commenting on the university's response to recent incidents near and on campus:

G. - No update email was sent. It's bad to keep it quiet, they should follow up. So yes, it is a general problem.
On the other hand about recent incidents:

M. – I've seen more campus police lately because of recent robberies, but only in high traffic areas.

A couple of the participants mentioned that there should be involvement from the faculty:

H. – Faculty should spend an afternoon learning about classroom management – start at the top.

As an example of faculty taking part in addressing issues of safety:

J. – A professor in class told everyone about campus safety for eight minutes, “don't walk alone”, probably only professor doing this. He said it's not worth your life for your laptop.

H. – Professors should talk about it.

The final question of the focus group session asked the participants what they thought would contribute to an information video about inappropriate behaviour and safety at universities. Some of the points they raised were:

H. – Discuss support systems.

M. – The University must invest in support systems.

G. – Inform which behaviours are inappropriate.

M. – An approach? Gender: sit guys down, sit girls down separately.

G. – Yes, it can appear that always women are afraid, and men are always violent. But men more afraid than they admit they are.

So in terms of the University's role in dealing with inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus, the points raised by the participants would indicate that there are some problem areas. Some of the respondents felt that the University is not transparent enough with what they consider is actually going on in terms of inappropriate behaviour and issues with campus safety. However, the focus group discussion also recognized that the people

perpetrating inappropriate behaviour are adults and consequently are responsible for their own actions. They suggest that there is a need to increase the awareness of these issues and should be addressed by faculty members as well. The outcome of this study provides a pragmatic experiment in focus group methodology and analysis which could be replicated within a library context.

Use in Library Setting

After conducting the focus group on inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus, I am aware how this research tool can methodologically be applied to a study in a library setting. The interaction between the participants in this study demonstrated the richness that can come out of a discussion group. In a library context, Elhard and Jin (2004) note that “focus groups are an effective way to solicit patron input, involvement, and support.” Whether looking at the information seeking behaviour or the needs of patrons, a focus group can be a convenient way of gathering a number of opinions on a research question. There is even the potential to use a focus group with library staff to evaluate their own perspectives on their workplace. Overall, “focus groups can provide in-depth feedback on issues and ideas, and can give a detailed qualitative analysis of the needs used in libraries to evaluate public services and collections” (Connaway et al., 1997). A focus group can be conducted inexpensively as well, as long as proper refreshments are at least provided to the participants. Some library and information scientists may prefer to conduct questionnaires or surveys to produce statistical results of patron input. As a result, certain members of the LIS community may question the validity of focus groups that produce qualitative data. Even though “the analysis of this information is subjective (it) can be useful in the library context for creating new programs or services or for evaluating,

improving, and advertising existing services” (Elhard & Jin, 2004). From my own experience from moderating a focus group and analyzing the data, I hold the point of view that a focus group is an effective and useful research tool to study the library milieu.

Conclusion

Using focus groups as a qualitative research method allows the participants to express their points of view in their own words. In this study, the interaction between the participants produced a variety of perspectives on inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus. Acting as a moderator, I was able to clarify or ask further questions when warranted during the discussion.. Providing refreshments for the participants seemed to make them feel less inhibited and provided an incentive for their contributions. Certainly, conducting a focus group is much less time consuming than it would with individual interviews. Nevertheless, time has to be set aside to transcribe the notes from a focus group. This was a small focus group, however, and with twice as many participants, the process would be twice as challenging for moderating the discussion and analyzing the data. Even so, the results generated from an interactive discussion in a focus group can produce rich, qualitative data. Librarians can easily apply focus group research to conduct studies on information seeking behaviour and the needs of their patrons. Focus groups clearly can be an efficient and cost-effective research method that produces in-depth qualitative data about a research question. Finally, the methodological process and data analysis from this focus group can be utilized by various groups at the University of Western Ontario to assist in developing their own discussion groups on inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus. The data they retrieve from their projects can be used to

create an information video that will educate and inform students about the issues concerned with inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus.

Appendix

What behaviours would do they consider to be inappropriate? How would they describe such behaviours?

How prevalent are occurrences of inappropriate behaviour? Are any of them aware of any friends or peers that have experienced this, or perhaps they have experienced it themselves?

Do they believe there is a problem with inappropriate behaviour and safety on university campuses generally? Why do they believe that?

What is the nature of these inappropriate behaviours?

What happens to the victim? How does it make them feel?

What is the general perception about such behaviours?

Do peers take it seriously, or is it downplayed?

What can be done to address issues of inappropriate behaviour and safety on campus?

What types of preventative measures can be taken?

What action should be taken when inappropriate behaviour is occurring?

What messages do they think ought to be communicated about these inappropriate behaviours and safety on campus in an information video aimed at university students?

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