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Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Focus Group Research but Were Afraid to Ask

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Abstract

In this review I provide a glimpse into the key elements critical to effective focus group research from the perspective of experts Martha Carey and Jo - Ellen Asbury. The authors' intent is to promote the value of focus group research as an effective and rigorous form of research, if done right.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Focus Group Research, Novice Researchers, Experienced Researchers

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Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Focus Group Research but Were Afraid to Ask

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In this review I provide a glimpse into the key elements critical to effective focus group research from the perspective of experts Martha Carey and Jo-Ellen Asbury. The authors' intent is to promote the value of focus group research as an effective and rigorous form of research, if done right. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Focus Group Research, Novice Researchers, Experienced Researchers

Informative. Engaging. Brief & chock full of helpful information. Excellent guide for novice & experienced researchers. #FocusGroupResearch

If I were posting a Tweet to alert my followers that *Focus Group Research* by Martha Ann Carey and Jo-Ellen Asbury (2012) is a book not to be missed, the above might be fairly representative of what I would write. However, since a longer review is called for here, I hope to do justice to the value of this book for new and experienced researchers.

Informative

As a soon-to-be researcher, I found this book incredibly easy to read. It dispenses with much of the jargon that often makes professional and research literature inaccessible to some and, instead, renders the topic – focus group research – immediately approachable to readers, without short-changing or downplaying important issues that need to be considered when doing focus group research. When choosing to do focus group research, this book is the one I will turn to help me plan and consider all of the pieces that are critical to conducting a successful focus group. There is no area of focus group research that the authors leave untouched, and the fact that they do so in a mere 102 pages is remarkable.

Engaging

The authors' engaging style of writing flows so well and so smoothly that this reader did not want to stop reading. In fact, it was a pleasant surprise as I find books about research methods are sometimes dry and uninviting. Even though it took two sittings to finish this book, it could easily have been read in one sitting, from beginning to end. The fact that the authors focus the reader's attention on important ideas more than once throughout the book helps to build understanding and retain information. The organization of each chapter - key questions at the beginning and sub headings highlighting key words - helps focus the reader's attention on what the chapter will be about building anticipation, while the sub headings organize the information for easy retrieval at a later time. You can read the book's entire table of contents by visiting its web page located at <http://www.lcoastpress.com/book.php?id=394>.

Brief and chock-full of helpful information

Although the appeal of *Focus Group Research* for some may be its length, don't be fooled. It is packed with lots of important details about how to plan for, conduct, analyze, and problem solve a focus group. And, yes, details are abundant in this book despite its brevity. The carefully orchestrated repetition of information embedded throughout the book makes it easy to remember important issues to keep in mind before, while, and after conducting focus group research.

Excellent guide for novice and experienced researchers

Although this is an excellent book about focus group research, there are tidbits tucked here and there that make reference to the importance of reflection (2012, p. 34) and rigor (2012, p. 35) in qualitative research, among other related ideas. For example, Carey and Asbury (2012) state, "a focus group session has elements in common with an individual interview in that the group facilitator and members 'co-construct' the data in a way similar to that done by an interviewer and an interviewee," (p. 28). This allowed this reviewer to be on the lookout for differences and similarities between the two methods of qualitative research and for other references to important elements of qualitative research in general as well as focus group research in particular.

In the chapter on analysis the authors provide examples that demonstrate how they apply what they've been discussing in their book. And, in the chapter on special populations Carey and Asbury (2012) address important issues to consider when doing focus groups with vulnerable populations, such as children, minorities, elders, LGBT, and the cognitively or emotionally challenged.

Clearly, Carey and Asbury (2012) know their topic so well that they don't mince words when describing and explaining focus group research. They stick to the essentials and the result is a book where every word counts; there are no extraneous paragraphs. This book would be a great addition to a university course on qualitative research methods. And, of course, it is a must read for those interested in and/or already engaged in focus group research.

Reference

Carey, M. A., & Asbury, J.-E. (2012). *Focus group research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Author Note

Elisa Waingort has been an educator for 28 years. She has taught most grade levels from elementary through middle school in North and South America at both public and international schools. She has primarily taught in bilingual and ESL settings and has held leadership positions both in the schools she has worked and in various professional organizations. She can be reached at ewaingort@cotopaxi.k12.ec.

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