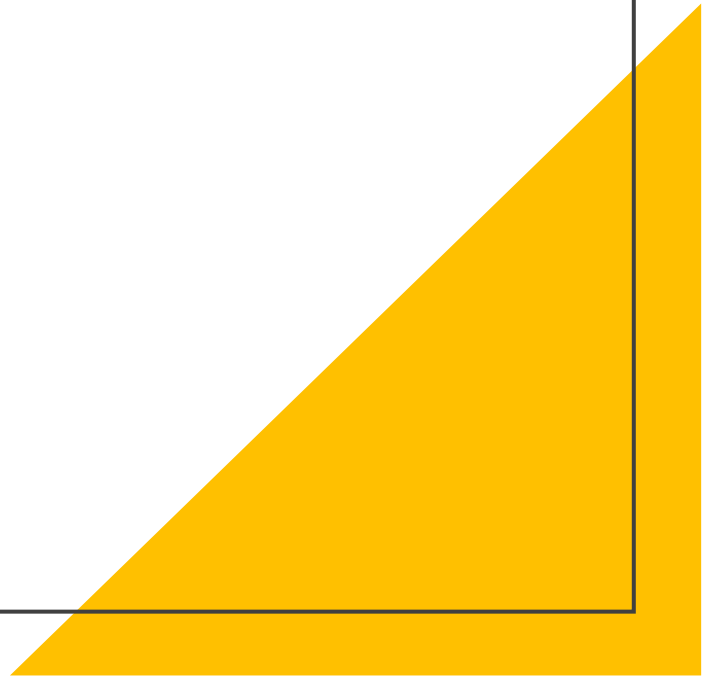




Focus Groups

Doing Political Research



What are Focus Groups?

- Group interviews facilitated by a moderator, focused on a particular topic
- Number of participants varies, usually between 5 and 10
- Levels of analysis
 - Individual
 - Group
 - Interaction



Why Use Focus Groups?

- Cyr finds focus groups to be rarely used in social science research
 - But they are an excellent way to investigate group dynamics
- Three uses of focus groups:
 - **Triangulation:** corroboration of evidence from other sources/methods
 - **Pretest:** checking how other methodological instruments, especially survey questions, are understood by participants
 - **Exploration:** finding new knowledge about/interpretations of political phenomena and processes

Abstract
The design of tax systems is an important topic as governments reshape taxes to reduce public sector deficits following the global financial crisis. This article discusses findings from a focus group study on public attitudes to taxation in England. It uses rational choice and moral arguments to explore three questions: What do the public think of different taxes? How do people react to different combinations of taxes? What are public attitudes towards public spending? This article demonstrates that people's stage in life affects attitudes to taxation. The most unpopular tax among older people is inheritance tax, whereas it is fuel duties for younger respondents. Taxes associated with personal choice (such as value added tax) attract more support than income tax. People also want greater transparency about the benefits of tax systems. The results show that principles are important for shaping public attitudes to taxation and that policy-makers should consider how diverse forms of taxation combine over the life cycle when designing a tax system.

Keywords
fuel duty, inheritance tax, public attitudes, tax systems, taxation

Public conceptions and constructions of 'British values': A qualitative analysis

Lee Jarvis¹, Lee Marsden
and Eylem Atakav

Abstract
This article draws on original focus group research to explore constructions of 'British values', in 'everyday' discourse. Two prominent, yet competing conceptions of this term are identified: political/institutional and social/cultural. Although each of these conceptions risks essentialising 'British values', this risk is mitigated by publics in at least three ways: (1) explicit recognition of the term's ambiguities; (2) discussion of its political motivations and exclusionary outcomes; and, (3) identification of qualitative change in the meaning of 'British values' over time. As the first exploration of public understandings of this term, their differences, and these complications, the paper offers three contributions: (1) adding breadth to existing studies of everyday nationalism through focus on 'British values' specifically; (2) shedding light on this trope's work in broader conversations around social and political life in the United Kingdom; and (3) facilitating reflection on the reception of, resistance to, and re-making of elite political discourse.

Keywords
British values, discourse, everyday, focus groups, nationalism, national identity

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8 CrossRef citations to date
13 Altmetrics

Articles
Radicalisation and Higher Education: Students' Understanding and Experiences
Catherine McGlynn & Shaun McDaid
Pages 528-570 | Published online: 05 Dec 2019
Download citation | <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668237.2019.1268827> | [Open Access](#)

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ABSTRACT
Since 2015 universities have been placed under a legal duty of 'due regard to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.'¹ This reflects the belief in UK counter-terrorism policy that radicalisation exists and can be countered. Advice to universities is largely silent on how this duty applies to teaching. Yet many degree programmes generate lectures and seminar discussions where views of an allegedly radicalised nature could be aired. This article presents focus group research which elicits students' understanding of radicalisation, and provides insights into their experience of debating contentious issues such as identity, community cohesion, and the causes of terrorism. We argue that students' understanding of radicalisation is conflated with extremism and we explore students' anxiety about debating these issues and reliance on educators to create the right environment for such discussions. Finally, the data presented here challenges some of the assumptions underpinning contemporary counter-radicalisation policy in the domain of higher education, which are premised on ideas of active grooming. We argue that this does not accord with students' own experiences, as they regard themselves as discerning, critical thinkers rather than inherently vulnerable to manipulation by those espousing violent extremist views.

KEYWORDS [Counter-terrorism](#) [education](#) [Islam](#) [radicalisation](#) [UK](#)

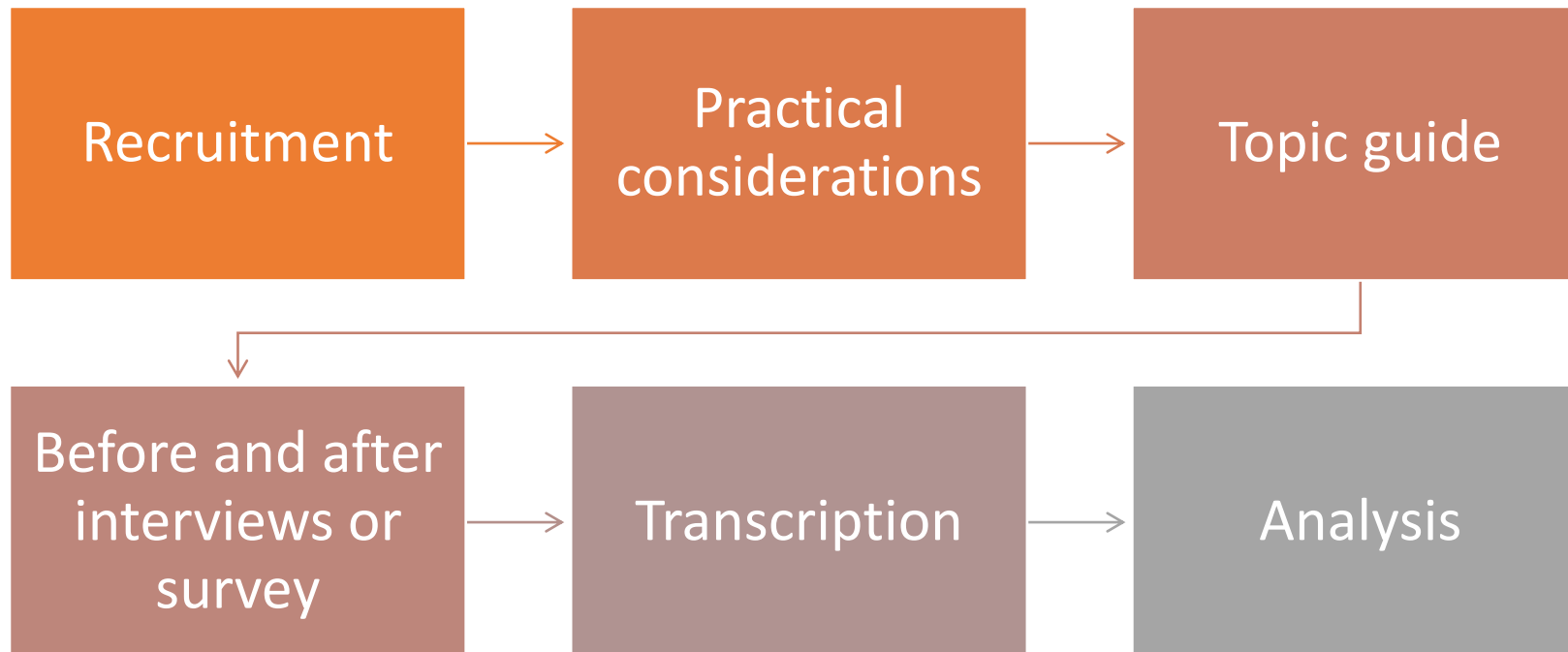
Related research
[Preventing extremism through education: exploring impacts and implications of counter-radicalisation efforts](#)
Martin M. Speer et al.
Journal of Social & Social Sciences
Published online: 24 May 2019
[Preventing radicalisation: a systematic review of literature considering the lived experiences of the UK's Prisoners' in educational settings](#)
Laura Taylor et al.
Research on Crime & Delinquency
Published online: 25 Jul 2017
[Youth, terrorism and education: Britain's Prisoners' programme](#)

- What Do the Public Think of Taxation? (Prabhakar 2012)
- Everyday Narratives of European Border Security and Insecurity (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2017, 2018)
- Students' understanding of "radicalisation" (McGlynn and McDaid 2019)
- Public conceptions and constructions of 'British values' (Jarvis et al 2020)
- How politicised is European integration? (Hurrelmann et al 2015)

Focus Groups vs Individual Interviews

	Focus Groups	Interviews
<i>Focus of Analysis</i>	Group and interaction	Individual
<i>Role of interviewer/moderator</i>	Starts discussion, occasionally intervenes	Directs the conversation
<i>Views challenged?</i>	Often, by other participants	Rarely, by interviewer
<i>Structure</i>	Less structure	More structure
<i>Who asks questions?</i>	Moderator and participants	Interviewer

The Process



Recruitment

Similar issues to finding participants for interviews

- Who can you find?
- Who is willing to participate?
- Who is not included?

Composition of groups

- Variation within groups
- Variation between groups
- What varies (or does not vary)? Age, gender, class, ethnicity, region, political views, form of involvement with your research topic? Guided by your research question



Practical Considerations

Where will the
focus groups
take place?

How long will
they last for?

How many
people in each
focus group?

Moderator
and note-
taker?

Topic Guide

A thick yellow horizontal bar spans the width of the slide, with a vertical yellow bar extending downwards from its right end.

- What questions will you ask?
- Icebreakers/activities
- How are they introduced?
 - Use of prompts: verbal, written, pictures, videos
- In what order are questions asked?

Group Dynamics

- Social pressures, groupthink, desirability bias
 - Are these problems or possibilities?
- Role of the moderator
 - How active? Guide discussion, or let it run?
 - Potential for 'moderator effects' similar to 'interviewer effects'
 - Moderator and researcher: are they the same person?
- Before and after the focus group
 - Use of questionnaires and individual interviews
 - How do views change after the focus group experience?
 - Allows for participants to reflect on the group interaction

Table 8.1 Transcription convention in focus groups on ‘voices of migrants’

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Function</i>
M1, M2 (or other)	Speakers
(.)	Short pause
(6.0), (8,0), (9,0) . . .	Longer pause (six seconds, eight seconds, nine seconds, . . .)
(incomp. 6.0)	Incomprehensible elements of speech
[Overlapping speech
Mhm. Eeeeh	Para-verbal elements
((leans back)),((laughs))	Non-verbal behaviour
[Heimat]	Elements of original language (difficult to translate)
I would not say so	Normal speech
THIS	Accentuated/stressed element of speech
(↑)	Rising intonation (if significant)
(↓)	Falling intonation (if significant)

Note: See also Example 8.2.

Transcription

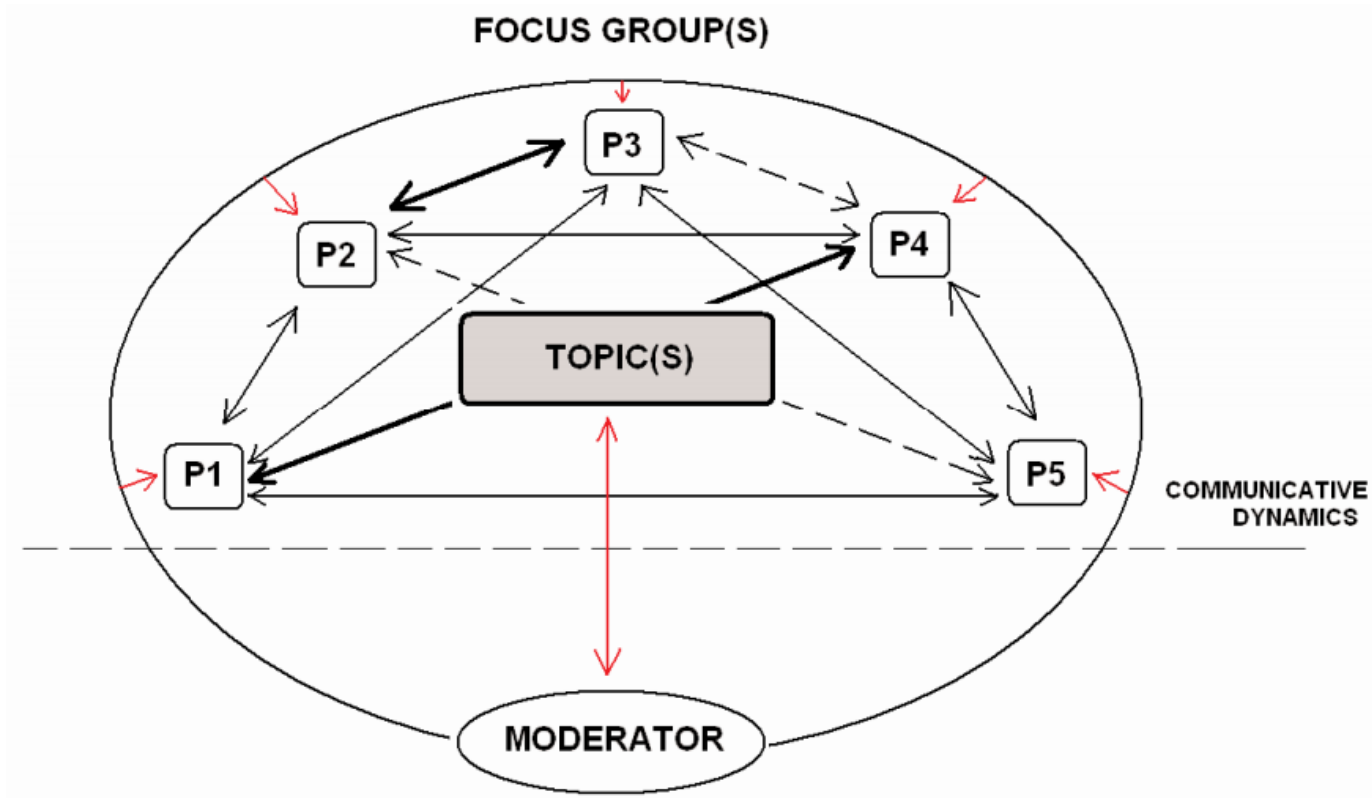


Figure 8.1 Interplays between key elements of focus groups (P = participant; arrows indicate possibility of a diverse intensity of interpersonal exchanges between participants)

Analysis:
Group
Dynamics

Analysis: Thematic Mapping

Table 8.2 Primary discourse topics in the focus groups on ‘voices of migrants’

Topic I	T-I	Perceptions of the Host Country
Topic II	T-II	Labour Market / Workplace
Topic III	T-III	Education
Topic IV	T-IV	Extreme Right
Topic V	T-V	Coping with Racism
Topic VI	T-VI	Improving Tolerance and Anti-Racism

Table 8.3 Secondary discourse topics in the focus groups on ‘voices of migrants’

Topic 1	T-1	Social Contact
Topic 2	T-2	Perception of Migrants
Topic 3	T-3	Citizenship and Collective Identification
Topic 4	T-4	Ethnicity and Religion
Topic 5	T-5	Language
Topic 6	T-6	Prejudices
Topic 7	T-7	Austrian Radical-Right Politics
Topic 8	T-8	Media and the Public Sphere
Topic 9	T-9	Integration

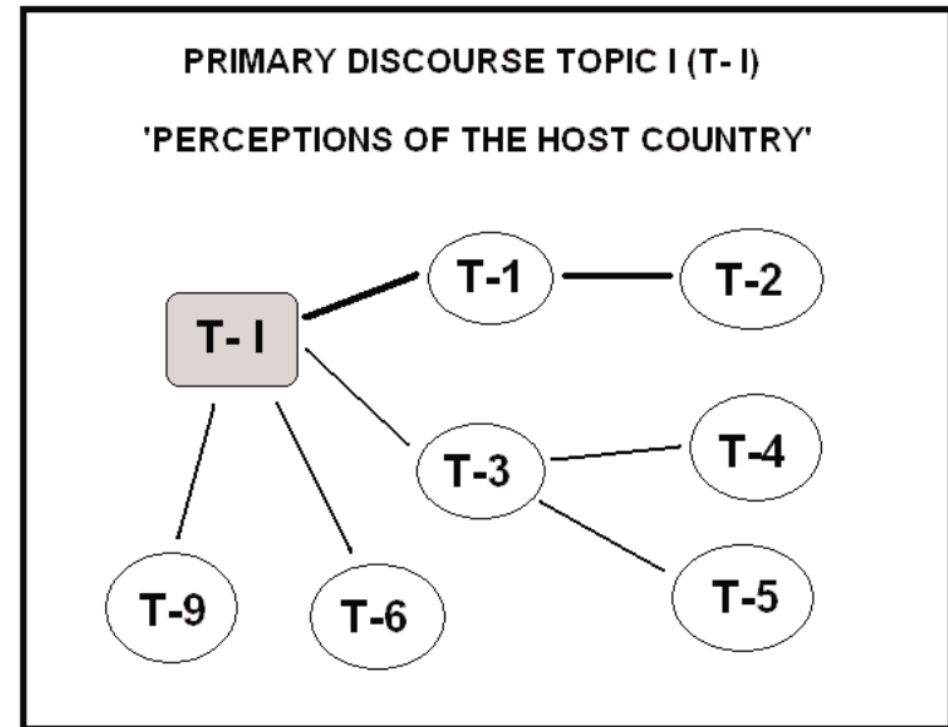


Figure 8.2 Thematic interconnections of the primary discourse topic I (T-I)

Presenting Focus Group Analysis (Cyr)

- “Clearly state the main purpose of the focus group in a research design.”
- “Specify the unit of analysis exploited in the data collection process.”
- “Provide the battery of questions from the focus group.”

Article

The Pitfalls and Promise of Focus Groups as a Data Collection Method

Sociological Methods & Research
2016, Vol. 45(2) 231-259
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SAGE

Jennifer Cyr¹

Abstract

Despite their long trajectory in the social sciences, few systematic works analyze how often and for what purposes focus groups appear in published works. This study fills this gap by undertaking a meta-analysis of focus group use over the last 10 years. It makes several contributions to our understanding of when and why focus groups are used in the social sciences. First, the study explains that focus groups generate data at three units of analysis, namely, the individual, the group, and the interaction. Although most researchers rely upon the individual unit of analysis, the method's comparative advantage lies in the group and interactive units. Second, it reveals strong affinities between each unit of analysis and the primary motivation for using focus groups as a data collection method. The individual unit of analysis is appropriate for triangulation; the group unit is appropriate as a pretest; and the interactive unit is appropriate for exploration. Finally, it offers a set of guidelines that researchers should adopt when presenting focus groups as part of their research design. Researchers should, first, state the main purpose of the focus group in a research design; second, identify the primary unit of analysis exploited; and finally, list the questions used to collect data in the focus group.

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Conclusion

- Focus groups can be a very important tool to understand group dynamics in thinking about political phenomena
 - But careful attention needs to be paid to how design choices might influence how participants talk and act
 - The level of analysis is key: are you interested in individuals, groups or interaction?
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