

Step 6

Focus Group Analysis: Coding

Here is an exercise to help students find patterns and group responses from their focus group transcript. This document is best used after students have a sense of the overall method of analyzing data from a focus group. This can be found, above, in the overview of this step. In the class that this resource was developed for Bill did the analysis for two prompts with student input then he asked students to try to analyze a third prompt. So below the first two prompts might be used as examples for your students.

Curating research so that students can get practice analyzing data is challenging when a school schedule does not leave much time for this type of work. To address this problem, Bill created an exercise so that students could experience the work of analysis in one or two classes.

After this exercise, we have included a copy of the Analysis and Findings section of their report. This section that was based on this analysis so you and your students can see where they are going and what a final product looks like.

A) Exercise for two-class analysis experience:

Today you are going to analyze your focus group data so you can identify findings. Follow the steps below to do the work of analysis:

- First, copy and paste comments that you got from each of the note-takers under the appropriate prompt.
- Second, group comments that you think go together and then come up with a name for these groups. This is called, coding, and helps organize the responses.
- Third, write a sentence or two about what you learned from these groups that might help answer your research question.

Below I did this three-step analysis with two prompts to demonstrate what this looks like in practice. Then, after you look at these examples, you will be ready to try to analyze a prompt on your own.

Research question: How do family and community impact young people in Newark? (Insert your question)

First Prompt to focus group participants: “We all know that the old/traditional view of family (two parents and kids) has changed in America and in Newark. There are more single heads of households and households with grandparents, aunts, uncles and LGBT parents. What about your family?”

Step 1. List all of the responses to this prompt

- Her father passed away so now she lives with her mother and grandfather
- Live with her mother and grandma—too much stress
- People paint a picture of themselves based on who they live with
- Teach yourself when you are living with one parent you have to go out and do everything on your own.
- Family is a support system, a go to...
- Family is People in her home and neighborhood
- Family is People that has her best interest at heart and supports her all the time
- Family serves as role models: father, mother, sister—she is her own person, took on the role of parent.

Step 2. Code the responses. That is group the comments and create names for these groups.

- 1. Family as biological relationships—a reasonable name this group of comments.**

- Her father passed away so now she lives with her mother and grandfather
- Live with her mother and grandma—too much stress

2. Family as something that shapes and impacts you—function.

- Teach yourself when you are living with one parent you have to go out and do everything on your own.
- Family is a support system, a go to...
- Serves as role models: father, mother, sister—she is her own person, took on the role of parent.
- People paint a picture of themselves based on who they live with.

3. Family as relationships based on biology, geography and concern

- People in her home and neighborhood
- People that has her best interest at heart and supports her all the time

Step 3: What did you learn from these responses that can help you answer your research question?

Here is one possibility:

Young people had a range of different ways of defining family

a) In terms of biological relations

b) In terms of the function as a support system and a sources of role models

c) In terms of relationships that were not biological—i.e. family includes the neighborhood and people that have “their best interest at heart.”

Second Prompt to focus group participants (read and have participants complete the sentence): “I feel my family’s influence most in terms of _____ and I feel my family’s influence least in terms of _____.”

Step 1: List all of the responses to this prompt.

- I had to encourage myself to do better
- Dad handles all schoolwork: mom handles shopping and that sort of things
- I feel I needed to teach myself and learn Newark by myself.
- Serve as role mentor or model: encourage you to be independent and do your best
- Forced to be your own person, prove yourself
- One student shared that her mother was religious but father was not; when younger she attended church regularly but does not necessarily embrace those tenets so she is working through her own belief systems; She was encouraged to achieve academically and play sports (*had switched from Basketball to track due to CL injury—interestingly she said that both parents had ‘gone to college’*)
- One student stated that due to caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings she did not want to have children and was looking forward to finding her own way
- Another student of African descent shared that parents told the story of having to walk 10 miles to get to school so she should appreciate the opportunity that she has and do her best. To an extent her parents encouraged independence, yet her mother wanted her to be a nurse but she wants to be a computer tech so she won’t have to work “hard and can sit at a desk”--*this drew response from some students who thought she’d be bored.*
- Another student added that the grandmother had gone to college, but mother had not, so she was encouraged to follow in the grandmother’s footsteps and pursue higher education; she said that she wanted to be a chef.

- Another student stated that a cousin was a mechanic and had been teaching him so he wanted to become a mechanic and open his own business so that he could be independent.

Step 2: Code the responses into groups and name the groups.

a. Family influence most in terms of education and career (group name)

- Another student of African descent shared that parents told the story of having to walk ten miles to get to school so she should appreciate the opportunity that she has and do her best. To an extent her parents encouraged independence yet her mother wants her to be a nurse but she wants to be a computer tech so she won't have to work "hard and can sit at a desk"--*this drew response from some students who thought she'd be bored.*
- Another student added that his grandmother had gone to college but mother had not, so she was encouraged to follow in the grandmother's footsteps and pursue higher education; she said that she wanted to be a chef.
- Another student stated that a cousin was a mechanic and had been teaching him so he wanted to become a mechanic and open his own business so that he could be independent.
- One student shared that her mother was religious but father was not; when younger she attended church regularly but does not necessarily embrace those tenets so she is working through her own belief systems; She was encouraged to achieve academically and play sports (*Note: She had switched from Basketball to track due to CL injury—interestingly she said that both parents had 'gone to college).*

b. Development of persistence, independence, and grit because of or in spite of family (group name)

- I feel I needed to teach myself and learn Newark by myself
- Serve as role mentor or model: encourage you to be independent and do your best
- Forced to be your own person, prove yourself
- Needed to encourage myself to do better

Step 3: What did we learn from these responses that can help us answer our question?

- Most common positive family influences are related to encouraging education and career.
- No matter what influence the family, most of the young people developed persistence, independence and grit as a result.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

Third Prompt to focus group participants: What are your educational goals and what/who has been most important in motivating you to pursue these goals?

Step 1: List all of the responses to this prompt.

- Move family to a better place
- Become a nurse
- Open a bakery
- Be other than what parents want different, the boss
- I think I will be pushed into what my parents want

- Graphic designer
- Chef
- Mechanic
- Computer Tech
- Unsure.
- Got to college at the same time as my mom

Step 2: Can you create two coding group and sort these comments? One possibility: “Career goals that require a four-year college education.” What do you think?

(Note: Instead of writing out each statement, put a number next to the statements that go in your groups—i.e. a group of 1’s and a group of 2’s and then give the groups a name.)

Step 3: Write a sentence or two explaining how the patterns you uncovered from these prompt responses can help you answer your research question.

B. What does this analysis produce? (The students whose work you saw in the first and, especially, the second example above went on to write the following Analysis and Findings section for their final report.)

Analysis and Findings

While we are well aware of the limits of our data (see below, “Future Research”) the data suggests several important findings relating to how family and community influence young people in Newark that further research could explore.

- Young people had a range of different ways of defining family

- In terms of biological relations.
 - In terms of function—support system and a source of role models.
 - In terms of relationships that were not biological—i.e. family includes “the neighborhood and people that have our best interest at heart.”
-
- The most common family influences identified had to do with encouraging education and career. No matter whether the influences were reported as positive or negative, most of the young people we talked with developed persistence, independence and grit as a result.

 - All the young people we spoke with believed that community exerted a strong impact on them. Most knew that they did not live in “good” neighborhoods but did not necessarily feel uncomfortable or afraid. One participant noted that you “do not have to allow the negatives” to deter them from achieving positive outcomes.

 - Our focus group revealed that young people set their academic and career goals on the basis of different factors and internal and external drives. Sometimes parents can influence their choices. Other times, it can be other role models. Some make decisions on their own. In other instances, the choice might be a mix of the two. For example, one focus group participant said: “I want to go to college for my mom and myself.” A few students indicated that they had career interests but either their school’s curriculum didn’t offer required courses, or they had been unable to register for them for one reason or another.

 - When discussing challenges, young people said that “how you choose to live,” not where you live was the most critical factor. Though, it is important to remember that perception

is also important, and that perception can change based on where you live in the city. Each ward in the city is different. Moving from one ward to another can influence one's sense of community.