Reviewer's report

Title: What about N? A systematic review of sample-size reporting in focus group studies

Version: 1 Date: 21 December 2010

Reviewer: David Morgan

Reviewer's report:

Both the subject matter and the analyses in this paper make a substantial contribution to the literature. I have three requests for Minor Essential Revisions that I would like to see the make.

First, the authors note that the distributions they report are positively skewed (with just a few studies that report unusually large numbers of groups). Although the authors do report the median values as well as the averages for both number of groups and number of participants per group, I would like to see this value included in abstract. The reason is that giving high visibility to the skewed average will lead some people to mistake this as the “best” size for groups, when the median value is actually much closer to the current “standard advice.”

Second, I think the authors need to do more to clarify the particular version of saturation that they are using. In their earlier discussion of saturation (e.g., page), they note the difference between a strict, Grounded Theory definition of “theoretical saturation” and a more pragmatic strategy based on “data saturation.” It turns out, however, the authors only use a rather strict version in their actually analyses, by discounting 15 claims of saturation, including several because they did not explicitly claim to use theoretical sampling. I personally would like to know how many of those 15 did give some evidence of meeting a standard for data saturation.

Also, in this context, I found the reference to “theory of data saturation” on page 18 to be especially confusing.

Finally, the authors never mention the issue of how standards for individual interviews compare to focus groups. I would list this as an issue for “future research,” especially with regard to both the reporting of and standards for saturation for that method. As it is, the current version makes it sound like focus groups might be unique with regard to “poor reporting” (p. 17), whereas it could just as likely that they meet the general standard for this kind of reporting in qualitative research as a whole.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests