The Practice of Dyadic Interviewing:
Strengths, Limitations and Key Decisions

Joanna Maria Szulc & Nigel King

Abstract: Dyadic interviews, in which two participants are interviewed together, are becoming more popular in qualitative research, but are much less discussed in the methodological literature than individual and group forms. In this article, we consider the nature and value of dyadic interviews, recognizing them as active, relational encounters, shaped by what all parties bring to them, and infused with issues of power. Drawing on our research on altruistic motivation which involved 47 dyadic interviews conducted with 94 individuals and post-interview feedback from participants, we demonstrate the strengths and point out some of the potential pitfalls associated with the dyadic format, focusing on the practical and ethical issues in defining and recruiting dyads and the practice of conducting such interviews. We provide recommendations for researchers interested in using this method, and suggest research priorities for the further development of dyadic interviewing.

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1. Introduction

Dyadic interviews involve two participants who simultaneously interact in response to open-ended questions (MORGAN, ATAIE, CARDER & HOFFMAN, 2013, p.1276). This specific technique has emerged as a successful research tool, particularly within the field of family studies (e.g., BLAKE, JANSSENS, EWING & BARLOW, 2021; SEALE, CHARTERIS-BLACK, DUMELOW, LOCOCK & ZIEBLAND, 2008) and health research (e.g., MAJEE, THULLEN, DAVIS & SETHI, 2017; WAWRZICZNY, PASQUIER, DUCHARME, KERGOAT & ANTOINE, 2015). However, despite the increasing popularity of this format of interview, one-to-one interviews remain the most common type, followed by focus groups (KING, HORROCKS & BROOKS, 2018; OLTMANN, 2016). [1]

This relatively low frequency of use of dyadic interviews in comparison to one-to-one interviews seems surprising given that the form has much to offer for qualitative researchers from many traditions (DEPPERMANN, 2013). As in focus groups, the interaction between research participants can offer insights beyond those from a one-to-one interview, whether the researcher's focus is on obtaining a rich understanding of experience in context, or illuminating the co-construction of meaning around the topic under investigation (HOLMBERG, ORBUCH & VEROFF, 2004; WALKER & DICKSON, 2004). Such a shared discussion within a dyad not only brings rich information which may not be available in individual interviews (SOHIER, 1995) but also provides means for more in-depth interactions among participants than is the case in focus groups (MORGAN & HOFFMAN, 2018), where respondents may feel more hesitant to speak up due to confidentiality protection issues (MITROPOLITSKI, 2014), and will have less time per person to articulate their perspective. Indeed, beyond the practical effectiveness of dyadic interviews (MORGAN et al., 2013; MORGAN, ELIOT, LOWE & GORMAN, 2016), existing research comparing dyadic interviews to focus groups suggests that the former are more likely to consist of a higher number of short exchanges between the interview partners, indicating a higher degree of mutual attunement (MORGAN & HOFFMAN, 2018, p.519). Further, the dyadic format may be easier to moderate, with just two participants to monitor, rather than the five or more that typically take part in focus groups (LOBE & MORGAN, 2021). [2]

While we have noted the increased use of dyadic interviews as a research method in the last few years, there is still relatively scant guidance available regarding the challenges and methodological decisions involved in conducting this form of research. In this article we seek to highlight the issues and possibilities facing researchers who choose to apply dyadic interviews, informing our guidance through an empirical example of how the technique operates in practice. We discuss the methodological decisions involved in conducting dyadic interviews, delineate the strengths of the technique as well as potential limitations of the method, and provide directions for future research where dyadic interviews hold particular promise. Through sharing our experiences, we hope to encourage researchers to think preemptively about the issues specific to research involving two participants in a simultaneous interaction. [3]

We will begin with an overview of dyadic interviews including existing literature on the topic (Section 2). Subsequently, we will introduce our example of a study of altruism to demonstrate the decisions involved in conducting dyadic interviews (Section 3.1), and talk about the strengths of the method (Section 3.2) and its challenges (Section 3.3). This will be followed by a discussion and a consideration of future directions for the development of dyadic interviews (Section 4), leading us to final conclusions (Section 5). [4]

2. Dyadic Interviews: An Overview

Typically, the dyadic interview is a procedure where two participants are interviewed together and simultaneously interact in response to open ended questions. Such a shared discussion of a topic between the two research participants can lead, it is argued, to the elicitation of rich and detailed joint accounts (MORGAN et al., 2016). Some scholars also use the term "dyadic interview" to refer to studies where pairs of participants are interviewed separately, and only the analysis is conducted at the level of the dyad. This may occur where various sensitivities and issues such as an imbalance of power exist, as for example in the doctoral student-supervisor relationship (BUI, 2014). In the current article, we consider only interviews where interaction is made possible for the dyadic partners. [5]

2.1 The literature on dyadic interviews

To gain an overview of the existing literature and identify studies where the authors utilized dyadic interviews as a method of investigation, we conducted a comprehensive web-based search of several electronic databases (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar). The keywords included "dyadic interviews," "joint interviews," "paired interviews," "double interviews," and "two interviewees." To further complement our searches, we scanned the reference lists from the existing methodological articles concerning dyadic interviews. [6]

In line with the literature, dyadic interviews are seen to be of particular benefit where participants have some form of pre-existing relationship and where the topic of the research is a shared experience, for example, in caregiver-patient relationships (e.g., RIFFIN, VAN NESS, IANNONE & FRIED, 2018) and in various aspects of family research (e.g., MOTAKEF & WIMBAUER, 2019; WALKER & DICKSON, 2004). For instance, research with caregivers and patients included studies of dementia-sufferers and family carers (e.g., SVANSTROM & DAHLBERG, 2004), children with diabetes and their friends (BROOKS et al., 2015), and people with intellectual disabilities and key supporters (CALDWELL, 2014). Research using dyadic interviews in a family studies context focused on such things as exploring the ways in which couples make meaning of their relationships (RADCLIFFE & CASSELL, 2013; WIMBAUER & MOTAKEF, 2017), and health-related problems experienced by one of the partners (e.g., HENNINGER, HOHN, LEIBER & BERNER, 2015; REGAN, LEVESQUE, LAMBERT & KELLY, 2015). We also started to observe the application of dyadic interviews in management research (SZULC, 2021). However, thus far the evidence from this discipline is only limited. [7]

Some scholars used a dyadic format of an interview to complement individual, one-to-one interviews for pragmatic reasons. The authors often reported that since research participants were from the same organization (or other social setting), they attended an interview together and were thus "jointly interviewed" (BOTETZAGIAS & KOUTIVA, 2014, p.294) or "desired to be interviewed together" (PERALTA & VAITKUS, 2019, p.1322). In these reported studies a

dyadic format of an interview seemed more of an impromptu occasion and an unintended research design. [8]

2.2 Theorizing dyadic interview

It has long been recognized that a qualitative interview cannot be understood as an interaction in which the researcher simply extracts information from the participant (e.g., DENZIN, 2001; HOLSTEIN & GUBRIUM, 1995; KVALE, 1996). The interview is a much more active and relational process than this, in which what happens between the two (or more) parties inevitably shapes what we characterize as "data." Interviews are now commonly understood as a site where knowledge is co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee(s), though what precisely is meant by co-construction varies between different approaches and traditions. For example, in psycho-analytically-informed research, the interview may be viewed in terms of psychodynamic processes such as transference and countertransference (HOLLWAY & JEFFERSON, 2000). In interpretative phenomenological analysis, it is understood as involving a "double hermeneutic" where the interviewer and interviewee both engage in interpretive acts (SMITH, FLOWERS & LARKIN, 2009, p.3). For many critical social scientists, the interview is understood as a performative space, where researcher and participant construct versions of themselves and their stories, inevitably shaped by wider issues of power in society (e.g., DENZIN, 2001). [9]

The above is by no means an exhaustive list; one could identify still further characterizations of the interview in numerous other qualitative approaches. It is therefore not possible to delineate a single theoretical understanding of the nature of the dyadic interview in a research landscape that has moved beyond the rather naïve assumption of mere knowledge extraction. Nevertheless, there are some common threads running through most contemporary understandings of the qualitative interview; that they are active, relational encounters, shaped by what all parties bring to them, and infused with issues of power in varied and sometimes complex ways. This perspective has important implications for the dyadic interviews, in particular regarding how we understand the relational setting of the interview and the actual practice of interviewing in that setting. [10]

Fundamental to the value of dyadic interviews is the opportunity to gain insights from the interaction between the two participants. However, given the discussion above, the interviewer cannot be seen as just an observer of the interactional dynamics between the members of the participant dyad. Rather they are an integral part of a three-person interactional system, through their presence and interventions. The question for the researcher therefore is not "what can I see going on in the interaction between the two participants?" Rather it is "how can I understand what is going on, in the context of recognizing myself as both the prompter of their accounts and the audience for them?" As HEAPHY and EINARSDOTTIR (2013) showed in their study of couples in civil partnerships, participants in dyadic interviews do not just respond to questions asked by the researcher but themselves help set the agenda and the direction for the narratives that they produce. [11]

In terms of implications for interview practice, the theoretical understanding outlined above points to the importance of researcher reflexivity throughout the dyadic interview process, up to and including data analysis. More specifically, they need to attend to what WALSH (2003, p.51) referred to as "interpersonal reflexivity"; a focus on what is happening between the parties engaged in the interview. This requires the researcher not only to consider how the participants (individually and as a dyad) are reacting to him or her, and vice versa, but also attending to what is happening between the members of the dyad. In dyadic interviews, participants play a role which in a sense blurs the normal boundaries between interviewee and interviewer, through probing each other in the context of their narratives or when introducing new topics for discussion. In such contexts, the interviewer's task is to steer this interaction towards the focus of interest (POLAK & GREEN, 2016) but also to pay particular attention to the ways in which both members of the dyad can be respected and supported (LOWTON, 2018) should they, for instance, notice signs of disquiet (TAYLOR & DE VOCHT, 2011). The interviewer needs to be especially sensitive to situations where a dyad experiences a potential or overt conflict. In such instances the interviewer should consider whether they may be unintentionally prioritizing one person's perspective over the other's (BJØRNHOLT & FARSTAD, 2014; MORRIS, 2001). [12]

We now move to the example of a study conducted by the first author, in which a dyadic interview method was used to investigate experiences of altruism in organizations. We discuss the methodological decisions involved in designing a dyadic interview study such as our exemplar, and illustrate some of the strengths of the method in terms of data quality and the challenges associated with it. [13]

3. Example of Dyadic Interviews in Use: Researching Altruistic Motivation

In this article we build on a study of altruism as experienced by employees working in the third sector that was conducted by the first author. The second author's role was to help with the interpretation of the results, collaborating with the first author in conducting the literature review on dyadic interviews, and co-authoring the article. The reported research took place in the United Kingdom in the settings of a community services provider, secondary school, and the university business school. The first author purposefully sampled these organizations since their value is perceived to lie in the achievement of social purposes (MOORE, 2000). The director of a community services provider and the Dean for Research in the university business school were directly approached via e-mail. The first author informed them about the nature of the study and asked for permission to access their institutions. Note that she was a former employee at the community services provider's headquarters and was not in any way affiliated with the remaining organizations. One of the participants from the community services provider acted as a gatekeeper to the secondary school. After an initial meeting between the first author and a School Principal from the secondary school, we gained access to conduct further research on the premises of an institution. [14]

We sampled our participants within the organizations on a convenience basis, looking at their willingness and availability to take part in the study. The sample consisted of 94 participants occupying various roles in the organizational hierarchy (community services provider, n=32; secondary school, n=32; university business school, n=30). The first author conducted a total of 47 dyadic interviews. Each interview took place face-to-face in meeting rooms at the premises of the organizations and lasted approximately 45 minutes on average (shortest interview: 30 min; longest interview: 100 minutes). One week after an interview, we asked participants to complete an open-ended survey that consisted of two questions with open answers. They had a chance to express their opinion on the interview format and raise any other comments. MORGAN et al. (2013) suggested that getting systematic debriefing feedback from participants can be a source of guidance for future work. The survey was optional, and we received 76 responses. [15]

To ensure that participants felt secure enough in the dyadic settings to agree on some issues and disagree on others, throughout the process of dyad formation we followed the suggestions of MORGAN et al. (2016) to carefully select dyads based on the level of their acquaintance. In the secondary school, we formed the dyads based on the suggestions of the School Principal. While he helped with access to dyads and their formation due to the particularly busy nature of the working environment of the explored institution and limited use of work e-mail by its employees, there was no further involvement on his part beyond his initial suggestions. He had no knowledge as to which staff took part in the study, nor how the dyads were constituted. After sending an information e-mail to respondents from the community services provider and the university business school, they were given an option to self-select into dyads or to leave this task with the researcher. Several participants used the opportunity to self-select themselves into dyads based on their working relationships. The remaining participants were grouped by the researcher following conversations with the directors of Human Resources (HR) about the general levels of acquaintance across different organizational roles. Such conversations were based only on organizational hierarchy and professional relations among organizational members and were particularly useful for a first author who was not familiar with the organizational structure of the explored institutions. Importantly, the HR directors were not directly involved in the research process, nor did they know who participated in the study. The choice of dyads was subsequently confidentially discussed with every individual participant to ensure everyone felt comfortable being interviewed as a pair. [16]

During the interviews, the first author employed a relatively non-directive style of moderation. The researcher's role was to ask questions from an interview guide with little active probing to let the participants engage in in-depth discussions. The author conducted all interviews and recorded them using a hand-held recorder. The process resulted in over 40 hours of recordings which were manually transcribed by the first author to ensure maximum familiarity with the data (LAPADAT & LINDSAY, 1999). The process resulted in 970 pages of transcripts (font 12, double line spacing). [17]

Throughout the entire research process, we followed the Code of Ethics and Conduct stated by the British Psychological Society expressed in the principles of respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity. The study received an institutional ethical board approval from the University of Leeds. We first sent a letter of introduction to the explored organizations informing them about the goals and procedures of the research and assuring of the study's confidentiality and the right to withdraw without giving explanations. Once we gained access to organizations, we sent similar letters to individual employees. Such letters were accompanied with an information sheet with further details of the study and an additional explanation of the dyadic nature of interviews. If participants agreed to take part in the research, they were once again shown an information sheet and asked to sign a participant consent form. Importantly, the creation of pairwise relationships in dyadic interviews, due to the presence of the interview partner, did not allow us to guarantee research participants full confidentiality. However, we ensured that all participants understood this important implication. We discuss further decisions related to the ethical code of conduct later in this article. [18]

To identify the key themes in the data, the first author used template analysis (TeA; KING, 2012) which balances the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study with a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analyzing textual data. The author developed a coding template based on a subset of data, which was subsequently applied to further data and revised and refined in the light of careful consideration of each transcript. A final version of the template served as the basis for the interpretation of the data set and for the writing up of findings. The textual data from the open-ended post-interview survey were analyzed separately, also using a TeA approach. Analyses were underpinned by a "subtle realist" approach (HAMMERSLEY, 1992, p.202); this recognizes that the researcher cannot stand in an objective position outside the data (relativist epistemology) but retains a belief in phenomena that are independent of the researcher and are knowable through the research process (realist ontology). We thus believe we can make claims as to the validity of a representation arising from research, while accepting that other perspectives on the phenomenon are possible. In the subsequent sections we discuss the methodological and practical aspects of our experience with dyadic interviews. [19]

3.1 Decisions involved in conducting dyadic interviews

Our experience with the project described above points to several methodological decisions that researchers interested in conducting dyadic interviews will need to consider. We start our discussion with examining how to approach potential interview participants to recruit them to take part in the research. Second, we emphasize the need to carefully consider the selection of participants for dyadic interviews. We further place such discussions in the context of ethical considerations. [20]

Compared to recruitment for individual interviews and focus groups, with which both authors have considerable experience, the recruitment of participants for the reported study turned out to be relatively complex, for several reasons. The first

decision was whether participants should be given an option to self-select into pairs or to leave this task to the researcher. Not leaving participants with the choice may mean that they end up in an interview with someone they dislike or with whom they do not feel comfortable. Self-selecting into pairs, in contrast, means that a list of research participants is shared with others. This, in turn, may lead to some ethical problems. Trying to find an alternative solution, the initial e-mail asking employees to take part in the altruism study indicated that they may suggest who they want to be interviewed with or leave the task with the research team. Some of the participants replied to say they teamed up with colleagues. The majority indicated they would like to take part in the research and had not identified a partner. After studying the organizational structure, initial plans were made, pairing specific individuals who work with each other. Subsequently, we e-mailed each participant separately to ask if they were comfortable being interviewed with a selected person. In one instance, a participant objected to being interviewed with a suggested person and we suggested an alternative participant. We assured everyone that their preferences would not be shared with others. Whilst we did not experience a situation where a participant would refuse to be interviewed with a particular person who had already agreed to a suggested pairing, researchers need to carefully consider what to do should such a situation arise. To avoid potential conflicts between participants, it may be that the research team asks if participants have any objections to being interviewed with any specific individuals from the explored organization before the process of dyad formation takes place. This solution has its weaknesses too as it may create some level of discomfort among potential participants. [21]

A second major decision pertaining to dyadic interviews relates to the basis for pairing individuals. While existing research using dyadic interviews sheds some light on dyads consisting of close family members (BLAKE et al., 2021), we know relatively little about pairs of work colleagues (SZULC, 2021), friends (HIGHET, 2003), and perhaps even less on strangers (KVALSVIK & ØGAARD, 2021). For instance, some authors suggested that prior roles and experiences may influence the level of interaction and comfort of the dyadic interview (MORGAN, 2016). Based on this assumption, the researcher predominantly paired individuals who had developed some form of a working relationship. However, in certain instances, she had to pair individuals who have not worked with each other before (for instance, they worked in different departments). Whilst they could have not shared their common experiences, they still demonstrated knowledge of organizational-wide behaviors and hence, developed common ground for conversations. These, in turn, resulted in interesting interactions and rich discussions of the explored phenomenon set in a specific context with which both participants were equally familiar. However, scholars should be aware that such advantages may be uncertain. In some cases, being interviewed with a stranger may lead to a withdrawal behavior. For instance, those who are introverted (KHALIL, 2016) or certain neurominorities (SZULC, McGREGOR & CAKIR, 2021) such as individuals with autism (TOMCZAK, SZULC & SZCZERSKA, 2021) may face particular communication or social interaction challenges when being interviewed with someone they do not know. [22]

The extant literature does not focus on the differences in status among research participants and how this may affect the nature of the interview and its progress. Whilst in the present study dyads were predominantly equal in status within the organization, in one instance we formed a dyad that involved a person with management responsibilities for their interview partner. The person occupying a lower place in the organizational hierarchy did not raise any issues in the confidential follow-up survey. However, the person with management responsibilities suggested that her interview partner could have felt less comfortable in sharing sensitive information in her presence. This is indicated in the following quotation from her follow-up survey response: "I really enjoyed the interview process. However, I am not sure to what extent X felt comfortable given I am managing her performance." [23]

Directly related to the above is the need to consider ethical issues particularly associated with dyadic interviews, at each step of the research. For example, as with focus groups, participants in a dyadic interview are not anonymous to each other, and we had to ensure that they commit to treating each other's words as confidential after the end of the interview. This was included in the consent forms that we provided. More specifically, our consent forms included information that neither confidentiality nor anonymity can be guaranteed in a dyadic setting due to the presence of an interview partner. We further explained the implications of it before and at the start of an interview and emphasized participants' commitment to treating the interviews in a confidential manner. Where people are recruited by virtue of their pre-existing relationships, there may be more at stake for them in a dyadic setting than there would be in a group setting. The potential impact of issues related to power imbalance, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity needs careful consideration, as part of the ethics review process (see also MORGAN et al., 2013; ZARHIN, 2018). This became particularly evident to us when an Associate Dean from the university business school raised concerns in her follow-up questionnaire that her interview partner, a junior lecturer, could have felt overwhelmed during an interview with a senior. At the same time, it is worth noting that pairwise relationships in dyadic interviews may prove helpful in some cultural contexts where, for example, it is simply inappropriate to expect one-to-one interviews. For instance, in certain Muslim countries, social norms and cultural traditions will make it almost impossible for a male interviewer to interview a female participant in one-to-one settings (ABALKHAIL, 2017). The dyadic format may also be helpful where a research topic is particularly sensitive or difficult to discuss, and the presence of another interviewee may be reassuring, such as when interviewing couples that have been living with disabilities and illnesses for a long time (TORGÉ, 2013). [24]

3.2 Strengths of dyadic interviews

In this section we highlight the strengths of dyadic interviews as evidenced in the organizational altruism study, especially in terms of the nature of the data produced by the method. We use extracts from the interviews to clarify our points. In the study, the shared understandings of roles and organizational contexts enabled participants in dyads to interrogate each other's understandings in a way that might well be difficult for the researcher if she was questioning them individually in a one-to-one interview. In the exchange below, two managers from the community services provider discussed what it means to be "altruistic." Mike[1] sought to deny that his helping behaviors at work could have been considered altruistic, but Jenny repeatedly questioned this, leading through their interaction to a more nuanced position:

> "Mike: I sometimes help to make my life easier. So it's the altruistic bit that I struggle with. I don't always do it just to help them, there's always an end gain because this is work. If I am helping people like today, I help them because I don't want them to go off sick [...] I want them to have their job done quicker. At work there's always another behavior. I don't think I am helpful just for helpful sake, I think it's just part of my make up as a manager. Even though people may think that it comes across as altruistic.
>
> Jenny: So if you are looking at people you manage, would you think ... yes there's an end gain, I understand it because I also do it, like you said—it makes my life easier [...]. But if someone was in that position where they say, 'I am really struggling with this', would you see that you are doing this to help yourself rather than genuinely wanting to help them because you are caring?
>
> Mike: Oh no. I am genuinely caring by nature ... I've never been unhelpful. It's because I'm caring I'm a good manager, I'd always help them. But that's quite different than putting myself under more pressure, which is a different thing, isn't it?
>
> Jenny: But if it's somebody genuinely wanting help for no gain for yourself so it's not about making your life easier, you will do that.
>
> Mike: Yes, true.
>
> Jenny: And I would do" (Interview 5, community services provider). [25]

The extract above is only one of the many examples demonstrating how a dyadic format of an interview has potential to provide insights which might be out of reach of the researcher not simply because of any reluctance to influence participant response but because of the lack of knowledge of everyday organizational situations and norms, and, depending on the relationship of the pair, individual behaviors as experienced by the dyad. This ability to consider different points of view and thus to further develop the conversation was also noted by participants in the follow-up survey. The following comments were typical: "I thought it was beneficial to discuss the concept with a colleague as this pushed the conversation along and allowed us to consider different points of view," "[...] we balanced off each other," "We could share the conversation

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1   Pseudonyms used.

instead of it being totally one sided, [...] it prompted thoughts about altruism that we had not considered" (Questionnaires). [26]

The second advantage associated with the dyadic format of an interview is associated with its potential to alleviate at least some of the impact of the social desirability (or its opposite) of particular positions. This is not to claim that the dyadic format can somehow cut through "bias" to reach a participant's "true" position; such an argument would embody a naïve realism that most qualitative researchers would rightly challenge (e.g., BOEIJE, 2004). Rather, the mutual insights of the dyad—whether from personal knowledge of each other, or shared contextual understanding (or both)—would make it more likely that socially desirable responses were challenged and other formulations of experience given a chance to be aired. To return to our exemplar study, in a British context, claims by people in professional and/or managerial roles to be acting from altruism might well be viewed negatively; they might appear boastful or self-aggrandizing, or conversely might be seen as counter to a proper focus on what is good for the organization as a whole. In the extract below, also from the community services provider, the dyad consists of two support workers. Rather mirroring the dynamic between the two managers in the first extract, Andy questioned whether altruism was a valid concept, highlighting what he presented as the instrumental nature of his own helpful and supportive actions. Gail, in turn, used her personal knowledge of Andy and the organizational setting to give examples that challenged the position Andy had presented:

> "Interviewer: Do you engage in such [altruistic] behaviors in your workplace?
>
> Andy: I'm not entirely sure if it [altruism] really exists this way. I mean the whole point of what we do is helping people who need support. I am coming here because I need a job and because I feel I really want to work here [...]. And I get an enormous satisfaction from that. I can't say it's genuinely altruistic because I get so much out of it.
>
> Gail: When you said you don't do it for ... the way you've helped Ian …
>
> Andy: He's my friend and that's part of being a friend with someone. I think equally, if the situation was reversed, he would do the same thing for me [...] I'd question whether I'd call it altruistic because there's a lot of mutual support in there [...].
>
> Gail: Yes, but you particularly would go above and beyond to research things that would have helped Ian in the beginning. You didn't do that to climb the corporate level, you did that for Ian, not for anybody else, it was Ian and that is what I think we are looking at now. Staff in our department, particularly more than others you, will go out and look for information in your own time. Look how you got out this birthday card for Tom today [...].
>
> Andy: It's more like a thought than like a desire. Tom said to me a few days ago he wants a cake and a party. And I knew that I could organize a party [...]. Almost everybody I texted, texted me back. So that was brilliant, that was an example how everybody, given an opportunity, wanted to participate.
>
> Gail: That's the difference though between being given the opportunity and you making the opportunity.

>   Andy: Yes, but I'm also a very bossy, naughty beggar. And again, that's me. I would
>   get very frustrated if I wasn't doing that sort of thing" (Interview 14, community
>   services provider). [27]

Following Gail's interventions, Andy somewhat softened his position, but at the end of the exchange still avoided a self-description as "altruistic," with a rather humorous characterization of himself as "a very bossy, naughty beggar." We also see the use of humor to manage a topic participants may feel uncomfortable talking about in the third extract, below, this time from the secondary school. The two (female) teachers deflected the potential embarrassment associated with discussing their own altruistic behavior through laughter. They then moved on to suggest discussing each other's altruistic actions would be easier; going beyond the immediate extract, this leads the dyad into what turned out to be a rich and complex discussion of the topic:

>   "Interviewer: Do you have a chance to engage in such behaviors?
>
>   Beth: I am completely selfless ... Ha-ha.
>
>   Jo: Ha-ha.
>
>   Beth: Yes, I think we do.
>
>   Jo: Yeah, I'd say so. It's hard, isn't it? To think of your own examples. Ha-ha.
>
>   Beth: Shall I think of yours?
>
>   Jo: Ha-ha yes, it's easy to talk about someone else" (Interview 6, secondary school). [28]

3.3 Challenges associated with dyadic interviews

Although the method proved very successful in eliciting rich data in the organizational altruism study, there were inevitably also challenges associated with it. These were evident in some of the interviews themselves, and in some comments on the post-interview questionnaire. One problem that could be experienced with dyadic interviews is when one person dominates the interview, whether reflecting status differences or simply the fact that one participant has a more confident, outgoing personality than the other. This was reported by others (e.g., ARKSEY, 1996; KVALSVIK & ØGAARD, 2021; MORGAN et al., 2016), and we also experienced such instances in the altruism study. In the following extract, it becomes obvious that Jeff, a support worker from community services provider, felt more comfortable talking to an interviewer than did Gemma, also a support worker. It may be that Gemma felt she could only give short answers as Jeff would take it over and continue with his monologues that sometimes drifted away from the focus of an interview. It is only after the interviewer specifically addressed Gemma that she took the opportunity to engage in the conversation more fully:

>   "Interviewer: Do you have a chance to engage in such actions here?
>
>   Gemma: Yes, everyday, everyday.
>
>   Jeff: Of course, we do. Every day. Because it's part of our job. You see, there are two
>   parts in this. The help side which is part of our job, that you must provide support for

clients and the team. And there is part of support which is not in the book, it has to come from within. You know, if you have it, you will give it out, if you are a person who is miserable you don't give but most people ... you get the support. Even the clients do support us. They improve us, our well-being, our way of thinking, and our way of motivating others. Sometimes it is nice to actually receive and not to give all the time. That's why I said sometimes we get help from places you wouldn't think. For example, my job here is to support clients; only support clients and I'm not thinking about anything else. I am here to support my clients only to find out that the client actually supports me. In this way I get help from a very unexpected source. [... discussion not on topic].

Interviewer: When you engage in such help giving actions, what is it that guides you, your emotions and your heart or is it calculations?

Jeff: From my experience there is no calculations. I always believe that if you help somebody with the intention of calculating that ... hmmm ... 'right ... if I have that, I'm gonna have that. And then managers, I want them to know that I made that decision. That kind of help is really wrong and I haven't experienced it. And I wouldn't give somebody help if I was gonna calculate it to get some benefits unless this was someone I really hate.

All: Ha-ha-ha.

Jeff: But I don't hate anybody. But it's a fact, we are human beings as individuals and we choose how we engage in our day life situation.

I: And what about you [looking at Gemma]? Is it head, heart, both?" (Interview 4, community services provider) [29]

The above example also illustrates another challenge in this form of interview; that dyads may be more likely than individual interviews to go off-topic for a substantial length of time, as they settle in to enjoying the conversation between them. This may be most likely when two participants share a good relationship which leads to an interaction focused on the research topic slipping into a friendly chat. This was our experience with an interview with two lecturers from the university business school, Alex and Dan, who worked together and were good friends. The following extract from their interview shows how many side notes the interviewer made which simply stated *discussion irrelevant to the topic.* In fact, during the interview, Dan himself called for bringing an argument back to the topic and admitted that if he was in the same room with Alex they could "ramble forever":

"Dan: It's age, ha-ha.

Alex: No, it's not age. It's another concept... the idea of ... I'm sorry I'm gonna ramble for a minute. [Irrelevant discussion—talking about giving lectures] it's this concept, going back to what Dan said, why people come to university and what we offer them. And if it had been 200 years ago, 300 years ago, it would have been completely different

Interviewer: Why?

Alex: Because I think there was much more freedom of direction, I think people who came to university then really wanted to come, they had something to say ...

> *[irrelevant discussion]*. Now there is a different reason for coming to university. It started, I suspect, by the labour government, the idea that 50 per cent of students ...
>
> Dan: Mrs Tatcher. Politicians.
>
> Alex: [Irrelevant discussion—talking about education systems and apprenticeships and politicians]
>
> Dan: What Alex is saying is that people who are coming to university, the nature has changed, and the reason for being here has changed but we can't necessarily change the way we perceive them and the way we deal with them. It's just how, not what or why...
>
> Alex: We've become the sage on the stage rather than the guide [Irrelevant discussion—talking about education, students and politicians]
>
> Dan: But if we bring our argument back to altruism [...], go back to your childhood Alex, same as me now, it was a bit of ... none of us came from particularly wealthy backgrounds, fairly modest, and you say how did you spend your time and how did it have impact on your life?
>
> […]
>
> Interviewer: I am mindful that we're running out of time and your families are waiting for you.
>
> Dan: She has to escape ha-ha.
>
> Alex: Oh yeah.
>
> Interviewer: No, I can stay here for another two hours if you have time, ha-ha.
>
> Dan: What other questions do you have cause we have rambled […] If we are in the same room it can go forever" (Interview 7, university business school). [30]

The results of our follow-up survey also highlighted potentially challenging areas for the dyadic format of an interview. First, while a vast majority of participants reported the process to be comfortable and allowing for complex discussions, some have expressed reservations about being interviewed alongside a colleague. For instance, a lecturer from the university business school suggested he may not have felt comfortable if he had been interviewed with certain colleagues:

> "I found the interview quite interesting, and I thought it was a good way of generating ideas having the interview with myself and another colleague. I do think this could cause problems for some people who were perhaps not as comfortable with their colleague" (Questionnaire, university business school). [31]

Similarly, one of the managers from the community services provider suggested that being interviewed with a colleague not only exposed him but it could have also resulted in negative reactions from an interview partner: "Happy to be interviewed with an equal though exploring my approach and technique did expose me—my personality. And if that person was threatened by me, they may take offence, i.e., if I was being over ambitious for example" (Questionnaire, community services provider). [32]

Interestingly, a similar comment was made by the cited manager's interview colleague (also in a management role) who suggested that the interview was more difficult than she expected it to be:

> "Being interviewed alongside a colleague was more difficult than I thought it would be. This is because I saw them differently before the interview. I didn't realize that they did so much for a gain for themselves. So eye opening" (Questionnaire, community services provider). [33]

Perhaps the ease of discussions during the interview process is associated not only with the level of acquaintance as suggested by MORGAN et al. (2016) but also, especially in the case of sensitive or even controversial topics, holding similar values so that it is easier to avoid challenging conversations. This was also suggested by one of the secondary school's administrators: "I found the process fine because I was interviewed alongside a colleague who has a similar ethos to myself. It may have been more difficult if this was not the case" (Questionnaire, secondary school). [34]

From the perspective of the researcher, interviewing individuals with different views/values may lead to challenging conversations which, in turn, could result in particularly interesting findings and rich data. Indeed, we observed interesting points of tension as well as the dynamics of a dyad in meaning making when research participants disagreed. The key, however, is to find the right balance between challenging discussions and participants' level of comfort. This point is further considered in the subsequent sections where we discuss considerations for future research. [35]

4. Discussion and Future Directions for the Development of Dyadic Interviews

Our experience with dyadic interviews, including in the altruism in organizations study, alongside a consideration of the relevant literature, highlights some real strengths of the approach. The dyadic perspective, we would argue, helps to foreground relational aspects of a research topic in a direct way, whereas these are only available via the reporting of a single participant in a conventional interview and can be diluted in a focus group. The method is self-evidently valuable where the topic itself is focused on a dyadic relationship, such as research into spousal or romantic relationships (e.g., WALKER & DICKSON, 2004), or patient and carer perspectives on a health care issue (e.g., WAWRZICZNY et al, 2015). But it is also valuable for other topics which are not intrinsically dyadic in focus, such as in the exemplar study we have described here. Shared experiences and shared knowledge of context can enable participants to explore the agenda together in a way that would be unlikely to occur in a group setting or in the more interrogative interaction that can occur in a one-to-one interview. The dyadic format can also give participants a chance to challenge superficial or socially desirable responses that the researcher might miss or might not feel comfortable to question for fear of damaging rapport with the interviewee. [36]

It must be recognized, however, that dyadic interviews bring challenges too, as we have noted above. Some of these occur before the interview itself, in terms of sampling and recruitment, where decisions about whether and how to match participants in pairs can be complex, especially regarding ethical issues. Thinking about the interview process itself, the relational strengths of the dyadic form may increase the risk of upset and at worst psychological and/or reputational harm to participants. The dynamics within a dyad interview can also turn in ways that are not helpful for the collection of good quality data; for example, one member of the participant pair may dominate discussion, or the convivial atmosphere within a close dyad may lead to long digressions from the topic. These kinds of issues can be difficult for the researcher to manage, because they face a tension between enabling the dyad to lead the discussion as much as possible (with minimal interviewer intervention) and getting the best data possible from the dyad as a whole. [37]

The insights from our exemplar study, plus the methodological literature, point to a number of implications for practice. The great majority of the dyads in the altruism study were very successful in terms of participants interacting positive with valuable data produced as a result. But this was only possible because a great deal of time and thought went in to the whole process of defining and recruiting to dyads. Researchers new to the method need to factor the complexity of decisions about how to construct dyads into their research planning from the start. Such things as status and quality of the prior personal relationship need to be considered where possible. The approach used in our example of asking people individually and in confidence who they would or would not be happy to be paired with can work as a way to minimize risks of a dysfunctional dyad. Turning to the interview process itself, a key task for the researcher is to work out when to intervene and prompt or probe, and when to let the participants take the discussion where they want, even at the risk of some deviation from the research topic. There can be no general answer to this; it will always depend on the nature of a particular study and the participants involved. However, our experience suggests that while different studies, and different dyads, will need differing levels of intervention and direction from the interviewer, it is usually more harmful for the interviewer to intervene too much than too little. [38]

To add to our understanding of the dyadic interview method, more systematic exploration of the dynamics within dyads, and between interview and dyad, is needed. Just as BLAKE et al. (2021) and HEAPHY and EINARSDOTTIR (2013) used both individual and joint interviews to assess their relative advantages and disadvantages, we could now examine the impact of varying levels of closeness between dyad members. With the growing use of internet-based qualitative methods, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for publications where the authors theoretically and empirically explore the practice of dyadic interviewing in an online setting. Finally, in the present article we focused mainly on dyad formation and the interview process, but there needs to be more consideration in future on the development and assessment of data analytic methods that optimally capture the distinctive qualities of dyadic interviews. [39]

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to shed light on the nature of the dyadic interview as a form of qualitative data collection; one which we feel deserves much wider usage. We argue that the context of the participant dyad is one quite distinct from both individual and group interviews. It encourages a genuine conversation between the members of the participant dyad, on a topic where they have a shared interest and often where there is a pre-existing relationship between them. The interviewer must facilitate this interaction, probing where their research question requires it but taking care not to dominate the discussion in a way that could disrupt the dynamic of the dyad, reducing it in effect to two parallel individual interviews. We have provided in some detail an exemplar of a study using dyadic interviews, highlighting the strengths of the method and the difficulties the researcher might face throughout the research process. We hope to have demonstrated not only the methodological potential of dyadic interviews but also offered suggestions for navigating its potential challenges. [40]

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Authors

Dr *Joanna Maria SZULC* is an assistant professor at Gdańsk University of Technology, Poland. She holds a PhD in management from the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. In her research, she uses qualitative methods to explore the nature of employee relationships and inclusive work environments. She is currently leading a funded research project on neurodiversity in the workplace.

Contact:

Joanna Szulc

Gdańsk University of Technology
Narutowicza 11/12
80-233 Gdańsk, Poland

Tel.: +48 58 347 27 86

E-mail: joanna.szulc@pg.edu.pl
URL: https://pg.edu.pl/p/joanna-szulc-1244988

Professor *Nigel King* is professor in applied psychology at the University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom. He has written extensively on the development and use of qualitative methods in real world settings, with topics including interviewing, visual methods and template analysis. His substantive interests cover the meaning of natural/outdoor spaces and how this links to wellbeing, inter-professional working (especially in health and social care) and anomalous experiences in relation to death and bereavement.

Contact:

Nigel King

School of Human and Health Sciences
University of Huddersfield
Queensgate
Huddersfield, HD1 3DH, United Kingdom

Tel.: +44 (0)7540 671233

E-mail: n.king@hud.ac.uk
URL: https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/persons/nigel-king

Citation