**DYADIC INTERVIEWS**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

Researchers who speak to their participants tend to adopt one of two approaches. In particular, they either

* conduct interviews with each participant separately, or
* facilitate focus groups with several participants at the same time.

Dyadic interviewing, in which one researcher interviews two participants at the same time, is not as prevalent. However, dyadic interviews generate some distinct benefits.

**Pre-existing versus unfamiliar dyads**

Admittedly, for several decades, many researchers have conducted interviews with pre-existing dyads—such as romantic partners, caregivers and their clients, parents and their children, and so forth. However, only in more recent years have researchers conducted interviews with unfamiliar dyads—pairs of individuals who had not met previously (see Caldwell, 2014). This document primarily revolves around studies in which the dyads are unfamiliar with each other

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| **Benefits of dyadic interviews** |

**Benefits of dyadic interviews over individual interviews**

Dyadic interviews generate a variety of benefits over individual interviews. The following table outlines these benefits.

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| Benefit | Details |
| **Sharing and extending**: One person can extend the suggestions or perspective the other person poses | * The answers of participants might thus explore issues in greater depth |
| **Comparing**: The two participants may express or recognize disparate opinions and perspectives | * These disparate positions can generate richer and more nuanced insights about some issue |
| **Conversation and networking**: The two participants might appreciate the opportunity to share their perspectives | * Participants might not have been granted the opportunity to discuss these issues previously * Sometimes, after the session, the participants might exchange business cards |
| **Opportunity to reflect.** Participants are granted some opportunity to contemplate their answers while the other person is speaking | * During interviews with only one participant, this person is either listening to a question or answering a question, potentially impeding their capacity to reflect carefully * This opportunity is especially valuable to participants who experience cognitive problems |
| **Redressing imbalances in power**. Participants sometimes feel more empowered when they are not interviewed alone | * During interviews with only one participant, the researcher guides the interview and thus occupies a position of power. This position of power might stifle the responses of this participant * Two participants, combined, may offset this disparity in power to some extent. Together, they might be able to shape and to influence the emphasis of this interview. |

**Benefits of dyadic interviews over focus groups**

These benefits of dyadic interviews—the sharing of answers, comparing of answers, networking, opportunities to reflect, and empowerment—also apply to focus groups. Yet, as the following table shows, dyadic interviews also offer several benefits over focus groups.

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| Benefit | Details |
| **Greater feelings of security.** Participants tend to feel more confident to express their opinions and perspectives when only one, rather than many, other participants are listening | * Participants who are shy and reserved may be especially inclined to prefer dyadic interviews over focus groups * The two participants can accommodate each other more effectively; they can respond to the nonverbal cues of one another—such as facial expressions that imply boredom * Similarly, some participants are reluctant to meet unfamiliar people—and this concern is exacerbated in focus groups relative to dyadic interviews * Specific demographics, such as people who have been diagnosed with cognitive impairment, may feel especially overwhelmed by focus groups |
| **Potential to extend answers**. In contrast to dyadic interviews, during focus groups, participants might not feel they are granted enough time to extend their answers | * During dyadic interviews, participants feel their answers can be longer—because only one other participant is listening * Hence, their answers might be more comprehensive—and include a narrative that clarifies the perspective in greater detail * These extended answers can be more nuanced as well |
| **Logistics**. Dyadic interviews are easier to arrange than focus groups | * Researchers can readily identify two participants who are available at the same time * Researchers often prefer the participants to be homogenous on key characteristics, such as field of study or socioeconomic status; this homogeneity is easier to arrange if the interview comprises two participants rather than many participants |
| **Moderation**. Researchers can moderate or facilitate discussions with two participants more effectively than discussions with more than two participants | * For example, researchers can more readily check that two, rather than more than two, participants understood the questions and are ready to proceed to subsequent questions |

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| **How to conduct dyadic interviews** |

Researchers have yet to formulate a protocol on how to conduct dyadic interviews. Instead, they may integrate some of the principles that apply to traditional interviews or focus groups. Nevertheless, researchers have advocated a few helpful practices. The following table outlines these practices.

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| Practice to consider | Details |
| **Balance homogeneity and diversity.** If participants are too different to one another, some problems might unfold. For example, the precise questions might be relevant to one participant but not the other participant. In addition, they might not feel as comfortable with one another  If participants are too similar, however, other problems could unfold. Their answers might not diverge enough from one another; consequently, the answers of one participant might not stimulate greater insight in the other participant | * Researchers have not clarified how to balance this homogeneity and diversity. * Arguably, the participants should be similar on characteristics that affect understanding—such as field of discipline or level of education * But, participants could differ on characteristics that affect their experiences with some issue—such as whether they live alone or level of confidence. * For example, suppose the researcher wanted to understand how universities could assist international research candidates better. The dyads might include students from the same nation but, perhaps, from separate disciplines |
| **Previous familiarity**. In general, researchers prefer to interview dyads who had not formed a pre-existing relationship. | * Pre-existing relationships can skew the responses of participants; they might be reluctant to express an opinion that could damage their relationship * Researchers should interview dyads who have formed a pre-existing relationship—such as a couple—only if they are specifically interested in these relationships |
| **Precede with individual interviews**. Researchers often interview each person separately first—and then together later—to learn about the preferences and sensitivities of these individuals | * Researchers might, for example, learn about the sensitivities of each person—and thus words, phrases, or questions they should avoid * After the interviews with each person, the researcher can more readily identify which dyads might clash and thus rearrange these dyads accordingly |
| **Start with questions to promote familiarity**. During the first ten minutes or so of the interview, researchers should begin with questions that enable the participants to demonstrate their attributes and share their values | * Participants might be prompted to describe their roles or answer other questions that demonstrate some of their attributes or qualities * Participants also could be asked to share values, such as whether they prioritize financial gain over personal development * After individuals contemplate their attributes and values, they tend to feel more resilient, according to research on self-affirmation theory (Koole et al., 2006) |
| **Design the schedule of questions**. Researchers often utilize the funnel approach, in which they discuss the topic broadly, and then narrow the conversation to more specific issues. | Many researchers ask five classes of questions in turn: opening, introductory, transition, key, and closing questions.   * **opening questions**: ask simple questions that participants can readily answer—primarily to promote their confidence. At this time, do not ask controversial questions that could provoke division. An example might be “Tell me about why you chose this university” or “Tell me about your experiences with universities” * **introductory questions**: Ask questions that prompt individuals to start contemplating the issue. An example could be “After you enrolled, what differed from hour expectations” * **transition questions**: Ask questions that shift the discussion towards the key issues you want to discuss. An example could be “After you enrolled, what were some of the main disappointments you experienced” * **key questions**: Most of the session should revolve around these key question—the main concerns or issues you want to discuss. An example could be “How do you feel the university could have prevented these disappointments” * **ending questions**: These questions are designed to close the interview and may include “Would you like to discuss anything else about your experience at the university” |
| **Permit conversation**. If participants begin to converse with each other, do not interrupt, unless the individuals stray excessively from the topic of concern. These conversations can generate vital insights. |  |

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| **References** |

Caldwell, K. (2014). Dyadic interviewing: a technique valuing interdependence in interviews with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative Research, 14(4), 488-507. doi: 10.1177/1468794113490718

Koole, S. L., Smeets, K., van Knippenberg, A., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2006). The cessation of rumination through self-affirmation. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77, 111-125.

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