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Introducing Dyadic Interviews as a Method for Collecting Qualitative Data

Qualitative Health Research
23(9) 1276–1284
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1049732313501889
qhr.sagepub.com



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Abstract

In dyadic interviews, two participants interact in response to open-ended research questions. There are few precedents for using dyadic interviews as a technique for qualitative research. We introduce this method largely in comparison to focus groups, because both represent forms of interactive interviewing. We do not, however, view dyadic interviews as miniature focus groups, and treat them as generating their own opportunities and issues. To illustrate the nature of dyadic interviewing, we present summaries of three studies using this method. In the first study, we used dyadic interviews and photovoice techniques to examine experiences of people with early-stage dementia. In the second study, we explored the experiences of staff who provided services to elderly housing residents. In the third study, we examined barriers and facilitators to substance abuse treatment among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Hawaii. We conclude with a discussion of directions for future research using dyadic interviews.

Keywords

aging, Asian people / cultures, dementia, focus groups, interviews, older people, photography / photovoice, research design

Qualitative interviewing presents an interesting gap between individual interviews, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups, which require three or more participants. What is missing in this continuum are dyadic interviews that bring together two participants. This article fills that gap, first by discussing the general issues involved in dyadic interviews, and then by providing empirical examples of how they operate in practice.

In some respects, dyadic interviews are not entirely new. Within qualitative marketing research, there is a tradition for conducting two-person interviews under the heading of micro- or mini focus groups. Unfortunately, marketing researchers have written very little about their uses of this technique. For example, Mariampolski's (2001) textbook, *Qualitative Marketing Research*, contains less than a page of discussion on this group interview format, and Greenbaum (1998) devoted only two pages to dyadic interviews.

Another research tradition that has provided a more extensive treatment of dyadic interviews falls largely within the field of family research. All of these studies consist of interviews with pairs of people who share a pre-existing role relationship such as married couples (Allan, 1980; Arskey, 1996; Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Seale, Charteris-Black, Dumelow, Locok, & Ziebland, 2008). Within the larger range of possibilities for conducting dyadic interviews, these relationship-based interviews

amount to a specialized form of group composition, and as such, they represent one important option for research designs that bring together two participants at a time.

In contrast to interviews that rely solely on preexisting relationships, our goal is to describe dyadic interviews as a broadly based option for collecting qualitative data. To succeed at this goal, we need to inspire other researchers to consider dyadic interviews as a viable third alternative to individual interviews and focus groups. This is obviously an ambitious objective, but we hope this article will serve as a first step along that path.



Comparisons to Individual Interviews

The crucial difference between individual and dyadic interviews consists of the interaction between participants in dyadic interviews, as the comments of one participant draw forth responses from the other. Depending on the research goals, this can be either an advantage or a disadvantage. Individual interviews allow participants to

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share information they might have withheld in a more public context; however, dyadic interviews allow participants to stimulate ideas that might not have been either recognized or remembered. Similarly, individual interviews give the interviewer more control over the session, whereas focus groups and dyadic interviews allow participants to “co-construct” their version of the research topic (Morgan, 2012).

One interesting feature of the literature on relationship-based dyadic interviews is its explicit comparison between doing pairs of one-to-one interviews vs. dyadic interviews that bring the two participants together. This approach has been examined in some detail in interviews with couples and partners (e.g., Morris, 2001; Taylor & de Vocht, 2011). Of course, this kind of design relies on the ability to specify the participants’ preexisting relationships to each other.

One specific feature that dyadic interviews do share with individual interviews is the ability to collect more data from each participant. For example, a typical focus group might include six participants talking for 90 minutes, or 15 minutes per person. By comparison, even an hour-long dyadic interview would produce 30 minutes of contributions from each person. Like individual interviews, this creates the opportunity to gather data in more depth and detail from dyadic interviews, while allowing each participant to develop a more personal narrative with regard to the research topic. Nevertheless, the difference between individual and dyadic interviews can be substantial, and it requires careful consideration in most contexts.

Comparisons to Focus Groups

Although dyadic interviews involve only one more participant than individual interviews, the emphasis on interaction creates a much greater similarity to focus groups, which calls for a more extensive comparison between these two methods. Morgan (1996, 2012) argued that one of the chief advantages of interaction in focus groups is a process of sharing and comparing. More specifically, sharing allows each participant to extend what the other has said, and comparing involves a process of differentiation that moves the discussion in alternative directions. Taken together, sharing and comparing allow researchers to hear interesting similarities and differences in what the participants think about the research topic. This process of sharing and comparing also occurs in dyadic interviews, as the participants respond to each other. Thus, what focus groups and dyadic interviews have in common is not just the broader equivalence of relying on interaction but also the specific processes that make this interaction of interest to researchers.

We also believe, however, that it can be quite misleading to think of dyadic interviews as simply being “miniature focus groups.” In particular, the format for a two-person conversation can be quite different from the kind of group discussion that occurs in focus groups. In essence, we would like to create a wider category of interactive interviews, in which dyadic interviews represent two-person conversations and focus groups represent a different kind of interaction in the form of group discussions.

One advantage of the two-person conversation is that it mimics some forms of interaction better than focus groups do. One important example is telephone interviews. Although it is quite possible to conduct focus groups over the telephone as conference calls, this interaction typically lacks the spontaneity of face-to-face interaction, in large part because of the continuing need for participants to identify themselves so they can maintain an orderly conversation. This is not a problem with dyadic interviews, where the two participants are partners in the ongoing series of exchanges. Indeed, the only difference from an ordinary conversation is the presence of a moderator who asks questions and probes portions of the conversation.

The ability to conduct dyadic interviews over the telephone opens up the opportunity to recruit participants who might be some distance apart. This also creates an advantage in working with rare categories of participants, when it could be difficult to assemble enough people at the same place. Another important recruitment difference is the sheer ease of bringing together pairs of participants rather than larger groups. Finding two people who have matching openings in their schedules is obviously easier than finding several people who can all meet in the same place at the same time. Because recruitment problems are potentially a major weakness for focus groups, anything that simplifies successful recruitment is highly desirable.

Moving beyond these basic comparisons to individual interviews and focus groups would require considerable speculation. Instead, we present summaries of three case studies that illustrate both the methodological and practical aspects of our own experiences. We do, however, move in more speculative directions in the final section of the article, when we consider directions for future research.

Photovoice Interviews With People With Early-Stage Dementia

The investigator in this study (Ataie) used photovoice methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997) to explore how people with early-stage dementia use their perceived strengths

and resources to cope with and adapt to the illness. Photovoice is a qualitative research method in which photography is used as a way of collecting data. Pivotal to the method is the assumption that it is important to elicit the perspectives and perceptions of vulnerable populations, and that it is necessary to find ways that enable members of these populations to express their views. To that end, participants in a photovoice project are invited to take photographs of their experiences and subsequently engage in a dialogue about these images. Human subjects approval was obtained through the Portland State University Institutional Review Board.

In line with photovoice methodology, the data sources for this study were participant-generated photographs and interviews. More specifically, individual interviews were used during the initial discovery phase of the project as a way to decode the meanings embedded in the photographs. Dyadic interviews were employed during a second, interpretative phase of the project as a means of member checking and to further develop the understanding of the range of responses to the illness.

The decision to use dyadic interviews instead of focus groups reflected the fact that people with early-stage dementia are easily overwhelmed when faced with groups of new people. For these participants, dyadic interviews minimize the distractions of a group situation and create a space where views, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions can be discussed with someone in a similar situation. In addition, discussing sensitive issues such as one's experiences with cognitive illness can cause discomfort in a group setting, and a carefully conducted pairing process for the dyadic interviews can eliminate this potential drawback. Finally, the recruitment area for the initial phase of this study was geographically spread, with participants living up to 200 miles apart.

Twenty people with early-stage dementia participated in the project: 13 women, 7 men; age 57 to 90, mean 73.4; Mini-Mental State Examination (Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975) scores ranging from 20 to 28, mean 25.6. The process of assembling the dyads was guided by theoretical sampling, direct clinical practice experience in the field of dementia, knowledge of related literature, and familiarity with the participants gained during the discovery phase of the project. The criteria considered in composing the dyads were gender, coping styles, interests, level of education, living alone or with a partner, time of diagnosis, and most significantly, level of functioning. A total of three dyadic interviews were conducted, two with women and a third with men. Each dyadic interview started with a slide show of two photographs (and their corresponding titles) that the participants had chosen for this occasion, continued with a discussion of these images, and eventually progressed into a dialogue about the emerging analytic framework.

Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to analyze the data. When analyzing the data from the dyadic interviews, the goal was to determine whether the earlier analysis had indeed properly identified recurrent patterns in the data, and whether the concepts were saturated so that no new dimensions or properties were emerging. In other words, the contributions of the dyads revised, refined, and supported the emerging analytic framework.

For these participants, learning to live with early-stage dementia was an ongoing, continually shifting process of adjustment in which they moved from a familiar sense of well-being to an alternative sense of well-being. In this process the participants used a variety of strengths and resources ranging from those that supported them in reconstructing identity, regaining control, and rebuilding relationships to those that assisted them in reestablishing a healthy lifestyle and restoring meaning and purpose. "Striving toward well-being while acknowledging the inconceivable notion of losing one's cognitive abilities" was the central strength that the participants brought to this process. It captured the paradox that the participants faced in living with early-stage dementia, which was to relegate the illness to the background of their lives while managing its symptoms in the foreground.

Looking at the implications for dyadic interviews, these interviews generated rich data, which refined the points that the participants had made during the individual interviews and clarified the emerging analytic framework. This format promoted a sense of safety and openness that facilitated a flow of shared stories. The dyads entered readily into candid dialogues, disclosing in-depth thoughts and discussing emotionally challenging topics early on in the conversation. In addition, observing the dyadic interactions provided vital insight into how strengths and resources were used in social encounters to cope with the symptoms of the illness. In contrast to focus groups, one particular strength of the dyadic interview format was the reduced effort on the part of the moderator to clarify, paraphrase, and summarize what the participants had told each other, without interrupting the flow of communication. Also, it was easier for the moderator to notice and bridge gaps in understanding between the dyad members when they occurred.

As expected, the participants presented with some dementia-specific communication difficulties; however, the interactions between the participants remained vibrant. The dyadic interviews were especially useful for participants who needed additional time to process what had been said and formulate their responses. All three dyads engaged in intense discussions that were characterized by sincere interest, respect, and curiosity, as well as a high level of interaction.

The participants encouraged each other to express their perspectives even if that meant struggling to find the right word for the concept they wanted to express. Furthermore, the participants felt secure enough in the dyadic interview environment to agree on some issues and disagree on others. The dyadic interviews fostered a sense of camaraderie and collective identity among the participants, as indicated by their growing confidence to disagree with some of the findings during the member-checking portion of the discussion. For example, the categories forming the concept “identity” were felt to be too static, so the concept “rebuilding identity” now emphasizes motion, process, and possibility.

In summary, taking part in dyadic interviews was an enjoyable experience for the participants, because it provided a venue for them to share their perspectives with confidence. Compared to focus group settings, the smaller, more personal format of the dyadic interviews reduced the stress of meeting new people and assisted in overcoming dementia-specific communication barriers. Compared to the earlier individual interviews, the interaction in the dyadic interviews created a sense of ease and relaxation for these participants, which in turn allowed topics to emerge that were not discussed in the individual interviews.

Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Staff to Support Aging in Place

The investigator’s (Carder’s) goal for this study was to identify characteristics of support and services needed to assist older residents of rent-subsidized apartment buildings to live for as long as possible in their home, or “age in place.” The researcher sought to hear from a wide range of participants who worked with residents in affordable housing to identify the qualifications of on-site housing staff who might be hired to assist older residents, the types of services needed, and the range of potential barriers to promoting aging in place. Because of the newness of this aging-in-place specialist, the research was exploratory and included interviews with individuals employed as resident service coordinators in affordable housing and with professionals who had clients in affordable housing. Participants were asked to discuss older residents’ unmet needs and potential strategies to support aging in place.

Group interviews would be highly desirable as a way to learn more about different experiences with this research topic. Focus groups were problematic, however, because the pool of research participants included a diverse range of health and social service professionals with varying experience with subsidized housing residents. For example, professionals included social

workers, attorneys, nurses, housing advocates, property managers, and mental health case managers. In addition, the research was designed around a grounded-theory approach that called for an iterative process of initial interviews, analysis, and additional data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Working with the smaller size of dyadic interviews was thus especially beneficial in this situation because it fit with the emergent design in the study.

The common denominator across these participants was that they all had clients who lived in affordable housing. The participants were located through snowball sampling, in which each participant was asked for names of others who might be interested. Thirteen 1-hour dyadic interviews were completed. The interviews followed a “funnel” format, with opening, transition, key, and closing questions similar to a focus group’s (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The first questions asked for a description of the kinds of residents who lived in affordable housing and the kinds of supports they might need. A series of key questions then presented scenarios that a new staff person hired to assist older residents might encounter, followed by questions about what staff would need to do to promote aging in place or prevent the need to move into a higher level of care. Human subjects approval was obtained through the Portland State University Institutional Review Board.

In the results, participants described a range of issues that made it difficult for their elderly clients to remain in their subsidized housing. These ranged from seemingly small tasks like getting help to put on socks or take out trash, to larger issues such as managing chronic health conditions. The characteristics of effective support staff were equally wide-ranging. Significantly, participants identified a detailed set of organizational and system-level barriers that made it difficult for them to help older persons age in place.

Looking at the implications for dyadic interviews, these interviews were both discovery-oriented, from the researchers’ point of view, and a matter of considerable curiosity for the participants, because they rarely had an opportunity to talk to others who shared a direct interest in their experiences. The participants were thus quite active in not only responding to our questions but also maintaining their own conversation. In many ways, the interaction was similar to what occurs in focus groups. In particular, the participants would complete each other’s thoughts, and say things such as, “I was thinking about when you were talking about . . .” In addition to picking up on what the other person said, there was also a tendency for one participant to trigger ideas from the other, sometimes asking each other questions that helped them jointly explore a topic. The success of this dyadic interaction allowed the interviewer to choose between joining in

with a more active role and simply listening to ongoing conversation, so long as the discussion stayed on topic.

These dynamics would be absent from individual interviews. This was especially true for sections of the conversation when participants either agreed with each other or discussed differences in their experiences and opinions. In many cases these comparisons arose directly in the course of the participants' conversation; in other cases, they provided the interviewer with the opportunity to probe similarities and differences. Such a decision is similar to individual and focus group interviews, in which the interviewer must strike a balance between encouraging talk and guiding the discussion toward the main topic.

One inevitable issue is which two people to invite to the interview. Ultimately, these interviews contained a mix of heterogeneity and homogeneity between participants, with the majority having at least one element of difference. There were no obvious distinctions between dyads with the same or different job descriptions, indicating for this topic that working with similar clientele mattered more than the specific source of the connection to the clients.

A related issue that arose for this set of participants was a desire to keep in touch, which was reflected by the exchange of business cards and contact information. Although this was not anticipated, it made sense in light of the unusual opportunity to share their experiences with others in a similar line of work. Even in cases in which the participants worked for the same organization, one would often not fully appreciate the nature of the other's work, and the interview presented an opportunity for them to describe and compare experiences. In situations like this, it might make sense to allow time for the participants to talk with each other informally, after the end of the interview itself.

Finally, scheduling two-person interviews, as with focus group interviews, requires planning. Nearly the same amount of effort was required to find a date that worked for the two participants, and then to confirm and reconfirm the meeting time, as scheduling focus groups. In three cases, a scheduled participant failed to appear, resulting in an individual interview; thus, as with focus group interviews, moderators must be flexible.

Substance Abuse Among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

This study examined barriers to entry to substance abuse treatment for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Hilo, Hawaii. The investigator for this study (Hoffman) chose interview topics that centered on the reasons for both entering treatment and continuing treatment, with an emphasis on factors related to motivations, barriers, and facilitators. Although Asian Americans and Pacific

Islanders have relatively low rates of substance use disorders (SUDs) compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Niv, Wong, & Hser, 2007), they underutilize health care services, including substance abuse treatment (Le Meyer, Zane, Cho, & Takeuchi, 2009; Yu, Clark, Chandra, Dias, & Lai, 2009), and the reasons for this reluctance to engage in treatment are unknown. In particular, there is very little information on the factors that contribute to this underutilization.

In this case, individual interviews would have been problematic because the study staff was limited to the principal investigator. In addition, it would have been difficult to assemble focus groups because of the small number of potential participants. From the perspective of two-person interviews, one of the reasons for using this method was the interviewer's outsider status as White and highly educated in comparison to the research participants. The hope was that this approach would allow the researcher to take a less visible role in comparison to an engaging interaction within each pair of participants. This method is particularly advantageous when entrée into a population is damaged or not established. In this study, the investigator was interested in talking with groups who were known to have reluctance engaging with Western researchers. An additional goal was for the pairs of participants to talk about this sensitive topic with greater ease as they got to know each other. Human subjects approval was obtained through the Oregon Health and Science University Institutional Review Board.

The participants consisted of three populations: Asian Americans and Pacific Islander drug users recruited on-site from a program specializing in culturally sensitive services for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; staff members from the treatment center; and community informants (leaders in the community with expertise on substance abuse within the Asian Americans and Pacific Islander communities, such as public health nurses and church leaders with substance abuse treatment experience; all but one were of Asian American and Pacific Islander descent), who were located through snowball sampling. Staff members and drug users were interviewed at the program site whereas community informants were interviewed in a place of their choosing, such as a church, restaurant, or home. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews covering the following topics: barriers to treatment; perceptions of treatment; and the role of family, culture, and language in influencing help seeking. Clients were asked additional questions about past and present help-seeking experiences.

In general, results showed that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders do not fit the "model minority" stereotype, and substance abusers might be a hidden population within the population as a whole (Masson et al., 2013). As is common in many settings, barriers to treatment

included social stigma and ongoing involvement with drug-using social networks. Saving face and protecting the family from shame were two common themes that participants reported as reasons for not seeking help. Facilitators to treatment included referral through the criminal justice system, perceived need for treatment, and culturally competent substance abuse treatment. One important factor that encouraged service use was overcoming the family's perceived stigma about being in substance abuse treatment.

Working with pairs of participants produced rich dialogue with both the Asian American and Pacific Islander clients and community informants. In general, the interaction featured a back-and-forth or "ping-pong" format. This kind of interaction facilitated the exchange of stories, which were particularly valuable as qualitative data. Another useful feature was that the participants could help each other with translation issues. Specifically, many individuals spoke a strong pidgin dialect, so a participant with standard English could help create mutual understanding between the researcher and the pidgin speaker. Building rapport also benefited from a similar process, when one of the participants was more familiar with or just generally more comfortable with the interview process. In addition, the dyadic interviews were especially useful for participants who were acquainted, as this allowed them to work with aspects of their shared histories. At the simplest level, they could help each other remember things. Furthermore, these participants would spontaneously ask each other questions the interviewer would not have known to ask.

The additional value of prior acquaintanceship that occurred in the participant interviews provided a valuable insight into the operation of dyadic interviews. In this case, there was no advance information about prior acquaintance. In other cases, in which it is possible to take shared history into account, this can be an important factor. The operation of this shared history is very likely to vary by context, however. In particular, there was no way to predict whether this would indeed be a helpful factor in the present interviews, and it might indeed be a negative influence in other settings. Either way, prior acquaintance is certainly an issue that should be considered in dyadic interviewing.

The interviews with the mostly White substance abuse staff were less successful. Although the data obtained did provide a useful perspective, these interviews were notably less animated. There are several possible explanations. First, there was a further level of sensitivity to the topic, because the staff members were mostly White and many of the interview questions concerned race. Thus, the sensitivity of talking about racial issues and drug treatment seemed to block lively interaction. Also, normal work tension could possibly have hindered the participants'

willingness to speak freely in front of each other. Finally, it is likely that the staff felt like their personal performance was being monitored in ways that were not anticipated when the interview guide was designed. In hindsight, performing the interviews in a location away from the program site or as one-on-one interviews might have been advantageous, providing a sense of freedom to discuss sensitive issues more openly.

The message here is something that applies to qualitative interviewing in general by emphasizing the need for thorough preparation when working with sensitive topics and questions. In this case, there was a successful anticipation of these issues with regard to both Asian American and Pacific Islander substance users and community informants, but a less successful match with the treatment program staff. In retrospect, one way to deal with this problem might have been to conduct at least one prior interview with a key informant, to facilitate an understanding of how these participants related to the sensitive topics in the study. Overall, although the dyadic format proved sufficient for the study, this case provides an example of the challenges to consider when narrowing the choice of interview method to use. The investigator should attempt to take into account the multiple layers and interacting dynamics within the research context.

Directions for Future Research

A notably consistent message among the lessons learned from these studies is the need to consider the selection of the participants for dyadic interviews. As noted earlier, we know a moderate amount about closely related dyads such as married couples, but by comparison we know very little about pairs of friends or acquaintances, and almost nothing about two-person interviews with strangers. One obvious topic is thus, When does it make sense to work with participants who are or are not acquainted? In focus groups, it has been traditional to work with groups of strangers, but it is also relatively easy to make accommodations for groups in which the participants are acquainted. Does this apply to dyadic interviews as well, and if so, what kinds of accommodations work best? At this point, we have no idea whether potentially problematic relationships could be accentuated or downplayed in dyadic interviews. In contrast, there are many reasons to believe that positive relationships can make a valuable contribution to interaction in dyadic interviews.

The creation of pairwise relationships in dyadic interviews also needs to be addressed in terms of ethical issues. In this regard, we suggest here that researchers approach dyadic interviews in the same manner as focus group interviews. For both of these types of interviews, neither confidentiality nor anonymity can be guaranteed (except possibly in the case of telephone or Internet

interviews), and participants need to be informed of this. In addition, researchers must work with their ethics review boards to consider the potential impact of issues related to power, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity when inviting specific pairs of people to enter into a research-based dialogue.

Another concern that was noted in each of the studies was the role the researcher can play in the pairing of participants. When the researcher has a degree of prior familiarity with the participants, then it is possible to make explicit choices about the best members for each dyad. When the participants do not know each other, then this raises questions about how easy it would be for them to find common ground for their conversation (Lehoux, Poland, & Daudelin, 2006; Moen, Antonov, Nilson, & Ring, 2010). Can the participants use their prior roles and experiences as a basis for reasonably comfortable interaction? If so, then it is likely that they can engage in the kind of conversation that is the basis for dyadic interviews.

A related issue on group composition is the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the participants. Obviously, participants need to share some relationship to the topic, but a different question is whether it is possible to have different relationships to the topic. This kind of mixing would be almost unheard of in traditional focus groups, in which there is a strong emphasis on bringing together participants who are relatively homogeneous with regard to the topic (Morgan, 1996). If dyadic interviews could work with either a homogenous or heterogeneous composition, this would be distinctly different from current practices with focus groups, and hence is well worth exploring.

A different topic is our need to understand more about the kinds of questions that work well in dyadic interviews. One option is to use classic interview formats that are already known to work well in both individual and group interviews. One example would be a combination of “grand tour” and “mini tour” questions (Spradley, 1979), which move from overviews of a situation to more in-depth descriptions of specific aspects of that situation. Another example would be funnel-format interviews that move from broad, participant-oriented questions to narrower, researcher-oriented questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2004).

Beyond these commonly used structures for interviews, we also need to discover any aspects of the interview setting that are especially favorable or unfavorable in dyadic interviews. This concern begins with the initial introduction to the interview, and the respective roles of the interviewer and the participants. Another issue of particular interest here is the classic goal of establishing rapport, because this applies to not only the relationship between the participants and the interviewer but also the

relationship between the two participants themselves. This suggests that it might be useful to have a first question that specifically addresses the participants’ need to get to know each other within the context of the research question. One general recommendation would be to get systematic debriefing feedback from the participants in dyadic interviews about their perception of the experience, as a source of guidance for future work.

One lesson learned from our empirical work is the advantage of using a combination of individual and dyadic interviews within the same study. This strategy has the distinct advantage of allowing for situations in which what was scheduled as a two-person interview becomes, of necessity, a one-to-one interview. Given the almost inevitable problem of “no shows” in dyadic interviews, this can be an especially efficient approach. Despite the logistical advantages of this design, it will only work when the interview questions operate in a similar fashion in both types of interview. The researcher thus needs to be prepared in advance with an equally effective one-to-one version of the interview schedule.

A major topic for future exploration is the analysis of dyadic interviews. Once again, there are parallels to focus groups, most notably in keeping track of which participant was speaking in each dyad. The goal here is to avoid mistaking one person’s persistent comments for a shared interest on the part of both participants. This issue of shared interest also applies to the full set of interviews. Did a topic show up in nearly every interview, and did both participants pay attention to it? If so, then the analysis should consider that topic to be an important issue from the participants’ point of view.

One specific analytic issue is opportunities that dyadic conversations offer for the examination of interaction. Although there has been considerable discussion of interaction in focus groups, much of this work has been inhibited by the complexity of discussions in focus groups (Duggleby, 2005; Morgan, 2010, 2012). Shifting down to the microgroups in dyadic interviews should simplify this issue. This is another case where issues that have been prominent within the focus group literature might be easier to address within the context of two-person interviews.

In addition, we would like to raise the possibility of working with three-person or triadic interviews. Although focus groups sometimes reach down to this minimal size, there is no literature on how to deal with these very small groups. From the current perspective, the question is whether triadic interviews function more like the conversations in dyadic interviews or the discussions in group interviews. This is not an easy issue to address, however, because we are not yet in a position to make systematic statements about how the dynamics of dyadic interviews differ from focus groups. First, this means that we do not

have a predetermined framework for considering the nature of interaction in three-person interviews. Conversely, it opens up opportunities for exploring the options that this potentially unique form of interviewing has to offer.

The last future direction we want to consider is the venue in which dyadic interviews are conducted. Two examples would be interviews on the Internet and by telephone. For the Internet, existing forms of focus groups often involve what are known as synchronous interviews, in which the participants are connected through instant messaging software or a chat room (Morgan & Lobe, 2011). The obvious difference in comparison to face-to-face interviews is that the participants can be located, quite literally, anywhere in the world. One limitation of this kind of computer-based, synchronous interviewing, however, is that it requires very small group sizes, because "turn taking" degenerates when multiple people are all typing messages simultaneously. Hence, two-person interviews are a natural format for synchronous online focus groups. Familiarity with the technology is another issue for Internet-based interviews, requiring both participants to be knowledgeable about the relevant software. In contrast, telephone interviews present fewer limitations and also offer the same advantage with regard to having the participants in different locations. Our group is already experimenting with telephone-based interviews and we believe this is an area with particular potential.

Conclusions

When are dyadic interviews most likely to be useful? Based on our experience, they offer opportunities when the researcher wants both social interaction and depth, when narrative is valued, and when interaction in larger groups might be problematic because research participants are geographically distant. Of course, this is a new method, so any criteria for when to use it will require more exploration and development. Still, at this early stage, we would note that dyadic interviews are valuable for providing a measure of the depth and detail available in individual interviews at the same time that they provide the interaction present in focus groups. In comparison to focus groups, we would also note that dyadic interviews provide several logistical advantages with regard to assembling pairs rather than groups of participants. Finally, we want to call attention to the difference between dyadic conversations and either individual accounts or group discussions; we believe this is an especially important area for future research.

Ultimately, any attempt at innovation requires a balance between what is truly new and what is already known. If a method offers little that is different, then there is not much reason to pay attention to it, but if it goes too

far beyond the boundaries of what is well understood, it might be too risky to attract enough use. In the case of dyadic interviews, the obvious link to existing practice is through focus groups, as a widely used form of "interactive interview." With regard to focus groups, dyadic interviews not only build on existing practice but also address existing weaknesses and offer new opportunities. Overall, we believe that both the practicality demonstrated by our existing work and the opportunities for future research combine to make dyadic interviews an exciting new option for qualitative research.

Acknowledgments

We thank our colleague, Susan Eliot, of Eliot and Associates, for her assistance throughout this project. Paula Carder also thanks Jenny Weinstein and Jacklyn Kohon for coordinating and conducting interviews.

Authors' Note

Portions of this article were presented at the 17th *Qualitative Health Research Conference*, October, 2011, in Vancouver, Canada.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Portions of this research were funded by a grant from the Northwest Health Foundation to Paula Carder, and by awards from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to Kim Hoffman.

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