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Towards the wholesome interview: Technical, social and political dimensions.

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Towards the wholesome interview: Technical, social and political dimensions.

Abstract: This chapter considers qualitative interviews in management research. It argues for what it describes as wholesome interviews that seeks consistency in the alignment of technical, social and political dimensions of interviews to promote positive outcomes for the interviewer, the interviewee and the research community. It defines and discusses the technical, social and political dimensions of interviews and it concludes by considering ways in which the concept of wholesome interviews may be used to consider situations when wholesome interviews cannot be pursued.

Keywords: Interviewing; qualitative research; technical, social and political dimensions of interviews; wholesome interviews.

1) Introduction

This chapter is about individual interviews, rather than either group or focus group interviews, that will have different characteristics and dynamics. Interviews of individuals have been taking place in different settings for different purposes for a number of centuries and across the social sciences for research purposes for over one hundred years (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012; Denzin, 2001; Herzog, 2005; Platt, 2001). Thus, most people would be aware that an interview often entails a verbal exchange that enables the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee to allow the interviewer to use that information to realise a given objective. Such is their commonplace nature some commentators have suggested that we now live in an interview society in which all are individuals that may use the technology of the interview to narrate the self (Silverman, 1997; see also: Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012, p 239; Denzin, 2001, p 28; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

Despite their popularity in being used in 90% of social science investigations (Denzin, 2001, p 23), there is very little agreement about many aspects of research interviews. The dominant positivist tradition has often conceived interviews as simple technical exercises that the interviewer uses in a neutral and apolitical way so as not to bias responses or contaminate the procedure when pursuing a higher good of value-free knowledge. As Gubrium and Holstein (2001, p 19) have said of this tradition:

> "Interviewers are generally expected to keep their "selves" out of the interview process. *Neutrality* is the byword. Ideally, the interviewer uses his or her interpersonal skills when meeting to encourage the expression of, but not to help construct, the attitudes, sentiments and information in question." (Italics in original.)

However, this perspective's implicit social (Dundon & Ryan, 2010; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Myers & Newman, 2007) and political assumptions (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016; Kezar, 2003; Kvale, 2006; 2007) have been challenged.

The contribution of this chapter is to synthesise these different challenges with considerations about the technical qualities to put forward an argument for wholesome interviews in which an interviewer acts honestly in aligning their input into the social political and technical dimensions of interviews. In doing this we tend towards a realist ontological position and an interpretivist epistemology. The former leads us towards believing that humans have an inner essence that is expressed in their values and we acknowledge the possibility of mutation, change and development *over time*, we reject the ease of fluidity, contradiction and multiplicity of character implied of researchers in some research perspectives. Our choice of an interpretivist epistemology is an acknowledgement that neither values nor meanings expressed by humans are universal and it is possible for different researchers to look at the

same phenomenon, adopt different interpretations of the same events and offer different explanations for the outcomes.

In putting forward our argument, we use the term wholesome for two reasons. Firstly, the concept of wholesome suggests pursuit of a balance of the different dimensions of an interview. Secondly, the idea of the wholesome interview assumes a desire to promote wellbeing for the interviewer, for the interviewee and for the research community. In considering the interviewer, recognition that each will have different identities – for example, as a parent, colleague, community participant and worker – in other spheres of his/her life is not to argue that people are completely fractionated with one part of a person's life having no impact on other parts. While sometimes roles of a person may conflict, individuals' inner essence demands some form of consistency across different dimensions of a life if that person is not to experience dissonance and the discomfort and anguish that it brings (see also, Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 12; Nadin & Cassell, 2006, pp 213-214). An interviewer's consistency across different spheres of his/her life is more likely to promote wellbeing in the interviewee. That is to say that consistent behaviour by the interviewer will preclude the interviewee having a sense of being misled if s/he find out that the interviewer espouses one set of beliefs in one sphere of his/her life, but subscribes to a completely different set of values in another sphere of his/her life. Expression of different beliefs during the interview to those that the interviewer holds may be interpreted as a form of covert research. Such actions could lead to the interviewer failing to understand points from the belief system of the interviewee while being restricted in his/her capability to question the interviewee when they do not understand because of their earlier misrepresentations, leading to poorer quality data. It could also damage other researchers' opportunities to enter into the field (Punch, 1994). In

putting forward these arguments for wholesome interviews, this chapter goes beyond others' suggestions that avoidance of harm to anyone is apt (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 23).

In promoting understanding of the technical, social and political dimensions that need to be synthesised in the course of an interview, we adopt the following definitions. We borrow from Jamous and Peliolle's (1970, p 112) discussion of knowledge bases of occupations to define the technical dimensions of interviews as the "'means' that can be mastered and communicated in the form of rules" to gather the information to realise a given research objective. In effect, some dimensions of interviewing have been codified and may be found in methodological text books. With any activity, there is a difference between knowing the codes and enacting what the codes suggest. Interviews inevitably involve some form of *interaction* between the researcher and the person from whom information is sought. It is a social activity in which both the interviewer and the interviewee gcan each choose from a range of actions during the interview, regardless of the preparation of the technical dimensions prior to the interview and it is these interactions that have to be executed that constitute what are defined here as the social dimensions of interviews. Interviews can never be seen as a wholly neutral activity (see also, Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 6). Both the conduct of the interview and its outcome will mark a change from a situation that would have existed if the interview had not taken place. Ways in which change may take place are in the relationships between the interviewer, the interviewee and others. The political dimensions of an interview represent the power relationships between the different parties involved in an interview and others and the ways in which these may be managed and transformed either in the course of the interview, or because the interview has taken place.

This chapter will proceed by discussing each of the technical, social and political dimensions of interviews in turn before making some concluding remarks. The way in which we have defined the technical, social and political dimensions may suggest that they are separate stages of an interview with the technical preceding the social and the social preceding the political. While acknowledging that the interview should be perceived as a process and each of the technical, social and political dimensions may appear to be more to the fore at different stages of the interview process, the different dimensions are used for analytical purposes only. As will be evident in the discussion, all dimensions may manifest at each stage in the process.

2) Technical dimensions of an interview

As indicated above, the technical dimensions of an interview are those aspects that may be codified. Such codification means that the technical dimensions are often discussed in research methods text books. The discussion will provide a brief overview of four issues that may be codified before introducing a fifth issue of making an interview wholesome.

(i) *Logic and order of the interview*

A common taxonomy divides interviews into structured, semi-structured and unstructured according to the extent to which the interviewer "structures" or directs the interview. Particular devices that help to attain structured or less structured interviews are closed-questions that predefine a limited range of responses that are permissible and open-ended questions that invite expansive answers. Different commentators (e.g., Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012, pp 248-9; Cassell, 2015; Harvey, 2011; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ng and Coakes, 2014) suggest ordering questions into different sections according to their relative

importance in seeking an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated and their contribution to managing the social dimensions of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Jacob and Furgerson (2012, pp 3-4) indicate that it is most useful to start with questions that the interviewee will find easy to answer, such as those designed to solicit information about the background of either the interviewee or the organization to which they belong, or his or her role in the organization. These questions do not only help to set the interviewee at ease – or to break the ice (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012, p 249) – but they can also generate relevant context information. As the interview proceeds, questions that are essential to the substantive phenomena under investigation may be asked with the most difficult and controversial questions being located in the middle of the interview. Towards the end of the interview, there are likely to be questions that fall outside of what the researcher has necessarily gleaned from their own prior experience and review of the literature. So it is not unusual for interviewers to invite comments on whether there is any issue relative to the phenomena being investigated that the interviewee believes should have been asked, but which was omitted, or whether there is anything else that the interviewee wishes to add (see also, Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012, p 250).

(ii) *The ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher*

There are a range of taxonomies used by different authors (for examples, see Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Cassell, 2005, pp 168-170) to articulate how people with different ontological and epistemological assumptions perceive and conduct interviews. The ontological assumptions of how the interviewer understands the world of which they are part may be interpreted simply by considering a single axis that ranges between realism whereby a researcher views the world as a separate external reality to him/her and the interviewee and constructivism where the researcher perceives a phenomenon existing only in the interaction

between the interviewer and the interviewee, or between the interviewee and others with whom they interact. Epistemological assumptions of the relationship between investigators and the phenomenon that they study may be interpreted simply along a single axis between positivism which assumes that a possibility of perceiving and measuring external phenomena in an objective way free of any bias and interpretivist stances that seek to understand the meanings that may be given to a phenomenon from the subjectivity of the participants.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions will affect what the researcher will see as important phenomena, the types of questions asked about a particular phenomenon and the ways in which each question might be constructed to derive particular forms of information. Researchers towards the realist end of the ontological dimension, regardless of whether they are positivists or interpretivists, will view the interview as a technique that will access a comment – albeit one of a potential range from an interpretivist epistemology (e.g., Denzin 2001, p 30) – on the external world. Researchers from a constructivist position will view interviews as a situated account in which interviewees either draw on "cultural resources to yield morally adequate justifications" (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012, p 243) or they will view each interview as producing a reality (Kezar, 2003; Limerick *et al*, 1996).

(iii) *Research design*

Research design embraces the type of interview that the interviewer believes will enable him or her to address that research question which in turn will affect the subsequent method of analysis and the choice of whom to interview. Structured interviews are highly similar to questionnaires and are ignored here. Cassell (2015) has provided a recent disaggregation of semi-structured interviews into the following:

- Exploratory interviews that focuses on an emergent issue from a range of different perspectives;
- Theoretical interviews where existing theories around a topic help to structure the research objective and the types of questions that are asked;
- Event-based interviews which involves asking the interviewee to focus on the importance of a particular event to explain a phenomenon;
- Comparative interviews that seek to understand the models that interviewees utilise when interpreting the relationship between different phenomena or the varying courses of a phenomenon in different circumstances;
- Narrative interviews that encourage interviewees to tell stories about their own experiences of organizational phenomena as a means to understanding how those interviewees make sense of their experiences;
- Biographical interviews which seek understanding of an interviewee's experiences by locating those experiences within a chronology of that interviewee's life history; and
- Visual technique interviews which involve using pictures of different types as foci for interviewees to discuss their opinions and emotions surrounding what is portrayed.

Cassell describes unstructured interviews as phenomenological interviews which entail telling an interviewee about the topic of the research and simply inviting him or her to tell his or her story around that topic.

When choosing participants for an interview study, Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012, p 247) suggest that there are two loose principles, namely representativeness and quality. Put simply, the aim will be to interview either; a cross-section of people that will give a diversity of opinions on the phenomenon, or those who can provide the most insightful, informed or relevant view or example of the phenomenon under investigation. How the data is analysed

and/ or presented will vary in part by the type of interview and in part by the type of account that the researcher wishes to provide. In some instances, such as in theoretical interviews when there is a desire to explore the prospective outcome of a policy change, the phenomena or the impact of the change may be taken as the unit of analysis and a form of thematic analysis may be utilised. If biographical interviews have been used to explore the impact of a change on particular groups, the unit of analysis may be the individual and a story-telling form of analysis may be used.

(iv) *The substantive area or discipline*

An interview project will require a research question that has been at least partially influenced by reading sections of the literature in the discipline, although it might also be motivated by an issue of importance to the researcher for personal reasons. The research question will help to define the overall objectives of the interview. Other issues informed by the literature or insights derived from the researcher's experience will provide further ideas for expansion of the interview's focus around the relationship between the phenomenon in which the interviewer is interested and other phenomena as well as the choice of people to interview. One of the strengths of qualitative research is that unexpected issues often emerge in the course of the research and it is important that the researcher is flexible and sensitive to the need to adapt the design of the content as issues are revealed by the interviewees.

(v) *Considering how to make the interviews wholesome*

The technical aspects of interviewing may have been treated here as analytically separable, but they have social and political dimensions. For example, the ordering of questions can help to manage the interviewer's social relationship with research participants. The ontological assumptions will affect whether the researcher sees the possibility of external

structures that could be oppressive while epistemological assumptions about the possibility or otherwise of making value-free judgements will inform a researcher's view of what his/her responsibilities are if oppressive structures are observed. There are similar political dimensions when designing the research in deciding how to represent opinions of different parties to the research and in choosing the research area and the research questions to ask to facilitate the expression of a voice of particular groups. In this regard, this last sub-section could have been put at the start of the discussion as it essential that a researcher asks him or herself a number of essentially political and social questions before embarking on a research study if s/he wishes to achieve a wholesome interview. These questions include: Do you believe that a group affected by your studies suffer a disadvantage vis-à-vis others? What might be the source of that disadvantage? How might you help to overcome that disadvantage? Do you want help that group? On a social level, the questions that might be asked before embarking on a project include: Do you belong to the same community? If not, can you gain access to that community? Will you like the people in that community sufficiently to interact with them? How will you manage interaction with them and what are the issues to consider when managing that interaction? It is to the social dimensions of interviews that this chapter now turns.

3) Social dimensions of an interview

As indicated above, a research interview involves an interaction between a minimum of two people who may not know each other. The types of interaction will be different according to the approach to interviewing that is assumed, which may in turn be influenced by factors such as the ontological assumptions of the researcher – i.e., whether he or she views him or herself as co-constructing knowledge with their research participants – the interviewer and

interviewee's relative knowledge of the topic and their assumed role in the interview. Different authors (e.g., Duff, 2002; Granott, 1993) offer classifications of different orders and objectives in interview situations. These may include simple questioning of one party by another to allow individual construction of understanding, or forms of collaboration to operationalize each other's different spheres of knowledge to realise a joint objectives as in action research where researchers may work with practitioners to realise a given objective (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Regardless of its exact form, the interactions make interviews, by definition, a social activity. Even though the researcher may have prepared an interview schedule of questions based on the technical knowledge and converted that schedule into an interview protocol (see, for example, Jacob and Furgerson, 2012) with reminders about providing explanations of the objectives of a project and the conduct of other tasks such as securing consent from the interviewee, etc., the interview still needs to be executed. There is, however, a difference between knowing what to do and the codes to follow for doing something and being able to turn the ideas and codes into action. Doing requires the exercise of a form of knowing that Polanyi (1962) describes as tacit as not everything can be expressed explicitly for pre-codification. Even implementation of codes will involve competencies and adeptness that are assumed and implicit rather than explicit. It is not surprising that some authors describe doing the interview as an accomplishment (Myers & Newman, 2007, p 5) or performance (Denzin, 2001).

The idea of a performance is also manifest in dramaturgical analyses of interview situations (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, pp 15-17; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p 38; Hermanns, 2004; Myers & Newman, 2007). To a lesser (e.g., Hermanns, 2004) or greater (e.g., Myers &

Newman, 2007) degree of explication, those who adopt this approach draw on Goffman's dramaturgical sociology. Goffman drew a comparison between routine social phenomena and theatrical performance. To follow the detailed description provided by Myers and Newman (2007, p 11), the interview is the performance of a drama at the front of the stage – although over time, interviewers may be allowed to the interviewee's backstage area (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016) – according to a script composed by one of the actors, namely the researcher, as both the interviewer and the interviewee play out their respective roles. The merits of this approach does highlight that the interviewer role is different to other roles that the same person may hold in other parts of his/her life. There are, however, a number of problems with this form of analysis. The first one is that while there may be expectations of the role that interviewers and interviewees may play, only one of them has a script, so the analogy is not wholly applicable as the role of the interviewer is not simply to act out a part, but also to direct the other party. More significantly – and is acknowledged by some (Myers & Newman, 2007) – the idea of the interviewer playing out a role could encourage feigning or acting out human qualities such as interest in what the interviewee is saying, naivety when wanting the interviewee to provide an explanation of a situation or empathy with the dilemmas that face the interviewee. The contention here is that while the interviewer may have to adopt a persona that is suitable for spending an extensive time in the company of someone whom s/he has never met, or only met on one or two occasions – and which is different from the way in which s/he may act most of the time – the central essence of the interviewer's character is likely to remain unchanged, even if the interviewer's knowledge and understanding is enhanced. In other words, in a wholesome interview, the selection of a topic that is of genuine interest to the interviewer and which promotes affinity and sympathy with the research participants is paramount and is more likely to promote rapport with research participants than feigning sympathy and empathy.

Closely aligned with dramaturgical approaches to the social interaction involved in an interview is an emergent literature on rapport (Dundon & Ryan, 2010; Garbarski, Schaeffer & Dykema, 2016; see also Harvey, 2011; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Garbaski *et al* (2016, p 5) provide three definitions of rapport as a sense of affinity, expression of non-verbal and verbal behaviours, or co-ordination and synchronization in interaction. Both Dundon and Ryan (2010) and Garbarski *et al* propose ways in which rapport may be constructed to facilitate better information gathering, although Dundon and Ryan also warn of a danger of over-rapport which could lead to collection of non-research related tales or information that the interviewee thinks that the interviewer wishes to hear. If, however, the core of rapport is seen as a shared sense of affinity so the expression of behaviours and the liking for forms of co-ordination in interaction is simply a product of that affinity, there is a problem with the argument that both Dundon and Ryan and Garbarski *et al* put forward. That is, rapport is based on mutuality and cannot be generated by one party. Ironically, Dundon and Ryan's paper illustrates that the foundations of mutual affinity precedes the social interaction in the interview and stems from shared interests, political affiliations, mutual acquaintances and senses of humour. Thus, a wholesome approach to interviewing encourages interviewers to pick a research question which itself generates affinity between themselves and their research participants.

For this reason, one of the authors – Bill – has often expressed affinity with particular parties that have an interest in the phenomenon that is being researched prior to the interview taking place. For example, in the work that Bill has conducted with Catherine Cassell (e.g., Lee & Cassell, 2008; 2011; Cassell & Lee, 2009; 2012) around trade union learning representatives, it was not unusual for the interviewers to explain to the many respondents who were union

learning representatives (ULRs) that the interviewers were sympathetic to the introduction of ULRs. In this context, preparation of initial reports from an early part of that programme of research and a subsequent publication of a report by *TUC Unionlearn* (Lee & Cassell, 2009) that could be given to the respondents also provided a means of adding to trust so that a shared affinity could be established at the start of the interviews.

When conducting interviews, there is a range of factors to consider that could impact on the quality of the social relationship. One of these is the medium through which the interview will take place. In addition to the face-to-face interactions – that have been assumed here – interviews may take place over the telephone (Harvey, 2011, 435-6), electronically through such mechanisms as e-mails, internet forums, discussion groups and chatrooms (Morgan & Symon, 2004) and through Skype. The social relationship between the researcher and the interviewee will be different when these media are used. For example, Morgan and Symon (2004, p 28) describe the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee as disembodied and de-contextualised when electronic means are used. The medium for the interview and the social relationship that follows may affect the quality of the information that is shared. For example, Harvey (2011, p 439) suggests that the absence of full social interactions in telephone interviews can have a detrimental effect on the confidence of the interviewee that the information will be kept confidential (c.f., Cachia & Millward, 2011). By contrast, there may be many advantages and positive effects including enhanced responses around difficult topics and protection afforded to vulnerable groups by the anonymity that may be realised through electronic methods (Morgan and Symon, 2004, p 24; Willis, 2012). The use of media such as Skype has the benefit of permitting interviews to be conducted even when there are great distances between the interviewer and the interviewee, but it can affect the quality of the social relationship. Hence, we would suggest that in most

circumstances, it is easiest to establish and demonstrate the shared affinity essential to a wholesome interview when the first contact is face-to-face.

A final consideration around the social dimensions of an interview is where it takes place. There is not a special time and space for interviews as they are rarely a routine part of interviewees' normal days. So interviews often take place in a space that has been designed for other purposes. As Herzog (2005, p 35) indicates, this will involve the interviewer crossing boundaries into other domains of the interviewee's life where work or domestic life commitments, will regulate the interviewee's behaviour. While this may provide insights into other parts of an interviewee's life, the location of the interview could result in disruptions that affect the quality of the information that is collected. We have always found disruptions and entering unexpected social interactions with others to be useful. For example, in the research into ULRs described above, Bill was often sat in an office, interviewing a trade union learning convenor, when a ULR or a learner would enter the learning convenor's office. The interruption would provide an opportunity both to observe the operation of the scheme and to have an informal discussion with that other person about the ULR project. Of course, there are times when the interruptions may not facilitate learning more about a project. In one interview, an interviewee had to receive a phone call about his wife who was in hospital. The interruption obviously involved a break in the interviewee's train of thought and he requested that he be reminded what he had been talking about. Having the genuine interest in the topic that is necessary for wholesome interviews can help the interviewer recount where the discussion had reached.

As we have indicated above, while the social dimensions may be analytically separable from the technical and political dimensions, they overlap in practice. There are, for example,

political dimensions to the choice of where to conduct the interview. Interviewees' being able to choose the location helps to equalize relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is to the dimensions of an interview that are most significantly political that we now turn.

4) Political dimensions of an interview

As indicated above, there are inevitably political dimensions to interviews because interviewees and interviewers are involved in relationships with one another and with others who might be affected by the research. In considering political dimensions, this chapter is informed by Gramsci's (1971) ideas that academics do not form a separate and self-contained group of intellectuals, but those who espouse ideas of any description are intellectuals that are aligned with one or more groups in society. The nature of that alignment is based on whether the ideas that are articulated serve to protect a society which benefits some groups rather than others, or whether the ideas articulated seeks to change that society to move away from unjust inequality. Three dimensions of political relationships of interviews will be considered here. The first is the interpersonal relationship and a requirement for the interviewer not to be exploitative of the interviewee in the interview situation. The second is whether the interview situation may be transformative *per se*. The third is the interventions that the interviewer may make to help bring about change that is beneficial or disadvantageous to the interviewees.

In considering the first issue, interviews have been described as a "gift" or "privilege" (Denzin, 2001, p 24; Limerick, Burgess-Limerick & Grace, 1996). These are useful metaphors because they highlight that the interviewee is giving something to the interviewer.

In many cultures, there is the expectation of some form of reciprocation in research, even if it is just sharing of personal details (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 9; Walker, Eketone & Gibbs, 2006). Such expectations should be contrasted with concerns that interviews are essentially asymmetrical in the power relationship which gives rise to patterns of exploitation (Gubrium & Hostein, 2001; Kvale, 2006; Limerick, Burgess-Limerick & Grace, 1996; Tanggaard, 2007). The interviewer sets the agenda, controls the exchange between the parties and decides on how knowledge produced by the interview may be presented. The interviewer may also be the person who receives the most immediate gratification from the interview exchange. As Kvale (2007, pp 55–56) argues, although interviewees may sometimes find the opportunity to discuss their lives enriching, an alternative feeling is one where the interviewee "has given much information about his or her life and may not have received anything in return". The interviewee is also reliant on the researcher to act with a proper duty of care with that information (Gattrell, 2009). Similarly, the researcher, rather than the interviewee, obtains the longer-term benefits of the interview. Except in some types of action research (e.g., Rod, 2011), interviewees may gain little from the research, but published outputs from the research project may benefit the researcher's academic career. Issues surrounding the disparate power relationship in the interview situation are accentuated when deception on the part of the researcher is involved. Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016, pp 17-21) suggest that deception and non-deception are not binary categories, but fall along continua which they break into three. Firstly, there is impression management where props such as the provision of potted histories to gain gatekeepers' approval side and the choice of special clothing may serve to deceive. Secondly, there is the extent to which the goals of the research and the particular groups' interests that those goals serve are revealed or withheld. Thirdly, there is the extent to which the accounts produced of the research are fully "truthful" when they are based on selection and exclusion of some of the information collected.

As it is the interviewer who constructs the unequal relationships, some authors suggest redress of the disparate power relationships through a range of mechanisms. For example, Limerick *et al* (1996) suggest ways of shifting power away from the interviewer to the interviewee including: negotiating over the interview schedule; allowing the interviewee to choose the time, setting and method of recording and whether to terminate the interview; the provision of transcripts and articles for reading and commenting before publication; and generally being accessible after the interview. Such analysis is accompanied by advice about being prepared to be challenged throughout the interview process and adoption of modes of behaviour to reduce social differences. An alternative suggestion around addressing disparate power relationships in the interview situation is provided by Ben-Ari and Enosh (2012) who argue for indirect reciprocation. Ben-Ari and Enosh (2012) suggest that the efforts made by interviewers to equalize power relationships between themselves and interviewees are relatively superficial and the disparate relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is not only inevitable but can also be helpful in generating curiosity about the other as a prelude to seeking understanding. Rather than focusing simply on the dyadic relationship between the interviewer and interviewee with the aim of seeking direct reciprocation between the two, Ben-Ari and Enosh argue that it is necessary to set that relationship in the context of a common goal. This effectively creates a third party and triadic relationships involving the third party and the interviewer and interviewee. It is then possible to acknowledge that reciprocation will not be realised through the direct relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, but will instead be derived indirectly via the third party within the triad.

Ben-Ari and Enosh's account suggests that the third point in the triad is a collective interest when what has been argued above is that many projects may support some groups at the expense of others and assumptions of indirect reciprocation are not sufficient in wholesome interviews. While the idea of wholesome interviews that is proposed here supports the principles of seeking to construct interviews in ways that are not oppressive or exploitative, it rejects the idea that researchers may be involved in deception when they have not revealed everything that they know about their project to everyone that they come into contact with. Pursuing a wholesome interview would involve having no intent to deliberately mislead people. Actions such as adopting a particular type of attire when conducting research interviews are often intended as akin to respecting the traditions of a community that one is visiting which could facilitate the interviewees taking the research more seriously. Omission of part of the explanation of the research often arises because qualitative researchers do not know all that they hope to reveal (Collins, 2008). Not including all of the evidence collected in written reports is inevitable because of the pure volume of qualitative research, but as long as there is not deliberate omission of pertinent data with an intention to mislead the reader and there has been an equal chance for all data to be included by reference to the terms of analysis appropriate for the objectives and documented methods of the paper, deception is unlikely to be a product of wholesome interviews.

There are, however, two other comments of importance here about the perceived nature of unequal relationship in interviews. The first is that the arguments above tend to focus on the interviewer-interviewee relationship and ignore the power relationship between the interviewee and wider society. This issue will be discussed later. The second is that the arguments tend to ignore situations where the interviewee is in a more powerful position than the interviewer. This is often the case with business and management research where

interviewees are head of multinational corporations or partners in large accountancy or law firms, etc. and have considerable resources at their disposal to mobilise should they not like the research that is being conducted. More generally, there has been the development of a body of literature on interviewing elites (Harvey, 2011; Kezar, 2003; McDowell, 1998). These works tend to define elites by their qualities and position. Some of this work highlights that elite interviewees are less likely to accept the authority of the interviewee, but instead use their knowledge, both to prepare for the interview and to challenge the interviewer and seek control of the interview (Harvey, 2011, p 439). Others suggest that the interview is a tool for liberation. For example, Kezar (2003) argues that transformational elite interviews that will allow the interviewer to understand that interviewees may actually feel disempowered and also facilitate the interviewee reflecting on the prospective impact of their actions from different perspectives and whether they wish to be the type of person that perpetrates such an impact. Whilst acknowledging that elite interviewees may challenge interviewers, especially when those interviewees perceive objections to their powerful position in the research, there must be serious doubts about the value of Kezar's arguments. Not only does her approach misunderstand the nature of structural power – which will be discussed further below – that is often reproduced through mechanisms that are too diffuse for any one individual to exercise any significant control in bringing about change, but it affords the interviewer with a status of a greater agent for change than the combined strength of oppressed groups and their allies that may mobilise against those mechanisms on a broad front.

It is now appropriate to address the relationships between the interviewees and other groups in society and the interventions that an interviewer may make to benefit one group or another. As indicated above, societies may be structured in ways that benefit some groups at the

expense of others. In such a context, research projects can either challenge those relationships, or they can accept them. Neither is neutral, as each supports one party or another. While some academics who criticise the current order simply write up their research for academic audiences, this does not mean that an interviewer's responsibilities to interviewees end with the interview. There are a number of ways in which interviewers may challenge how the world is constituted as a consequence of the research that they have conducted. In the research into ULRs, discussed above, that Bill conducted with Catherine Cassell, ULRs provide a challenge to traditional ways in which learning opportunities have been distributed within corporations because they seek to provide opportunities to develop through their workplace to people who had previously been denied such opportunities. The ULR initiative was, thus, clearly designed to benefit those who previously had limited learning opportunities at work. In the course of this project, Bill and Cathy made a number of interventions to support the ULR initiative. These included: Reporting back to the participants; Speaking at an event organized by the TUC to which numerous trade union officials had been invited to share expertise with them; Writing a report in non-academic language, using many quotes of ULRs, to help popularise the scheme; Advising individual trade unions on the merits of the scheme; Providing different trade unionists with examples of learning agreements that had been negotiated in support of ULRs at different organizations so that they could formulate their own; Writing references in support of funding of individual ULR initiatives for their proponents, and; Providing written accounts of the UK scheme to proponents of comparable schemes in other countries.

Another project that both Usman and Bill are involved in currently addresses the political inequalities that exist between academics in different countries. After the Second World War, the English language was established as *lingua franca* for business, cultural and

academic endeavours. This was aided by national English publishers, especially of textbooks and handbooks, gaining new markets so Anglo-American authors gained influence beyond their national audiences and became international (Gobo, 2011). This resulted in ethnocentric knowledge about research methods that had been local to a Western context becoming perceived as universally appropriate and suitable for research elsewhere (Gobo, 2011). Consequently, the default assumption of English, as a universal language, was instrumental in the increasingly widespread adoption of particular methods developed in the West and the preclusion of the development of alternative indigenous research approaches. As Gobo (2011, p 419) argues, accounts of research methods mainly written by American experts have been "tacitly described, proposed, and publicized as context-free knowledge, as useful and appropriate tools for studying every culture". In response, there have been calls for the development of "glocalistic" methods that can fuse sensitivity to local conditions with the generation of knowledge that may have broader or global applicability (Gobo, 2011; Lee, 2015), in part to overcome disadvantages suffered by academics that do not have English as their first language and to generate knowledge that is of most use to those outside of countries where English is used predominantly. We are currently engaged in an interview study that seeks to understand the ways in which Western assumptions around epistemology, ontology, theory and method affect the course of projects conducted elsewhere in the world. Our intention is to prevent such factors becoming the means of exercising a form of intellectual imperialism. One of the interventions that we are committed to making is the preparation of teaching materials that will enable the development of glocalistic research strategies for people who conduct research in one country but who address audiences in another.

The two projects discussed here may not be considered too much of a challenge to the most powerful groups in society. There are occasions when interviewers may generate evidence

and arguments that those with existing power object to sufficiently to deploy resources to obstruct the research or to prevent its publication and use. This makes it essential that new researchers ensure that they observe the spirit of the ethical code of their own institution when carrying out research and keep records of how they observed ethical guidance so that they retain the support of their institution should their research lead to interventions by powerful opponents. In projects involving wholesome interviews, it is equally important for more experienced researchers to be clear when their research is designed to challenge prevailing political relationships and to be prepared to be transparent about the intended consequences.

5) Concluding summary and discussion

In this chapter, we have argued for wholesome interviews that pursue alignment of technical, social and political considerations to promote positive outcomes for researchers, interviewees and the research community more generally. Our intention has not been to suggest that research participants do not have their own interests which may sometimes conflict with those of the researcher (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 2), but instead to suggest the means by which researchers may start from a position where those conflicts are most likely to be minimised and from which researchers may extricate themselves most easily when such conflicts arise and the researchers feel compromised.

Throughout this chapter, we have treated the technical, social and political dimensions as analytically separable but integral to one another in practice. For example, the choice of research questions is a political decision that will affect both the technical issue of which literature to review and the social question of which populations to interact with. Our

definitions suggest that different qualities are necessary to realise competence in the respective dimensions of the technical, social and political. Competence in the technical dimension may be addressed by knowing the codes sufficiently well to design a well-executed research study. Expertise in the social dimension may be developed by selecting populations to research with whom the researcher has a prior affinity, anticipating issues and situations that may arise and rehearsing how to deal with those situations, although not in ways designed to mislead the interviewees. Execution of the political dimension will involve understanding of one's own values and reflection on the extent to which one is prepared to accept the prevailing order, the changes that one wishes to see and having the courage to carry that forward when designing and conducting research projects.

A criticism that may be made of this chapter is that it may lead researchers to preclude studies of some agencies and areas that they disagree with (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p 5). Obviously, this is a drawback, but what must be assessed is whether the information that could be collected by studying a site in a covert or less than wholesome way outweighs the costs and is better than having no information at all. Of course, not all researchers will have the same values and attach the same meanings to a single phenomenon. Thus, some information may be available from research conducted by others who do not share a particular researcher's values.

In conclusion, this chapter has gone beyond simple classifications of interviews that focus purely on the technical types – see 2(iii) above – to provide an understanding of the alignment of the technical, social and political dimensions to achieve wholesome interviews. There may be occasions when it is not possible to achieve the alignment between the different dimensions of interviews that are advocated here. Exploration of the extent to which

different interviews vary from the wholesome interviews along the dimensions identified will enable understanding of the suitability of alternatives to wholesome interviews for different situations that may face researchers when they design interview projects.

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