

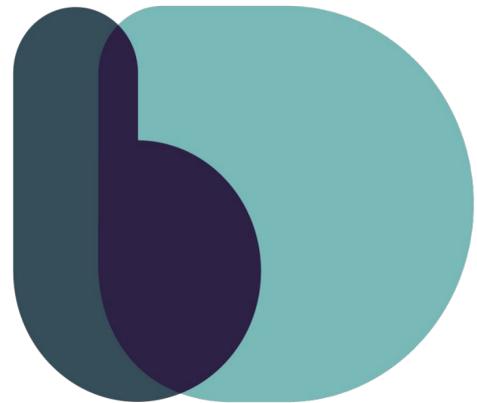
BeDo

Compassionate Interviewing for Qualitative Research

Day 1/2

WELCOME

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING



BeDo | BE WELL,
DO GOOD.



OBJECTIVES

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

1. Cultivate an embodied understanding of compassion in relationship to oneself and others.
2. Explore practical frameworks for field site application.
3. Exchange experiences and ideas with colleagues through practice and discussion.



OVERVIEW

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

I. What is compassion?

II. Common humanity

III. Interview anatomy

IV. Asking sensitive questions

V. Responding to distress

VI. Internal resources and self-advocacy

→ Mock interviews

DAY 1 - 4:00-7:00PM

Introductions + ice breaker (15 min)

I. What is compassion? (45 min)

II. Common Humanity (30 min)

Break (20 min)

I. Interview anatomy (15 min)

II. Asking sensitive questions (30 min)

Closing reflections (15 min)



Improv exercise (10 min)



What is Compassion?



...the feeling that arises in witnessing another's suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help.”
(Goetz et al, 2010: 352)

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

compati: to suffer together

Distinct from...

- Sympathy (Escalas & Stern, 2003)
- Empathy (Ricard, 2021; Batson et al, 1987)
- Altruism

What is suffering?

Any moment in which our experiences is *other* than we would like it to be.

→ Aversion

What we resist persists

- Clean pain versus dirty pain (Menakem, 2017)
- Pain x resistance = suffering (Brach, 2019)

We are wired to avoid suffering

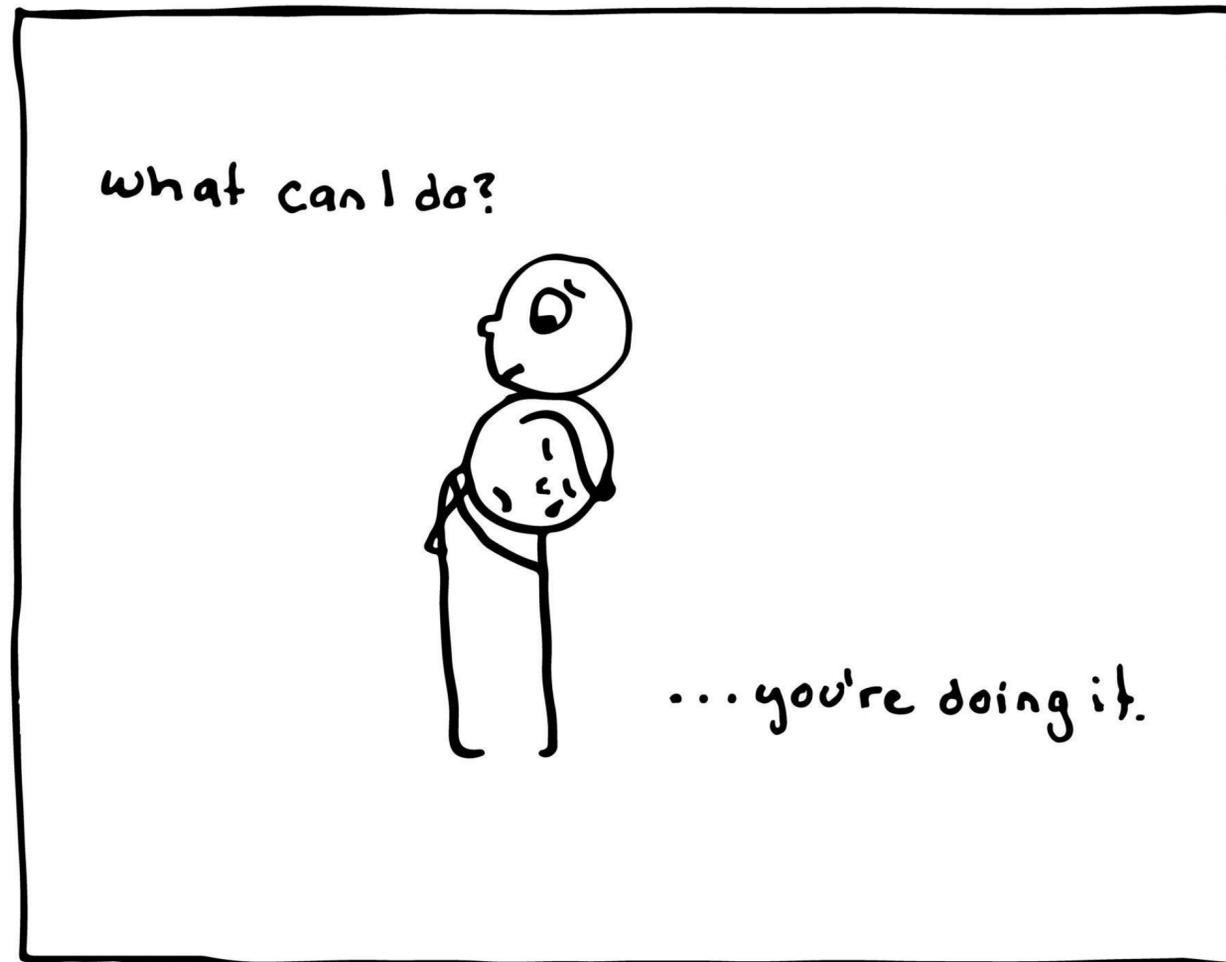
- Suppression, denial
- Minimization
- Numbing, addiction
- Problem-solving too soon

The conscious turn *towards* suffering is the first and most important step on the pathway to compassion. It also requires the most courage.

What is action?

Can be big or small, tangible or intangible

Intention matters!



dharmaComics©

Image: Dharma Comics, 2021

The imperative

Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual benefits

- Increases positive emotion, lessens depression (Fredrickson et al, 2008)
- Increases social connectedness (Hutcherson et al, 2008)
- Healthier aging (Alda et al, 2016)
- Contentment and life satisfaction (Brito-Pons et al, 2018)
- Reduced likelihood of chronic illness (McWilliams & Bailey, 2010)

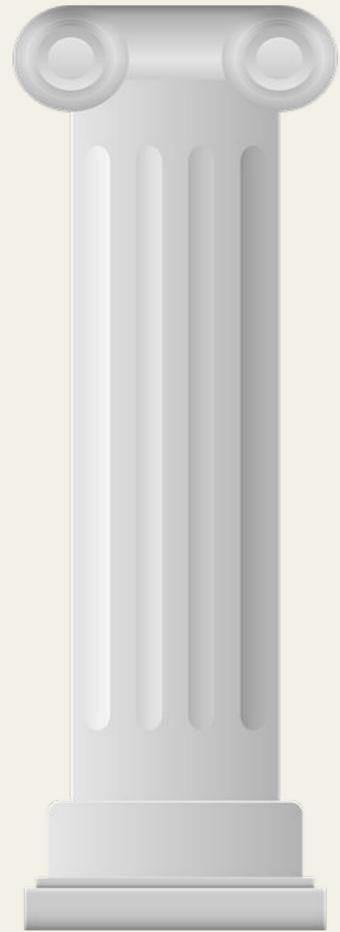
Paradigm shift

- Towards an *ethos of compassion*

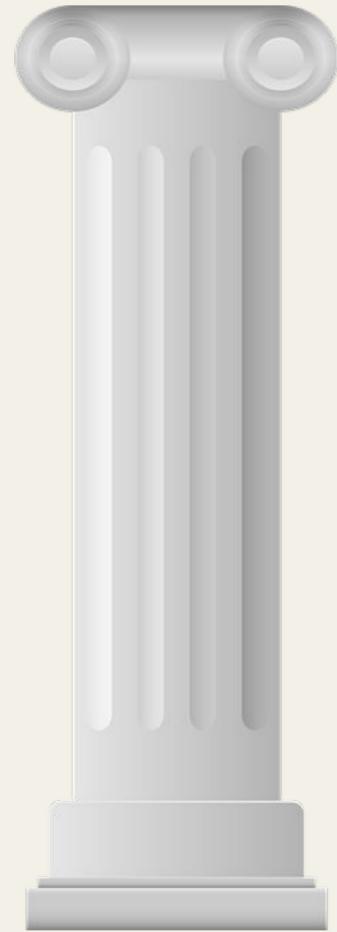


Image: Alberto Ruggieri, Getty Images

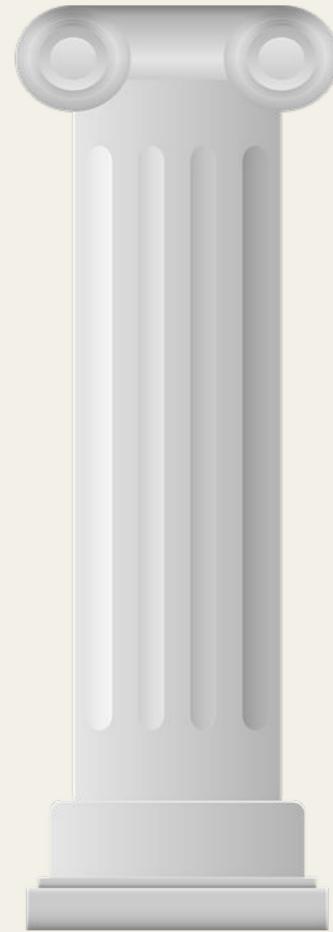
The Five Pillars of Compassion



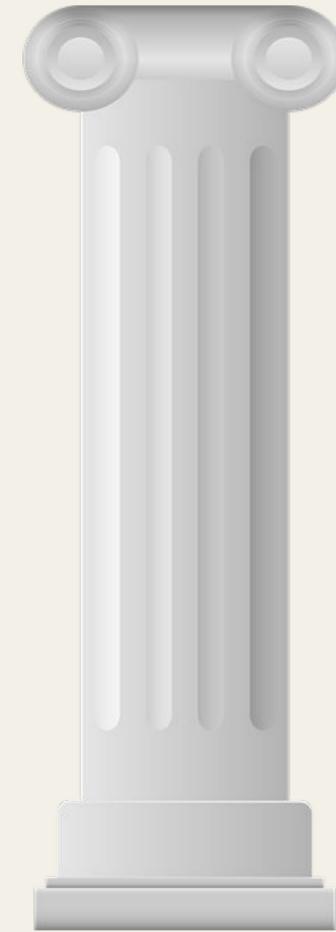
Awareness



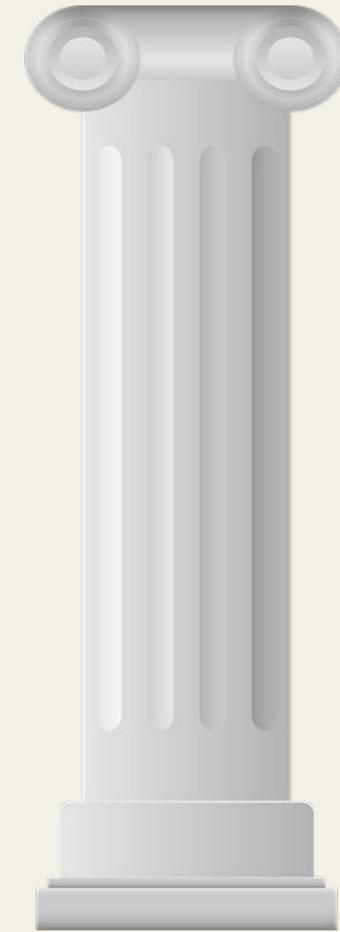
Humility



Embodiment



Common
Humanity



Action



Recognizing
suffering



Feeling
motivated to
alleviate that
suffering



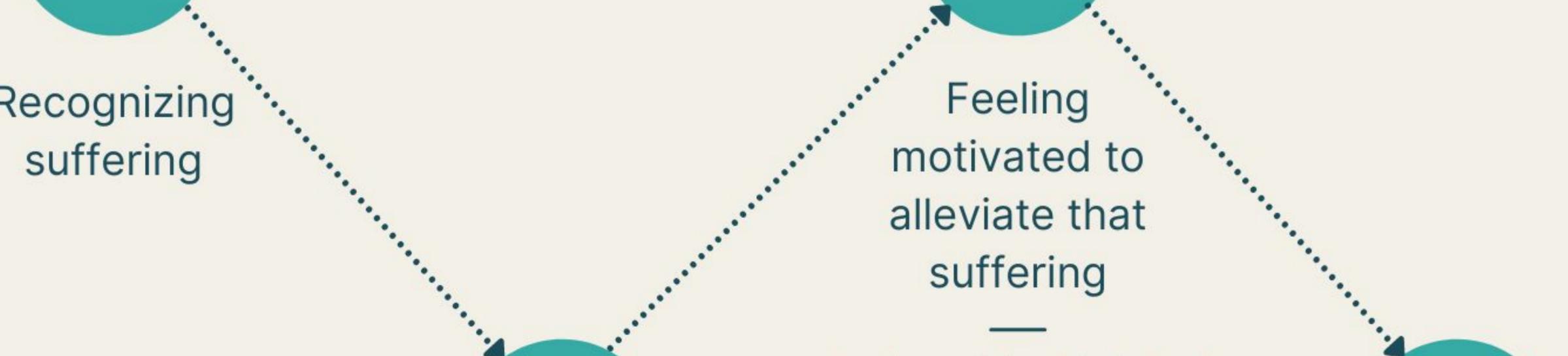
Interpreting feelings about
that suffering

—
Is the person is deserving of compassion?
Does helping them come at a cost?



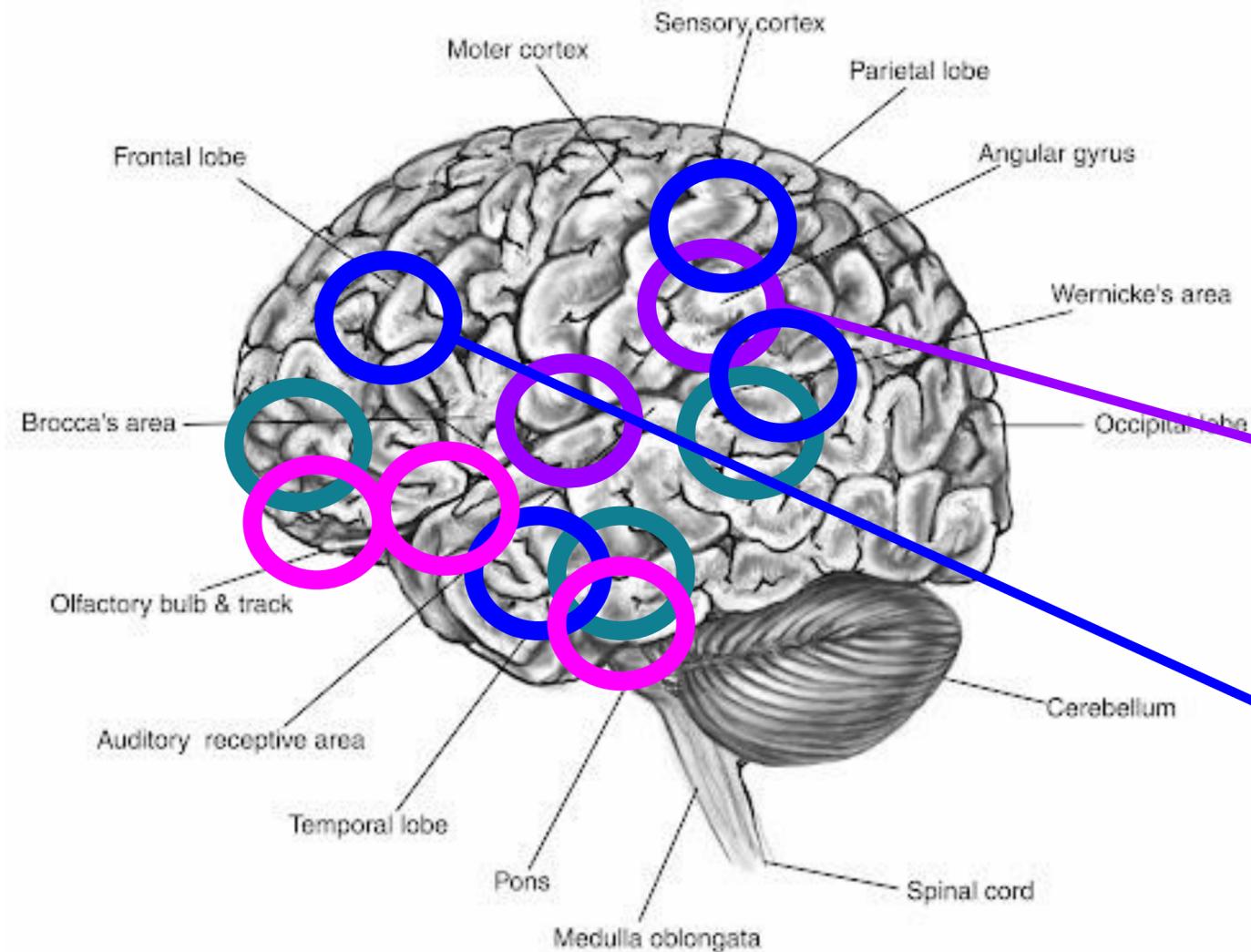
Acting in some way to
alleviate that suffering

—
Am I capable of helping?



The neuroscience

1. **Assessment by amygdala + mirror neurons**
2. **Affective simulation (empathy)**
3. **Cognitive reappraisal and decision to act**
4. **Reward and positive affect**



Right supramarginal gyrus

- Responsible for egocentrism... as well as empathy (Silani et al, 2013)
- Reduced function when under stress

Prefrontal cortex

- Attention, impulse control, memory organization, emotional regulation

Image: Brian Injury Resource Centre, 1998



Practices that cultivate radical compassion are actually practices of undoing our resistance to contacting vulnerability.

TARA BRACH

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Why do we care?

Emotionally-demanding research

- Minimization is a slippery slope
- Compartmentalization (Thomas et al, 2013)
 - Useful in times of stress but not an effective life strategy (Showers, 2002)

Turning towards our emotional experience

- Antidote to burnout
- Deepens inquiry

Towards more inclusive and culturally-responsive definitions

- Critiques of individualism (Torre et al, 2019)





Written reflection (5 min)

1. What did you notice in the physical body?
2. Where/when did you experience resistance, if at all?
3. Was this bodily experience familiar? Have you experienced it elsewhere?



Common Humanity



“

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

LILLA WATSON

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Suffering together

Fantasy of separateness

- Fetishization of suffering in disciplines like anthropology (Robbins, 2013)
- Obscuring our own complicity (McGregor, 2013)
- Hardship narratives and trial by fire mentality

“Your pain is my pain too” (Johnson, 2021)

- We cannot truly honor the suffering of another until we internally validate our own

Auto-reflexivity (Heinze, 2020)

- Understanding and documenting the researcher experience

Subjectivity + objectivity

Objectivity and objectification

Stereotype content model (Fiske, 2018)

- Warmth + competence
- In-group versus out-group

Contemptuous 'outcasts' (Fiske, 2009)

- Deactivated medial pre-frontal cortex (mPFC)
- Dehumanization

Rehumanization and rewiring

- Individuation reactivates the mPFC
- What's your favorite vegetable?



		Competence	
		Low	High
Warmth	High	Paternalistic stereotype low status, not competitive (e.g., housewives, elderly people, disabled people)	Admiration high status, not competitive (e.g., ingroup, close allies)
	Low	Contemptuous stereotype low status, competitive (e.g., welfare recipients, poor people)	Envious stereotype high status, competitive (e.g., Asians, Jews, rich people, feminists)

Image: Fiske, 2002



A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle... Sent out in the not-always-greatly-hopeful belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps.

PAUL CELAN

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Towards reciprocity

Emancipatory research (Lynch, 2000)

- Born out of the disability movement (Oliver, 1997)
- Empowering subjects of inquiry (Oliver, 1992)

Social action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2006)

- Striving for democratic social change
- Vulnerable to critiques of 'majority rule' democracy and behavioral change

Bearing witness (Kurasawa, 2009)

1. Giving voice to suffering against silence
2. Interpretation against incomprehension
3. Empathy against indifference
4. Remembrance against forgetting
5. Prevention against repetition



J.L. GEROME.



Written reflection (5 min)

1. What did you notice?
2. What challenged or surprised you?
3. What touched or inspired you?
4. What is one action you can take to recognize the common humanity of your research participants?

BREAK



Interview Anatomy

What is an interview?

“...a method of data collection that involves two or more people **exchanging information** through a series of questions and answers” (DeCarlo, 2018)

Common challenges (Roulston et al, 2003)

1. Issues in the interviewing process itself
2. Issues in transcription

Attending to power

- Mediating extractivism (Yahr, 2018)



Image: Yahr, 2018



“

All interviews are reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions... whether recognized or not.” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995: 4)

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Other techniques

The Ethnographic Interview (Spradley, 1979)

Motivational Interviewing (Rollnick & Miller, 1995)

- Behavioral change

Cognitive Interviewing (Waddington & Bull, 2007)

- Context reinstatement
- Perils of storytelling

The ‘active’ interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995)

- A continuously unfolding interpersonal drama
- Attending to the *whats* and the *hows*



For your **consideration...**

1. Know when you *need* to interview → understanding someone's subjective perspective
2. Attend to structural variations
 - Time, duration
 - Number of interviewees (1:1 or focus group?)
 - Number of interviews (follow-up conversation?)
 - Opening and closing
 - Place, setting
3. Have resources in place
4. Is there anything else you would like to add?



Asking sensitive Questions



Image: Malam Ezera, 2016

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Why ask sensitive questions?

Tendency to overestimate personal costs (Hart et al, 2021)

Opportunity to reinstate agency (Hart et al, 2016)

Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practices (**TRIRPP**) (Edelman, 2021)

- Uniting asset- and deficit-based approaches

Resilience = a lifelong process of learning to harness resources to sustain wellbeing (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013)



Take active steps to seek participation from disenfranchised groups and individuals
Unite with social justice; tackling deprivation and health inequalities
Frame the researcher- participant relationship as relational
Empower individuals and communities through choice and agency
Emphasise strengths and resilience
Minimise re-traumatisation
Recognise potential impact of trauma in all participants
Strive to be culturally competent
Support researcher wellbeing – recognising and supporting resilience and possible pre-existing trauma and traumatic impact from doing research
Remove barriers to conducting research arising from structural issues, disadvantage and stigma

TRIRPP

1. Context
2. Empowerment
3. Culture

Image: Edelman, 2021



SET

“...anything related to the internal state of a person, including personality, preparation for the experience, intention, as well as mood, expectations, fears, wishes” (Hartogsohn, 2017)

We are fundamentally social creatures

- The interviewer’s internal state has a profound impact on that of the interviewee

Conflicting roles

- Counsellor or researcher?
- *With great power comes great responsibility*

Practical strategies

1. Personal check-in
2. Anchoring in psychological safety
3. Managing expectations

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING



Co-regulation (Porges, 2019)

Mirror neurons

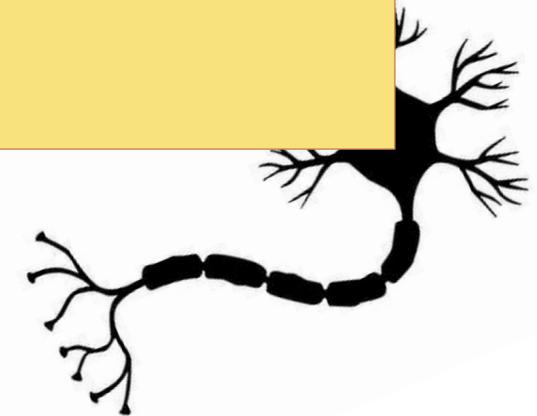
Does not require face-to-face contact!

Tone, volume, cadence

Vocabulary, slang

Facial expressions

Eye contact



SETTING

1. Physical
2. Mental + emotional
3. Social
4. Cultural

Consider...

- Locale
- Seating
- Time of day
- Recording protocols
- Researcher wellbeing
- First impressions
- Other attendees
- Gifts
- Attire
- Punctuality
- Follow-up
- Silence

What values do I want to communicate?

Agency
Stability
Openness
Familiarity

What is within my locus of control?



For your **consideration...**

1. Consider set and setting
2. Mind your own internal resources
3. Manage interviewee expectations
4. Empower through choice and agency
5. Strive for cultural competency
6. Take a stance sometimes
7. Be attentive to language, verbal and non-verbal
8. Get comfortable with silence
9. Explore ways to 'give back'
10. Greet mistakes as opportunities for growth



Breakout room discussion (10 min)

1. Identify at least one value that's important to your research. Describe how you might use set and setting to convey that value in an interview.
2. What does reciprocity mean to you?
3. How can you attend (or have you attended) to power imbalances in your field site?

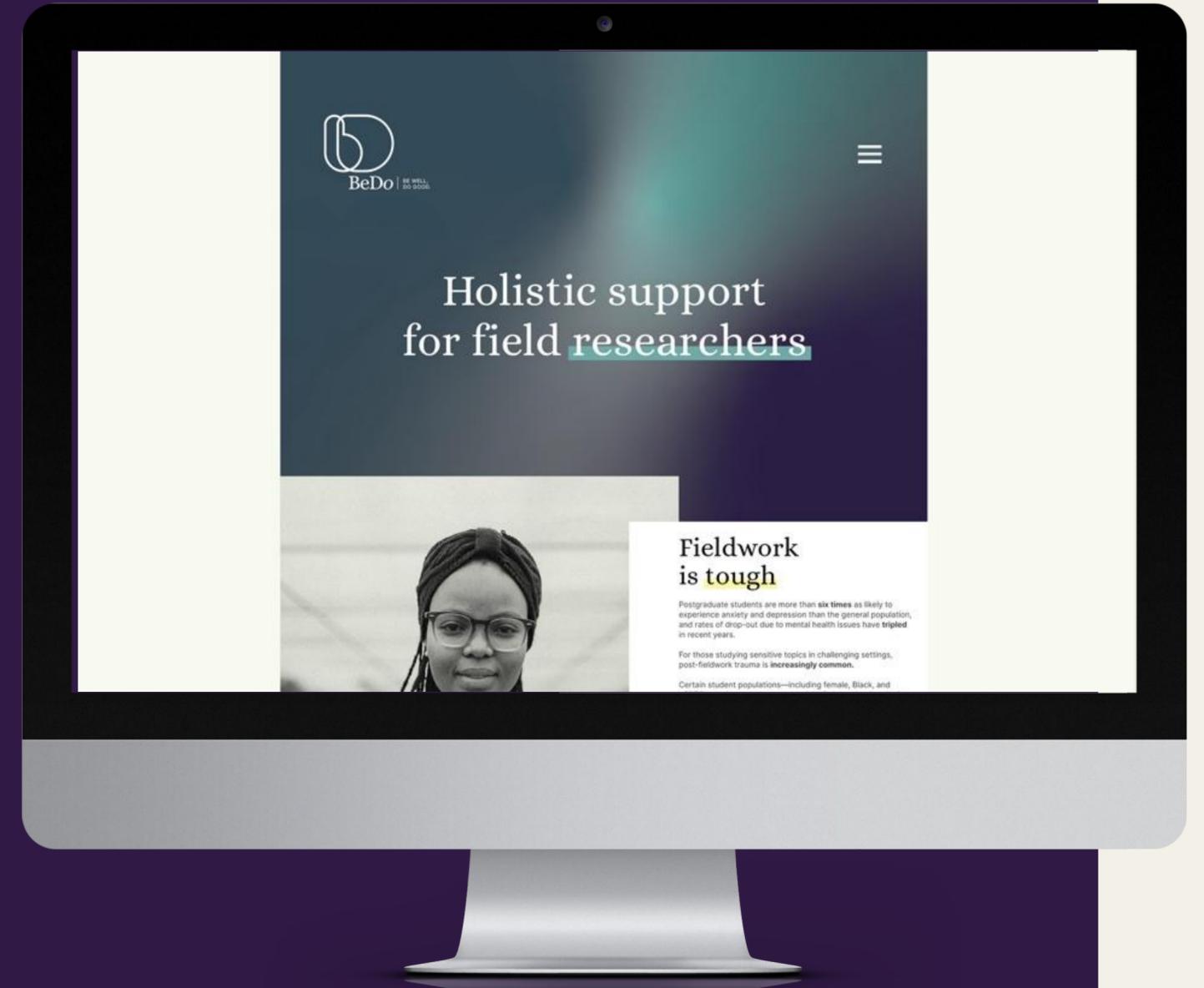


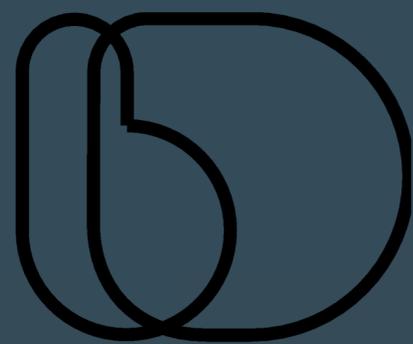
To be continued...

See you tomorrow!



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BeDo

Compassionate Interviewing for Qualitative Research

Day 2/2



OVERVIEW

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

I. What is compassion?

II. Common humanity

III. Interview anatomy

IV. Asking sensitive questions

V. Responding to distress

VI. Internal resources and self-advocacy

→ Mock interviews

DAY 2 - 4:00-7:00PM

V. Responding to distress (40 min)

[bonus] Reflective listening (20 min)

VI. Internal resources + self-advocacy (40 min)

Break (15 min)

Mock interviews (40 min)

Closing reflections (20 min)



Responding to Distress



“ Trauma is not what happens *to* you. Trauma is what happens *inside* you, as a result of what happens to you.

GABOR MATÉ

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

The trauma imperative

An evolving field

- Ubiquity of trauma (Kessler et al, 2017)
- Growing recognition for diversity in trauma responses (van der Kolk, 2000)
- Big T vs. little t (Barbash, 2017)
 - Bodily-threatening vs. ego-threatening

Trauma pushes us beyond our ability to self-regulate

- Hyper- vs. hypo-arousal

Sympathetic vs. parasympathetic nervous system(s)

- Fight, flight, freeze, fawn
- Rest, digest, tend, befriend

The vagus nerve (Porges, 2019; Hanson, 2020)



TRIGGER	REACTIONS
My partner looking at their phone while I'm trying to talk to them.	Physical: heat, fist clenched. Emotional: Anger Mental narrative: "They're so insensitive!" "I'm not important to them." Nervous System: **FIGHT response
The plane in bad turbulence	Physical: shaking, heart fast Emotional: Fear: Mental narrative: "We're going to die!" Nervous System: **FREEZE response
Receiving criticism at work	Physical: throat choked/lump Emotional: Sadness, Shame Mental narrative: "What's wrong with me. "I never get it right, I'm not good enough!" Nervous System: **FREEZE response

Image: Eyres, 2021

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Navigating triggers

Fight/flight/freeze... fawn? (Gaba, 2020)

Any word, person, experience, or moment that sets off a disproportionate emotional reaction (Richo, 2019)

Might look like...

- Dissociation
- Righteous anger
- Excessive empathy

'Amygdala hijack' (Goleman, 1996)

- *When it's hysteric, it's historic*

 Contemplative writing practice



COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING SKILLFUL REPONSE

1

Pause

Turn the finger around

2

Interoception

Is this a feeling or a fact?

3

Check the narrative

4

Compassion

Am I really as unsafe as I feel?

5

Respond when ready



*Between stimulus and response, there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response, lies our growth and our freedom.*

Steven Covey



Written reflection (5 min)

1. What stood out to you about this practice?
2. Did you notice if this practice opened the door for more compassion?
3. How do you know when you're in a triggered state?
4. What might be a skillful response to this trigger going forward?



Reflective Listening



“ Accurate reflecting gives you permission to feel what you feel and know what you know.

BESSEL VAN DER KOLK

The art of reflecting

Listening style useful in exploratory interviews
(Katz & McNulty, 1994)

- Quality control
- Attentive to content and feelings
- Non-judgemental, curious

We can reflect content, feelings, or meanings.

Potential perils of reflective listening

- Evaluating and judging
- Solving
- Withdrawing



Verbal

Rephrasing
Extrapolating
Synergizing
Summarizing

Non-verbal

Eye contact
Mirroring
Matching
Interested silence

COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Two eyes, two ears, one mouth'

Step 1: Taking in cues

Step 2: Sorting

Step 3: Drawing a conclusion

Step 4: Expressing the essence

Reflecting is NOT 'parroting'

Verifying

- "Is that right?"
- "Help me understand that better."

'Door openers'

- "That sounds really frustrating."
- "You seem really excited about that!"
- "Sounds like it went really well."



Reflective listening exercise (10 min)

Listen silently and attentively, 2-3 minutes

Reflect and expand, 2-3 minutes

Switch!



Group discussion (5 min)

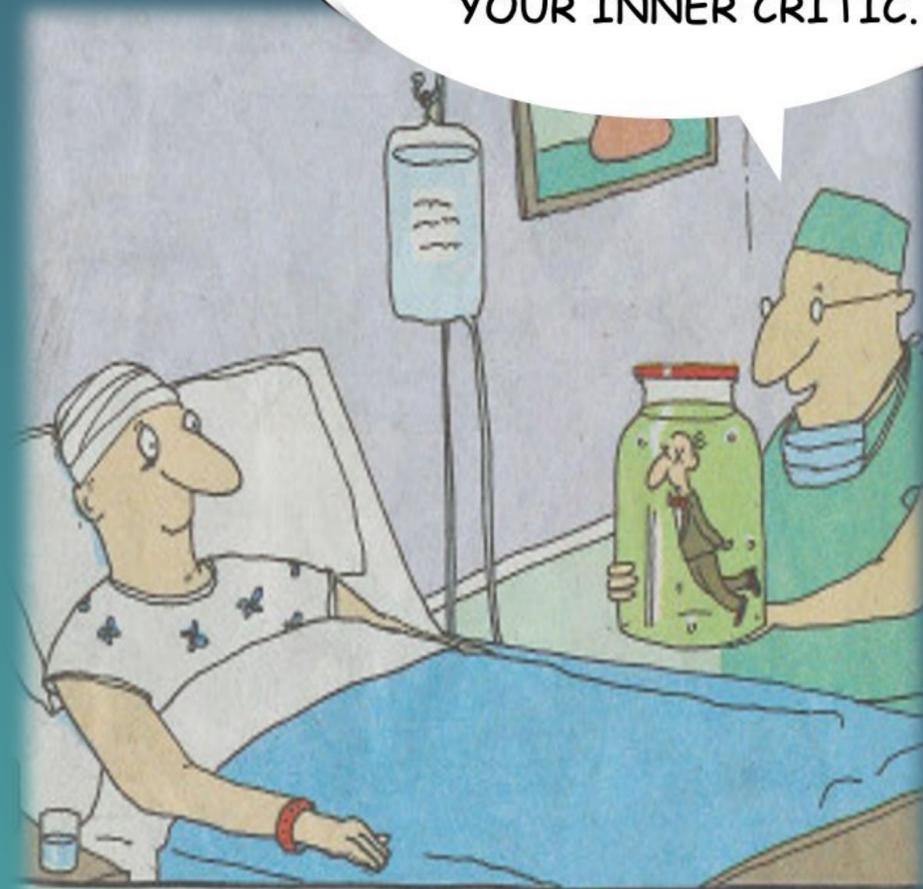
1. What did you notice about the experience of listening?
2. What did you notice about the process of reflecting?
3. How might you utilize reflective listening in your own research practice, if at all?



Internal resources and Self-advocacy



CONGRATULATIONS,
MR. JACOBS!
WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY
REMOVED
YOUR INNER CRITIC.



COMPASSIONATE INTERVIEWING

Self-compassion

Three components (Neff, 2021)

1. Kindness vs. self-judgement
2. Common humanity vs. isolation
3. Mindfulness vs. over-identification

Never self-indulgent, actually improves motivation

- Self-esteem vs. self-compassion (Breines & Chen, 2012)

Internal resources

- Physical, mental, emotional, social
- Hedonic vs. eudaimonic happiness
 - Pleasure/enjoyment vs. meaning/purpose

Burnout

Post-fieldwork trauma and emotional burnout

- Increasingly common (Pollard, 2009; Spector, 2019)
- Loss of agency, sense of inefficacy

→ Reconnecting with purpose

Self-advocacy

Perils of empathy without boundaries

- Vicarious trauma

Boundaries: personal and interpersonal

Not too hard, not too soft

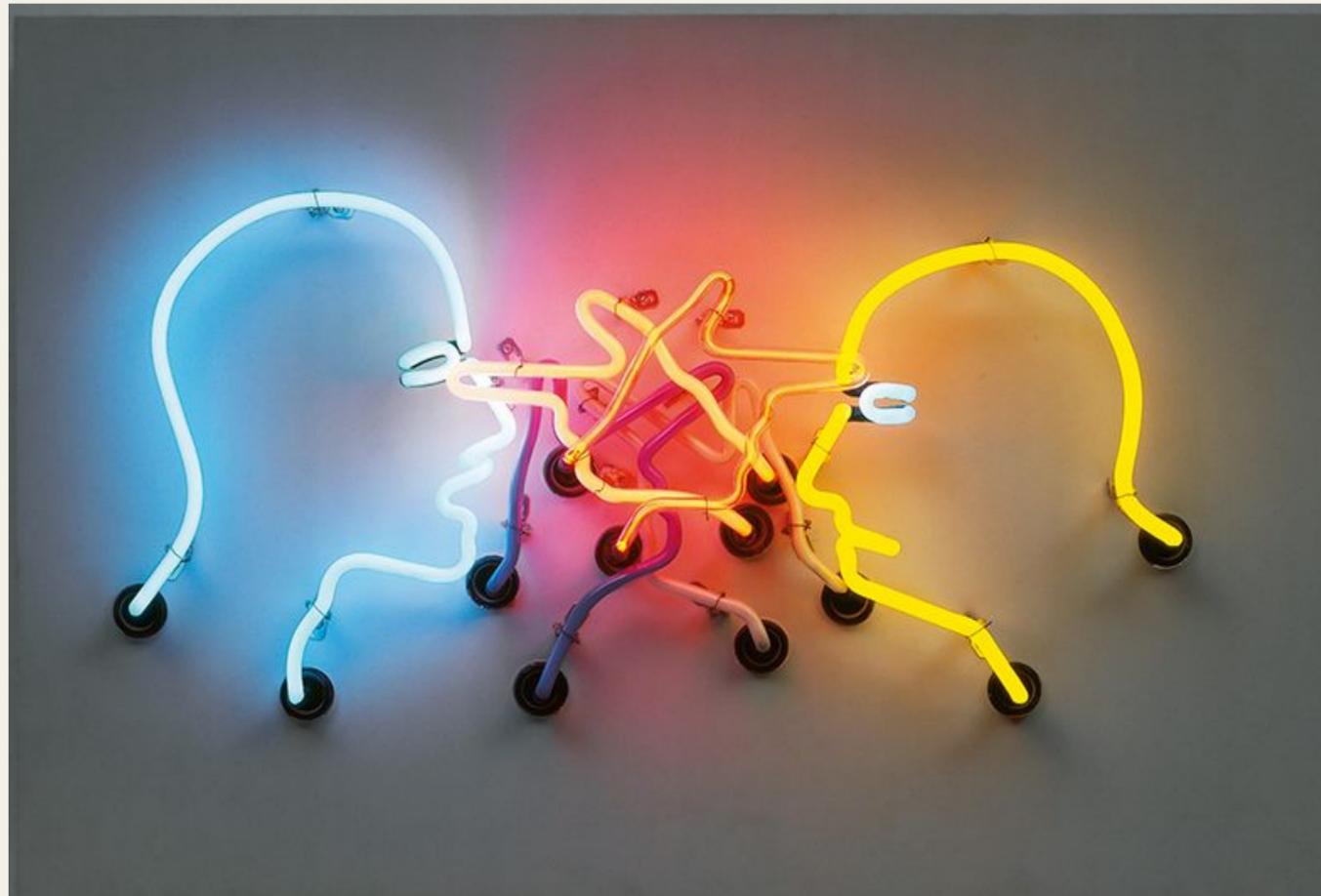


Image: Nauman, 1941



Written reflection (5 min)

1. What stood out to you about this practice?
2. Where did you experience resistance, if at all?
3. What did it feel like to bring self-compassion to this difficult or joyful experience?
4. What are some practices or activities that rejuvenate you and enhance your capacity for self-compassion?

BREAK

MOCK INTERVIEWS

Narratives

- Interviewer and interviewee

15 min interview

5 min feedback/transition

]
(x2)

40 min total

Feedback guidelines:

- Emphasis on appreciation
- Ask permission to give suggestions
- Frame suggestions in the form of a question





Debrief and discussion (15 min)

1. How did you curate set and setting?
2. How easy or difficult was it for you to stay in character?
3. What did you notice in your own body language or your interviewee's?
4. When/where did you sense compassion arising?



Thank you!

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