

CALL FOR PAPERS (issued Friday 2 Oct 2026, closing date 14 Dec 2026)

Power and vulnerability in the in-depth interview: exploring a new 'ethic of care'

We invite papers that problematise the ways in which ideas about abuse, harm, trauma, 'victimhood' and vulnerability risk limiting our research ambitions and pathologizing our research subjects.

Oral historians, biographers, anthropologists, sociologists and narrative journalists, as well as archivists are increasingly encouraged to reflect on whether their interviewing and archival practices are 'trauma-informed.' The feminist therapeutic and organisational practices that situated harms against women and children within systems of oppression (Herman, 1992; Bloom, 1994) have been displaced by individualising models of trauma and trauma-informed practice (Harris and Fallot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma-informed approaches have been adopted uncritically in many settings and contexts, with little opportunity for questioning the concept or the way it has been operationalised. Its emphasis on values and relational practice means a certain vagueness and a difficulty in thus measuring how much it is used and its effectiveness.

This is the case across the disciplinary cultures within which we attempt to recover, preserve and centre the voices of a diverse cohort of survivors, whether of, for example, child abuse, institutional harms, medical malpractice, natural disasters, acts of terrorism or genocide. The uncritical deployment of trauma as an ahistorical concept is applied equally to political and cultural catastrophes as to distressing events in individual lives.

The 'trauma-informed care' concept has crept beyond health services into humanities research and has become *de rigueur* in grant and ethics applications, usually without expounding on how the practice will be operationalised. The avoidance of methods that might 'retraumatise' participants or activate 'traumatic memories' (Mocnik, 2023) is favoured. Some scholars have offered alternative non-clinical concepts to trauma (Das, 2007; Bourke, 2022; Marecek, 1999). However, the common use of ahistorical, neuro/ psycho-centered notions of trauma raises questions about epistemologies, ethics and our everyday interviewing practices.

This special issue asks how we can work ethically and equitably with living subjects to research recent history or contemporary themes in the arts and humanities via long-form or multi-session interview(s). Can we define a new ethic of care that attends to structural harms and systemic failures, power dynamics and intersectionalities rather than individual pathology? Within the interview process, the concept of trauma and the notion of being 'trauma-informed' can pose a risk of reducing interviewees to a state of victimhood and in so doing obscure their agency, resilience and fortitude. It can imply that every interviewee is in need of special care and protection, skewing the power and authority towards the interviewer. And in the broader sense, this mode of understanding the dynamic relationship does not appear conducive to achieving historical accountability and justice – personal and political.

Shifting the lens from one of private, personal trauma to a new ethic of care can help to transform in-depth interviewing about individual suffering and resilience, into a tool for addressing issues around historical accountability and justice and to support contemporary advocacy, policy critique and institutional accountability. Moving beyond viewing harm solely as an individual experience, historians adopting a new approach might better trace how state, cultural and economic systems continue to perpetuate and maintain harm, exposing this violence as an ongoing everyday reality, and thereby shifting the focus from individual recovery/healing and instead placing the responsibility onto fixing the cultures and institutions that caused and perpetuated that violence. Can a new ethic

of care attend to sensitive topics, vulnerability and painful experiences in a way that neither reproduces harms nor silences participants? Must we reduce this positive ethic of care to a negative: 'avoiding retraumatisation'?

We invite proposals for papers reflecting on these challenges. Potential topics include but are not limited to:

- Feminist ethics of care
- Gatekeeping – who gets to adjudicate what and who is researchable, sayable, and ethical
- Critical reflections of 'trauma-informed' interviewing practices
- Care within research practices – theoretical considerations
- Care and 'vulnerability' – what are the boundaries of scholarly responsibilities
- Intersectionality and positionality in relation to care practices in interviewing
- Care - making our methodologies visible
- Positionality and working across difference including class, race, age, Global North/South, disability, neurodiversity
- Gender stereotypes and care labour
- Incorporating lived experience expertise in approaches
 - o Institutions
 - o 'lived experience'
 - o Power, collaboration, equity
- The interviewer as an ally in the fight for social justice

Papers should draw on individual original research experience and their own research concerns and dilemmas. To express your interest, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words along with a short bio to r.beecher@bbk.ac.uk cc claudia.soares@newcastle.ac.uk by 14 December 2026.