



INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Jonathan Smith (<http://www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk/about-ipa>):

“IPA is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and with how participants themselves make sense of their experiences. Therefore it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants.”

A type of thematic analysis, but focusing upon subjective **meanings** of personal **experiences**, not just patterns of words

“...an individual’s personal perceptions or account of an event or state” (Smith)

Not an attempt to produce an objective record of the event or state

IPA: HERMENEUTICS

- **Hermeneutics:** The study and theory of *interpretation*
- Understanding:
 - Core of human existence; cyclical process
- Language:
 - Means through which we get to understanding
- Negotiated understanding (through conversation) reveals the “things themselves”

IPA: HERMENEUTICS

- Explanation and understanding – two modes of knowing...

‘Human beings therefore have two different tasks. One is to construct and ***explain*** nature as an ordered, whole governed by causal laws from the impressions we receive. The other is to return from nature to life itself where there is ***meaning***, value and purpose.’

(Schmidt, 2006, p.36)

RESEARCHING LIVED EXPERIENCE

When we talk about
'experience' in IPA
research:

Something that has
meaning to a person

That they have come
to understand

We seek to
'understand' their
perspective of a
lived event or period
of time

What happened?
(from their
perspective)

How did they feel?
(beforehand? during?
afterwards?)

How did this affect
them immediately
and how did they
deal with this
afterwards

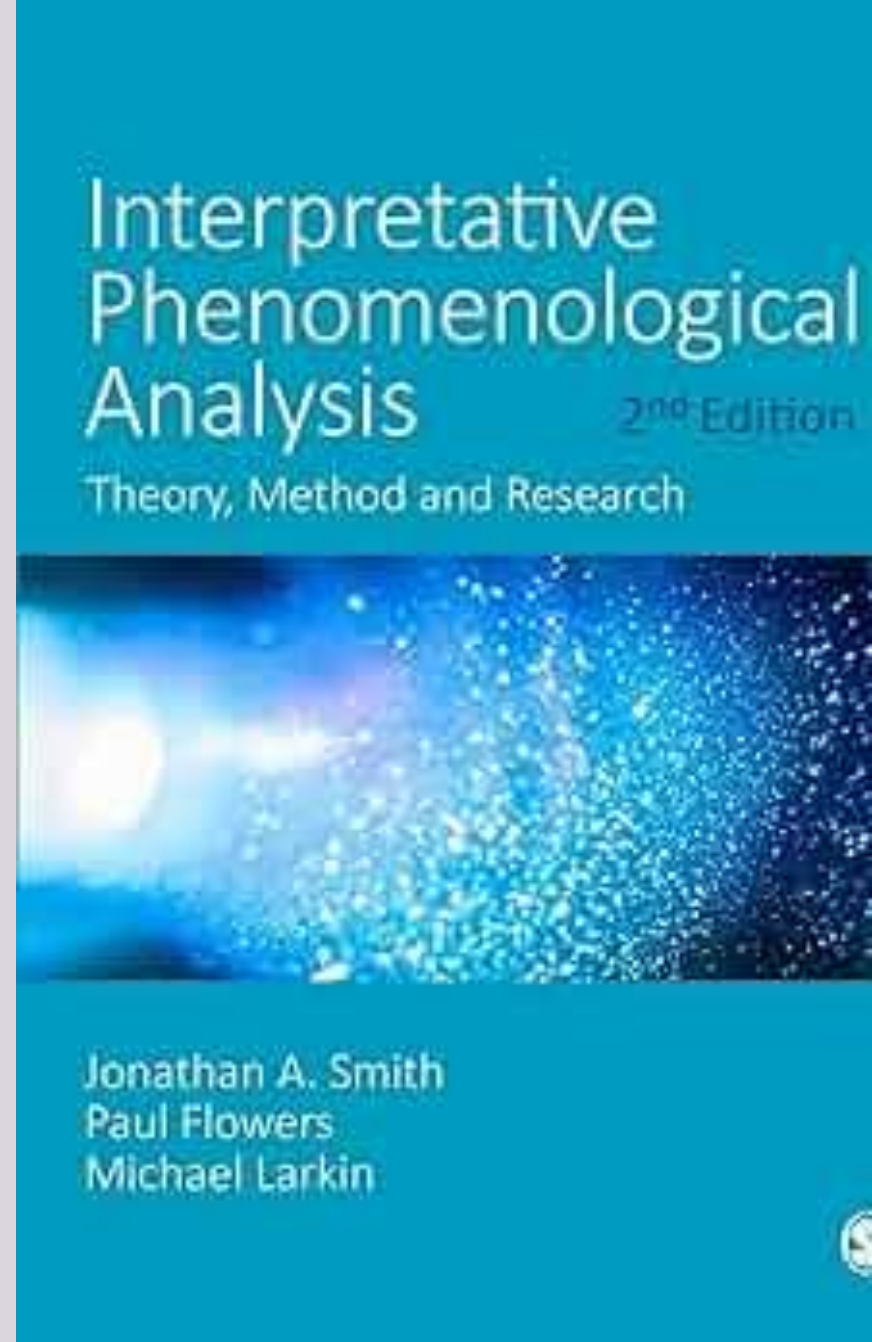
TRANSCRIPTION

- Transcribe the **whole** recording; include any and all semantic content
- Transcribe major prosodic features
 - e.g., sighs; laughs; interruptions and overlaps; ums and ahs;
 - Length of pauses



WHY USE IPA?

- Qualitative methodological tool and form of analysis
- Explores how an individual makes sense of their life world
- Individual viewpoint and experience (phenomenological)



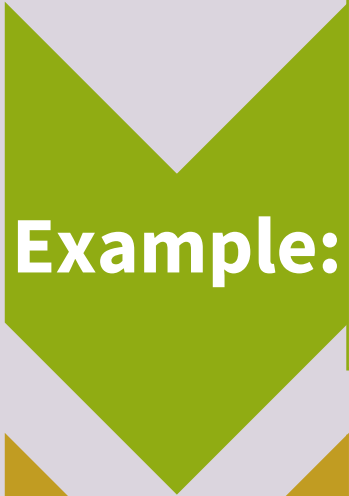
IPA: EXPERIENCE

- When we talk about experience in IPA research, we are talking about “something that matters to the participant”, and something of which they have some understanding
- We then seek to understand their **perspective** on it
 - How do they make sense of the event?
 - How do they make sense of their responses before, during and after – emotional, behavioural

IPA: EXPERIENCE & INTERPRETATION

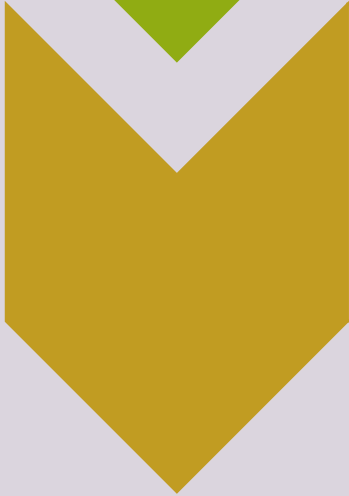
- Recognises that access to a participant's world is dependent on the researcher's own conceptions which are needed to make sense of that other personal world
- The aims and research questions in IPA research tend to focus upon a person's **experience and/or understanding** of particular phenomena in particular contexts
- Double interpretation

DOING IPA



Example:

- What is it like to be a recovering addict within a self-help 12-step program?
- How do people receiving support from an Early Intervention Service make sense of their experiences of auditory hallucinations?
- How is the experience of dialysis understood in the context of impending transplantation?

- 
- Set yourselves some **clear objectives**, so that you know when you are finished.

WHAT IS A SUITABLE RESEARCH QUESTION FOR AN IPA STUDY?

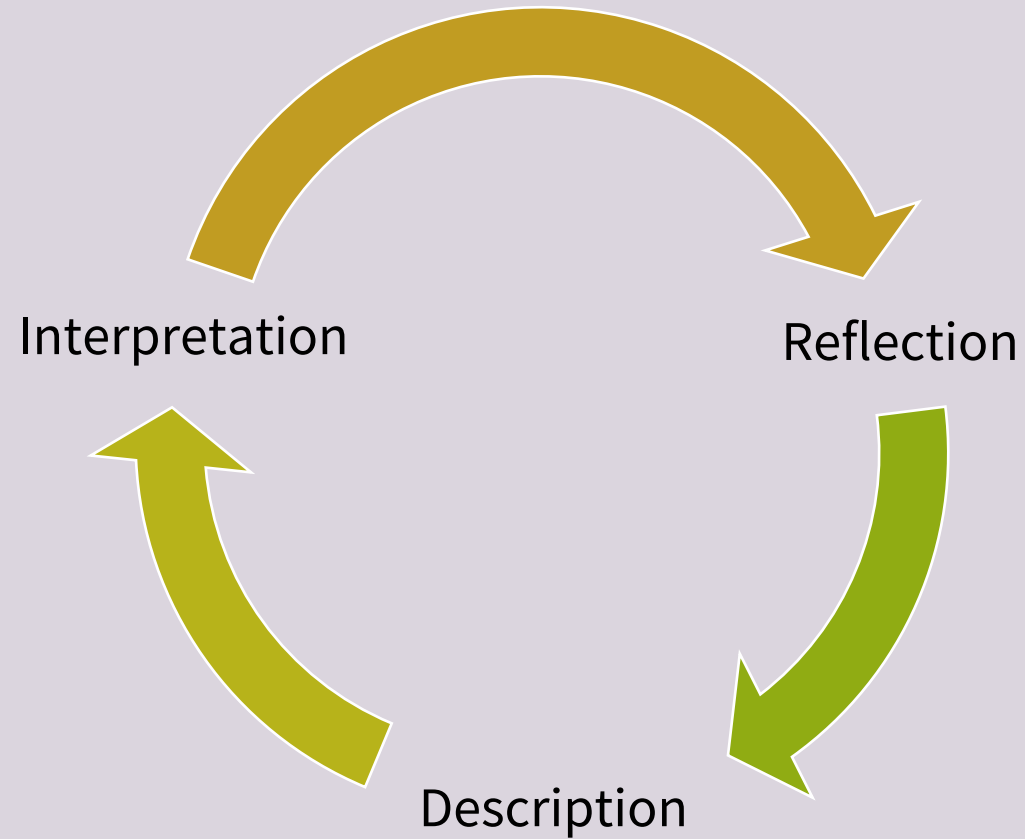
Focus on meaning and sense-making

Answerable... And worth answering!

- Don't underestimate the importance of this
- Personal commitment is often a positive advantage...



PROCESS OF SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS



IPA: ANALYSIS PROCESS



IPA: STEP 1



Reading and re-reading the transcript



Ensures the participant's words and story are the focus of the analysis

The story as told by the participant



Allows overall mapping of the interview structure and narrative

Develop a mental model of the person and the content



Allows awareness of how interview dynamics shape the interview and highlights areas of specific detail

IPA: STEP 2



Initial noting/coding



Detailed and time consuming



Looking at meanings (semantics) and language use, but at an exploratory level



You keep an open mind and note anything of interest



No rules yet – you have free reign



Aim - a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data

IPA: ANALYSIS

Descriptive comments: Key objects, events, people and experiences in the participant's life world

- What is standing out – through vividness, consistency, figures of speech, emotional responses etc?

Linguistic comments: The ease with which content and meaning were presented

- Content and language – tone; pauses; laughter (is this topic always joked about?); repetition (“a terrible thing...a terrible thing”); [pauses]
- Smith (2010) Jack – ‘shell-shocked’ Why shell-shocked? What does it tell us?

Conceptual comments: More interpretative – dealing with the transcript at a conceptual level

- Conceptual annotating often shifts the focus
 - Away from explicit claims and statements
 - Towards the participant's overarching understanding of the matter they're talking about

IPA: ANALYSIS

Abstraction: Putting like with like and developing a *thematic cluster*

Smith (2010): 'Jack':

Excessive thinking, mourning and grief, depression, shock, loss of self-esteem

Superordinate theme: '*Psychological consequences of HIV diagnosis*'

Subsumption:

A theme acquires superordinate status – helps to *bring together a series of related themes* (subsumes)

Smith (2010): Jack:

'*Diagnosis as transforming the self*' - theme that draws together a number of others (now sub-themes)
e.g. Loss of self, mourning and grief, the questioning self, the self as performance, work of managing the self, denial to protect old self, loss of future etc.

IPA: ANALYSIS

Polarisation: Highlighting 'difference' – **oppositional relationships**

Smith (2010) Jack:

Re-affirmation of self, the constant self, rebuilding the self, being a better person etc.

Oppositional device might be a superordinate theme e.g. *'Loss/Re-affirmation'*

Contextualisation: Connections made by **identifying contextual or narrative elements**

May be temporal, cultural or narrative themes (narrative moments in the story, key life events)

Jack: the diagnosis, disclosure to friends

IPA ANALYSIS

Numeration: *Frequency with which a theme is supported* (referred to)

But - frequency is not crucial to the importance of theme though e.g. shellshock only mentioned once

Something might be so sensitive it cannot be referred to more than once

Not just number – look for patterns (e.g. where do occurrences occur)

Function: How is the participant using themes to construct his account? *What are their functions?*

e.g. Jack (HIV diagnosis)

Victim – to elicit sympathy

Fighter/survivor (elicit praise, agreement, acceptance)

Themes serve a function in presentation of self in an interview

Themes are not introduced for no purpose – even if they are just to distract

IPA: STEP 2



Some parts of the interview will be richer than others, and you'll make many more notes about these sections



Descriptive core of comments -
clear phenomenological focus

Things that matter to them
Meaning of those things for the
participant

Alcohol - main
substance
Early recognition
of the problem

"I wasn't ready
to listen to it"

"I was the only
coloured person
and young"

"I was fighting it
so much"

Relate to the
"insanity of
drinking"

morning fears

Four Horsemen
of terror - metaphor
(religious background)

Temporality -
"every day"

L: Okay, um, let's start with, how you started in the program?

R: Um, I started in the program, initially, um, when I was 24. My friend recommended it to me because of my substance misuse, which was primarily alcohol at that point. It was, you know, it was leading me into a lot of damage and I kind of knew, then, I had a problem. And, um, I went to meetings and stuff, AA meetings, and, I used to go there and I didn't really relate to what people were saying.

L: So these were the first meetings?

I: Yeah, and I stopped drinking for a few days, but then, drank again, and. That, yeah, it was through a friend basically, he was in the program already and he introduced me. But I wasn't, I wasn't really ready to listen to it, or hear what people were saying, because, um. One, I was the only coloured person in the meeting {laughter}. And, two, everyone seemed to be a lot older than me, quite a lot older than me. Up, um, in their forties at least, and I used to go there and listen to these people, and, thought, oh, I can't be one of these people, you know, because they are like, old and they're all white {laughter}. And, I just didn't understand it. I did not understand it at all. But, that was probably my first introduction.

L: To the program?

I: Yeah. But at the same time, even though I was fighting it so much, there were certain things that people said, that I really, really, related to as well.

L: Like what?

I: Like, um, you know, just the stories and the insanity of drinking. Waking up and not knowing what you've done the night before, and that feeling of terror, loneliness, bewilderment and despair. You know, like, what did I do? All the panic, you know, all the fear. That morning fear, I really related to that at first.

L: Morning fear?

I: Morning fear is. In the program they call it the four horsemen.

L: Um, I don't know what it is?

I: Terror, and, it is just an expression, you know, the four horsemen, like people have expressions for certain things. But, um, these four horsemen are terror, you know, my god, look what I did! Loneliness, oh my god, I'm the only one in the world, why my life has messed up. Bewilderment, how has this happened to me again? And despair, is, will I be able to stop? Will this ever change?

L: Okay

I: Yeah, every day, that was the same for me. My dad used to come into my room and swear at me, fuck, what have you done. Why don't you stop drinking? Why can, why don't you just drink beer? Why you keep drinking whisky? And {silence} and, I really didn't have an answer. It was just lies. My whole life was lying, basically, at that point.

L: Was it?

Early bottle - works
help not refuse it

Finds different
from AA people

Struggles with
recognition

Relating to AA
stories

Morning fear

vivid portrayal
of the
problem

Temporality of
drinking -
every day

Impact on
family

IPA: STEP 2

- Further interpretive noting helps understanding about participant's concerns e.g.
 - looking at the **language** that they use
 - thinking about the **context** of their concerns (their lived world)
 - identifying more **abstract concepts** which can help you make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account

IPA: STEP 2

Initial coding

Being in NA is challenging

*Wants to disclose/ tell
everyone but sometimes
doesn't*

Conflict

"but the other part of me"

Mixed feelings

Tom: It is really difficult being in this fellowship 'cause I kind of want to tell everyone... but there are times when I don't want to tell anyone. But it's like I want to tell everyone, like I've found this way of life and its really great and its really helping me. But the other part of me doesn't want people to say why do you say that and say 'cause I was very fucking unhappy and so fucked up

IPA: STEP 2

Example of initial coding (focus on language use – metaphor)

It's like when you see a rocket going into the sky and then as it breaks the atmosphere and the bits fall off it and you just see the fuselage ... I've seen myself change, I've seen other people looking at me differently and they're happy that I've changed, there was someone who said to me something, she said you're growing into yourself.

IPA: STEP 3

Developing interpreted themes: turning initial coding into psychological themes

Tom: It is really difficult being in this fellowship 'cause I kind of want to tell everyone... but there are times when I don't want to tell anyone. But it's like I want to tell everyone, like I've found this way of life and its really great and its really helping me. But the other part of me doesn't want people to say why do you say that and say 'cause I was very fucking unhappy and so fucked up

Ambivalence

Fear of disclosure

Enhanced self-consciousness

IPA: STEP 4

Searching for connections across interpreted themes

- The end point of identifying interpreted themes is not a one dimensional description of what the participant is thinking about or has experienced
- It is the development of a map of how the researcher thinks the P is thinking
- Consider the relationships between interpreted themes – do some cluster? Are some opposites? Are some more important than others?

IPA: STEP 4

Searching for connections across interpreted themes

- Consider the relationships between interpreted themes
 - Do some cluster?
 - Are some opposites?
 - Are some more important than others?
- This 'map' provides a structure for writing up results

IPA: STEP 4

EXAMPLE OF TABLE OF THEMES

Theme: Early days in recovery

Fear of disclosure

Ambivalence

Identification with NA people

Being busy

Setting new temporality

Theme: Sense of self in early recovery

Finding your own place: the meaning of recovery

Changing sense of self

Addict identity

Theme: Maintaining early recovery

Receiving unconditional support

Developing a new social network

Wiring (facilitates insight)

Praying as a self-reflective process

IPA STEP 5

Recurrent themes (cross-case comparison)

- Repeat exploratory analysis with each transcript
- Repeat interpretative thematic analysis with each transcript
- Rigor of this process allows for new themes to be interpreted

Table of Themes for Group-Study 2

	Tom	Mike	Dan	Arjun
<i>1. Motives for drinking and using drugs</i>				
Enhancing sociability	3.28	4.09		2.05
Coping with feelings	4.14	2.22		2.10
Awareness of the consequences			4.12	2.26
<i>2. Challenges of beginning the recovery process</i>				
‘But the other part of me’: Ambivalence	5.01	5.10	3.07	
Conflictive identification with NA people	5.22	11.28	2.29	
Being busy	11.19	14.05	10.17	12.09
Setting a new temporality	7.8	9.18	10.12	14.11
<i>3. Maintaining recovery</i>				
Experiencing cravings	07.43	11.25	12.05	10.09
Missing out on the drugs/alcohol scene	12.20	07.03		
Becoming honest			04.31	09.21
‘It give that feeling of belonging’: NA’s support	9.10	13.01		14.16/18.15
Developing a new social network	7.31	10.04	11.17	18.28
Writing	13.16		7.09	
Praying		8.11	11.31	
<i>4. Changing sense of self</i>				
‘Being me and doing what I’m doing’: Authenticity	7.14	06.13	04.22	08.23
Identity as an addict	03.31	06.13	13.01	

IPA: TABLE OF THEMES

IPA: FINAL SUMMARY



Reading and re-reading; familiarising self with transcript



Initial coding



Develop interpreted themes using coding/notes



Connecting themes / clustering themes



Repeat for each additional transcript and compare themes between transcripts

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

- More than one way to analyse
- Make notes about how YOU did the 'method of analysis'
- Keep an analysis diary to record what you did
- Try to form a graphic representation of the structure of your themes
 - Could be in table format or box diagram format

hey! I GOT
A QUESTION

