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HEURISTIC INQUIRY AND DICHOTOMOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE METAMODERN FRAMEWORK:

A Critical Analysis of the Use of
Heuristic Research to Capture the
Experience of Reconciling the
Spiritual and Cultic.

Research Methods and Practice (ECPR7004).
Student number: 1922960



INTRODUCTION

- What is Heuristic Inquiry (HI)
- Theoretical foundations, methodology, and development
- Strengths and limitations
- Effectiveness and relevance in different contexts
- Application to my dissertation research
- Ethical issues around HI
- Metamodern philosophical framework.





Image: Luster (2017)

WHAT IS HEURISTIC INQUIRY?

Heuriskein (Greek: to discover)

Quantitative and Qualitative Research (Najaf et al, 2025)

Crossover with transpersonal psychology (Ho & Yin, 2016)

Moustakas (1961, 1990)

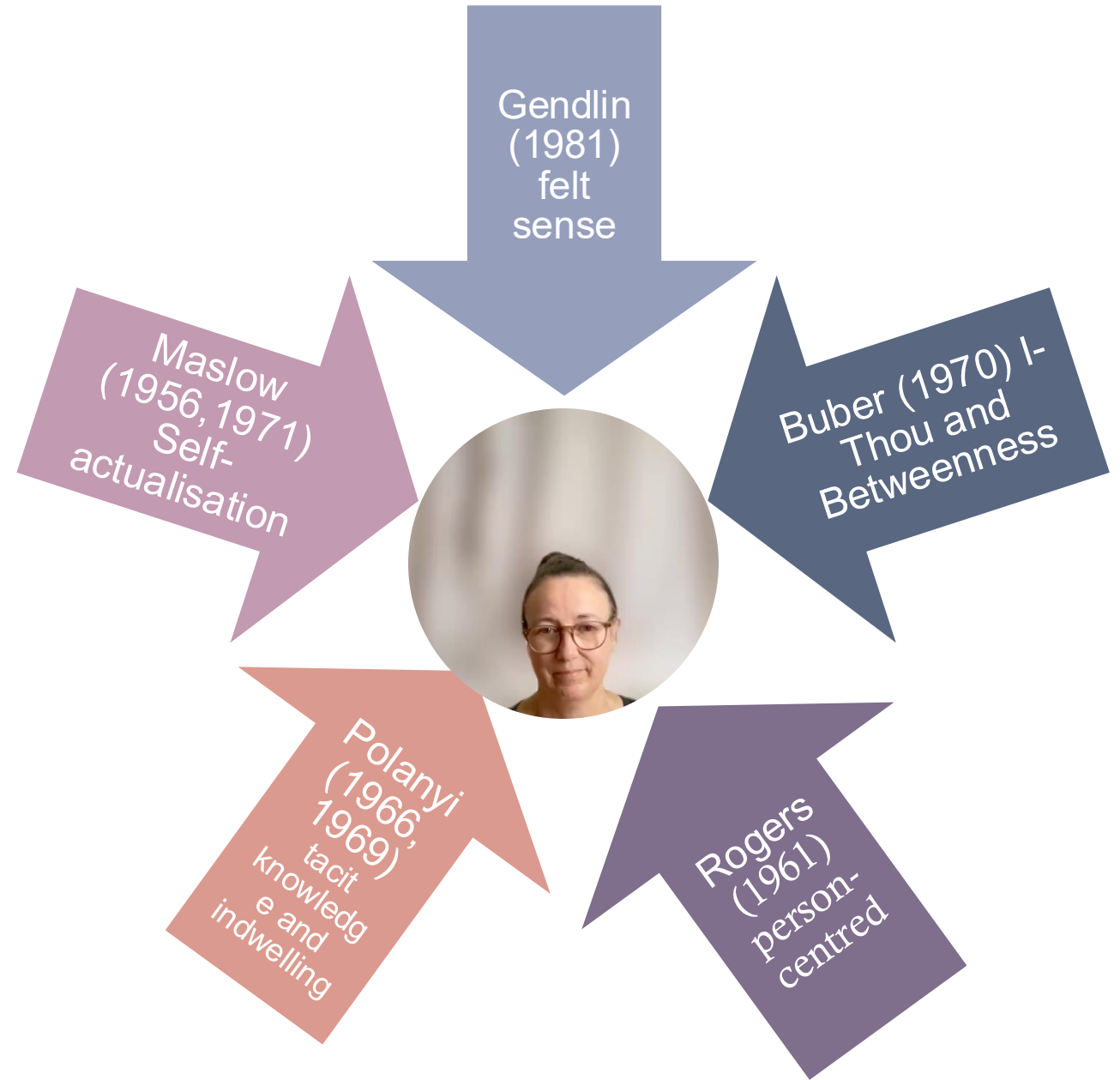
Humanistic

Social Constructivist

Phenomenologically aligned (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013)

Hermeneutic (meaning-making) Self-Search

Theoretical Foundations



Stages and Concepts

Stages:

Initial Engagement
Immersion
Incubation
Illumination
Explication
Creative Synthesis

Concepts:

Identification with focus of inquiry
Self Dialogue
Tacit knowledge
Intuition
Indwelling
Focusing
Internal frame of reference

(Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Polanyi, 1969; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019)



(Stock Image)

Development of HI

Sela-Smith (2001, 2002) – Heuristic Self Search Inquiry (HSSI) The I-that-feels (Mihalache, 2019)

Kenny (2012) – postmodern critique, language distances from self-experience

Sultan. (2019, 2020, 2024) – Expanded on the relational dynamic of co-researchers. Bridged gap between counselling research and practice. HI within contemplative practice e.g yoga.

Kilrea & McCaslin (2020) – Deep Heuristics/transformational relationships

Tudor (2023), Cardo & Tudor (2024) – combined concepts to create an overall framework. We-who-care – and act.



Characteristics of HI

- “Rooted in experiential time, not clock time” (Moustakas, 1990, p.318)
 - Non-linear, creative process
 - Pre-empts hypothesis (Kenny, 2012)
 - Aligns with person-centred practices
 - Form of psychotherapy
 - Transformative/spiritual emergence (Michelle, 2017)
 - Aligns with transpersonal psychology (Mihalache, 2019; Nash, 2023)
 - Concerned with lived/ living experience
 - Decolonising (Cardo & Tudor, 2024)
 - Culturally Embedded, emancipatory (Sage, 2019)
 - Allows for meaning-making from dual lenses (Cardo & Tudor, 2024)
 - Challenges existing narratives, social norms
 - Combines with other research methods
 - Explores complex meaning (Carr, 2019)
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Critiques and Limitations of HI

Small samples - Not
able to generalise

(Silvia, 2023)

No definitive
information

(Sage, 2019)

Can induce
perplexity/confusion/
feeling lost

(Sage, 2019)

Potential lack of
illumination

(Sage, 2019)

Reveals
difference rather
than similarity

(Sage, 2019)

Lack of social
action/change

(Sage, 2019)

Fosters narcissistic
preoccupation -
Privileges personal
data (Etherington, 2004;
Black, 2025)

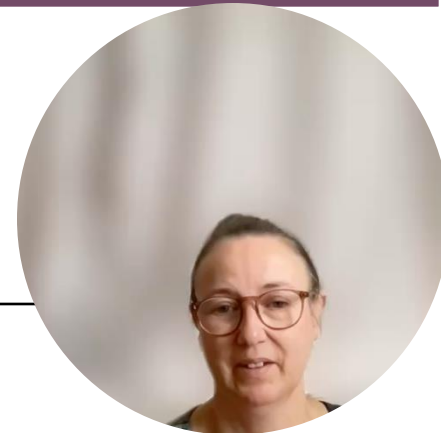
Solipsistic

Lacks objectivity –
cannot be
replicated.

Bracketing (Archibald,
2024; Davies, 2025)

No clear
philosophical
frame

(Mihalache, 2019)



Metamodernism – A Paradigm Shift

Oscillation – Gr. *Metaxy* (Vesely, 2024) cf. EMDR

+ / - = both / and more (Sutherland & Kelly, 2024) e.g. health-illness (Odynets, 2024)

Transcendence – grounded spirituality and social responsibility. (Andersen, 2019; Severan, 2022)

Embraces all forms of knowledge (indigenous to posthuman). Humble science (Storm, 2021)

Nodes of Meaning – shift away from absolutes eg Truth becomes truthiness. (Storm, 2021)

Self is fluid, relational construct (Siegal, 2022)

Interconnected, processural nature of self and world (Andersen, 2019; Storm, 2021) Dividuation (Ott, 2023)

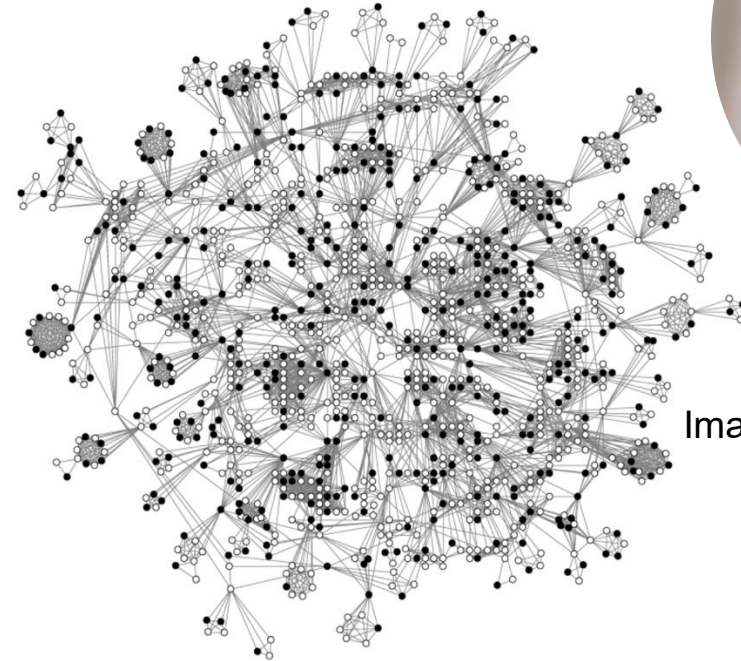


Image: Fernandez (2014)

Age of self-actualization – flourishing.

(Piskarev, 2019; Storm, 2021)

Difference is the norm (Storm, 2021)

HI in the Metamodern Frame

Self as fluid and relational dissolves critiques e.g. Sela-Smith, (2002).

Processural/ plural selves and world-processes

(Sultan, 2019, 2020; Tudor, 2023; Cardo & Tudor, 2024)

Transcends onto-epistemological divisions in science
(Fergani & Cooper, 2023)

Transformational process / self-actualization.

(Asplund, 2019; Clodd, 2020; Inglis, 2021; Kawka, 2024)

Exploration of liminal spaces/dichotomy

(Cardo & Tudor, 2024)

Hybridised research methods
e.g. terrapsychology/ autoheuristic

(Lyndon, 2024)

Deep Heuristics/ spiritual process
(Kilrea & McCaslin, 2020)

Illuminationism

(Najafi, 2025)

Soul purification
(Cardo & Tudor, 2024)

Background Image: *The Luminous M*
(Kawka, 2024, p.131)



Proposed Research

Hybridised
cult rhetoric.

(Thomas, 2024)

Cult n. “a small group of
people who have similar
religious beliefs or routines
that others view as bizarre
or sinister”

(OUP, 2025)

Religious Trauma
(Dille, 2023)
Spiritual Experience in
NRMs

(Laycock, 2022)
Acculturation
(Pretorius, 2024)

Therapy:
Psycho-ed,
de-constructing
cult,
reconstructing
self.

(Jenkinson, 2019;
Bervers, 2023; Shaw,
2024, Miller, 2024)

Dissociation, cognitive
dissonance, pseudo-
personality, alter, dual
identity.

(APA, 2013; Jenkinson, 2019;
Pratezina, 2019; Shaw, 2014, 2023,
2024; Broom, 2022; Black, 2025)

Humanising
Narratives

(Steel, 2022; Buechler,
2023; Yadlin-Gadot,
2023)



Research questions?

“the experience of discovery that pre-empts hypotheses” (Kenny, 2012)

The integration of spiritual and cultic experience

Effectiveness/appropriateness of therapeutic approaches

Potentiating or enmeshed, traumatizing relationship with leader

Quality of spiritual journey in NRMs

HI as metamodern, transformative and spiritual process

Definition of cults

Challenge existing narratives

Surprises !?



Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Professional responsibilities (BACP, 2018)

Interview type (Sultan, 2018, 2020)

Thematic / Narrative Analysis? Impact on representation (Rose & Loewenthal, 2018)

Researcher- participant confidentiality

Finding and Screening participants (ICSA, 2020)

Impact of timeframe on process (Davies, 2025)

Social justice/ spiritual /identity (Sultan, 2020)

Transference and countertransference

Therapy, supervision and self care.

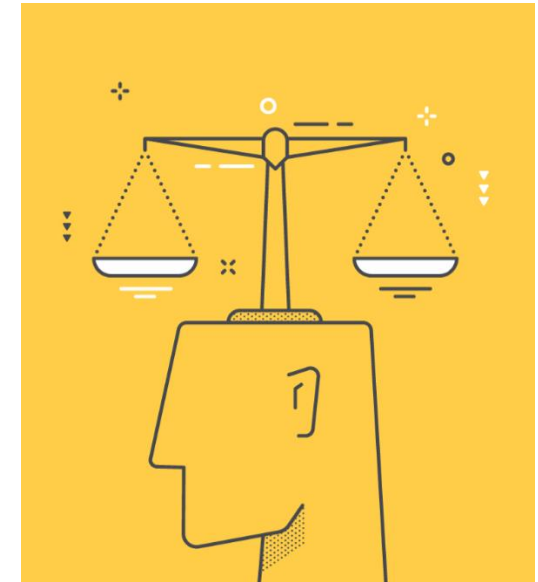
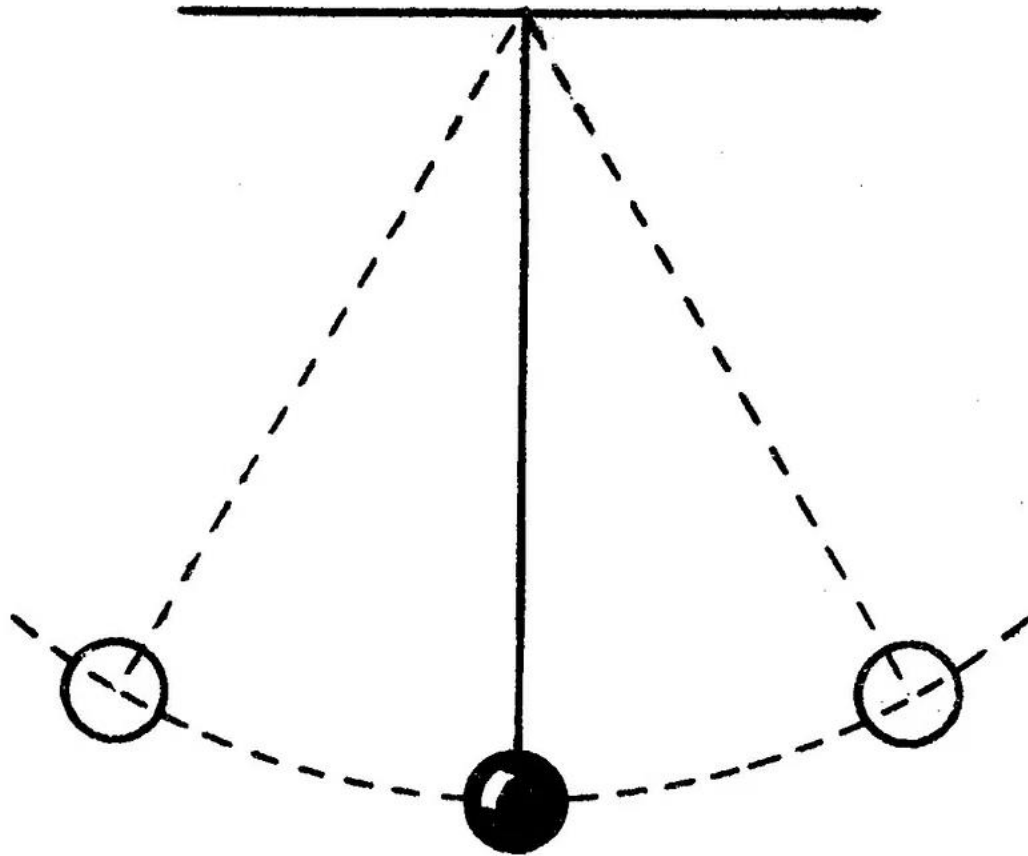


Image: Smith & Pepe (2020)



Conclusion



Metamodern HI as a
process for exploring
the dichotomous
experience of the
Spiritual and Cultic

Image: Clarke (2023)



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