Interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Plan

What is IPA?
Illustration
Theory
Practice
Evaluation

Speaking as a social/health psychologist
IPA useful to music research but needs imaginative leap
What is IPA?

Concern with
- Personal lived experience
- Experience close/ experience far
- How participant makes sense of experience
- Hot cognition

Theoretical underpinnings
- Phenomenological
- Interpretative
- Idiographic

Range of applicability?
- Started in health psychology
- Now in management, counselling, medicine, humanities
Illustration

Pain as an assault on the self: an interpretative phenomenological analysis
_with Mike Osborn, Clinical psychologist, Bath_

Chronic benign lower back pain
Persisted longer than 6 months
Rarely diagnostic
Rarely goes away completely with medic treatment
Major public health issue; impact on lives - work, relationships

Most research on impact of pain quantitative
Value in more work on subjective experience of pain
Participants & method

European Caucasian
Working class
Middle adulthood

Pain for 5-15 years
Stopped paid employment
Not taking major opiates or waiting investigations
No pain management or psychological intervention

Semi structured interviews- pain, self and pain
Establish experiential themes in first case
Explore patterns cross case
Pain and self

I am a nice person but the pain takes over and sucks it all out and leaves me miserable. If you didn’t know me you’d think I was a miserable cow so maybe I was a nice person and now I’m a cow. (Lynette)
Public arena makes it worse

I’m some waster, they should have someone who’s impressive but how can they look up to me, all bad tempered and crippled. All they see is a bit of a man, terrible. I try and keep out of their way. I can’t bear them see me like this (Tony)
Directing it at others

This pain, it hurts but it’s evil, gives me a nasty head and makes me hateful, irrational. I hate it when they all leave in the morning and I’m left on my own and I hate it when they all come back in the evening. If something sad happens to someone, I’m just glad someone else is miserable. And you have these stupid rows about nothing because you get to spray a bit of hate about. (Kevin)
The sting in the tail

I need to be careful about people and a bit worried about what’s going to happen to me. Are we all going to get rounded up and taken to a camp somewhere? (Kevin)
Conclusion

Illustration of IPA in practice
Rich idiographic account prioritized
Then patterns explored
 Allows dialogue with extant literature- raise questions
Could not have obtained this with quantitative instrument

Suggestive implications
Medicine concentrates on pain but impact on self is worse
Explore patients sense of identity as part of managing pain
Changing self
Self loathing
Phenomenology

Not a singular thing, body of work of number of thinkers
Husserl first to write programmatically.
Core principle: ‘Go back to the things themselves’
Focus on experience in its own terms

Needs translation as move from philosophy to psychology
Empirical not conceptual or personal project
Move from analysis of self to analysis of account of other
Being interpretative

Heidegger argued phenomenology is hermeneutic

IPA and hermeneutics
The thing is there ready to shine forth but detective work needed to enable this to happen

Double hermeneutic
Researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of....

Hermeneutics of identity/empathy
Hermeneutics of questioning/being critical
Understanding
Idiography

IPA takes great care with each case - slow move to general
Nuanced account of similarities and differences in cases
Opposite to nomothetic - dominant logic in psychology

Nomothetic:
- Analysis at group level
- Actuarial claims
- Critique

Idiographic:
- Value of the case in its own terms
- Illuminate/ problematize the group
- Warnock on particular and universal
Doing IPA

Data collection
Experiential phenomenological research question
Purposive sampling
Interview schedule used flexibly-contrast structured interview
Verbatim transcript

Analysis
Systematic search for experiential themes
Forge connections between themes, get superordinate themes

Write Up
Narrative account- themes supported by verbatim extracts
The research circle
Semi structured interviews

Aim to facilitate participant giving account in own terms
Establish rapport with respondent
  Use schedule but adjust sequence to fit the moment
Flexible/dynamic: Follow up/probe interesting areas arise
Respondent shares closely in how interview goes

Issues
Loss of control
Can be personally demanding
Schedule: experience of dialysis

1) Can you tell me the brief history of your kidney problem from when it started to you beginning dialysis.

2) Could you describe what happens in dialysis, in your own words?

3) How do you feel when you are dialysing?
   prompt: physically, emotionally, mentally.

4) How does dialysis/kidney disease affect your everyday life?
   prompt: work, interests, relationships.

5) If you had to describe what dialysis machine means to you, what would you say? prompt: what words come to mind, do you have a nickname?
Initial analysis

What’s it like being in pain?

shoulds, ideals,
Expectations
frustration,
other people
mobility restriction trapped
compared to sisters
compared to past when fit
ideal past/doubt, "I thought"
not "I was"
adjustment shock/loss

I’m only 50, and I should be doing this and that
and the other cos they say life begins at 40 but I
can’t and I suppose it does bother me. It’s
frustrating that people of my own age are, you can
see them flying their kite and you feel as if you can’t,
well you can’t…which is so stupid, I just think I’m the
fittest because there are 3 girls (she and her sisters) and
I’m the middle one and I thought well I’m the fittest and I
used to work like a horse and I thought I was the strongest
and then all of a sudden it’s just been cut down and I can’t
do half of what I used to do.
Turning into themes

I’m only 50, and I should be doing this and that and the other cos they say life begins at 40 but I can’t and I suppose it does bother me. It’s frustrating that people of my own age are, you can see them flying their kite and you feel as if you can’t, well you can’t…which is so stupid, I just think I’m the fittest because there are 3 girls (she and her sisters) and I’m the middle one and I thought well I’m the fittest and I used to work like a horse and I thought I was the strongest and then all of a sudden it’s just been cut down and I can’t do half of what I used to do.
Themes Clustered

Trying to make sense/searching for an explanation
Uncertainty/lack of understanding
Frustration
Confusion and anger

Implications for the self-concept
Self-critical/self-doubt
Loss and bereavement/shock/adjustment
Social comparison - with others
  - within family
  - with self before the pain
  - Nostalgia/selective recall of the past

Mobility/physical restrictions/planning activity
Social/identity problems and withdrawal

Now go back to original extract and look again
Evaluation

Developed assessment tool
Conducted evaluation of corpus
3 major databases
300 papers overall 1996-2008, upward trend
69 papers on illness experience - detailed exam of 51

- Good: 14 (27%)
- Acceptable: 28 (55%)
- Unacceptable: 9 (18%)

Interpretation/explanation?
Unacceptable

Not consistent with principles of IPA
Lacks detail of method
Poor evidence base - this is usually the problem

Large no descriptive themes from large no participants
Insufficient extracts from participants to support themes
Theme: short summary & 1 or 2 extract without interpretation
No explanation how prevalence determined
Analysis is crude, lacks nuance

Not trustworthy
Acceptable

Consistent with IPA theory
Transparency of method
Coherent plausible analysis

Sufficient sampling from corpus for each theme
Approx half of participants or measure of prevalence
Good

Must clearly meet all the criteria for acceptable
Corpus well sampled:
Clearly satisfies prevalence, representativeness, variability

Offers something extra, point to degree of excellence:
Well focused, learned in depth about specific thing
Strong data or interpretation or integration
Reader engaged and finds it enlightening
Actually usually find it has all of these!
Distinctive features of IPA

Concern with personal lived experience
What is that like for that person?
How do they make sense of what is happening?

Theoretical grounding but emphasis on praxis
Detailed idiographic analysis
Nuanced account of convergence/divergence

Good with:
existential, hot, novel, ambiguous, processual
IPA and music?

What is it like to experience music?
What does music mean in your life?
What happens to you when you listen to that piece of music?

What does it mean to be musical?
What is the relationship between musician & tutor like?
How do you think of your instrument?
What does it feel like to perform?
Describe your experience of improvisation?
Useful reading


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