

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

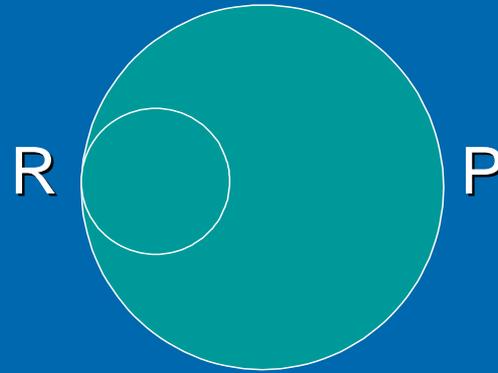
Systematic search for experiential themes

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

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comparison with ought self

loss

social comparison- others

social comparison-family

nostalgia

loss of self

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

Smith JA, Flowers P and Larkin M (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, Research*. London: Sage.

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