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Looking forward: conceptual and methodological developments in interpretative phenomenological analysis Introduction to the Special Issue

Jonathan A Smith and Virginia Eatough (Guest Editors)

We are delighted to introduce this special issue which showcases recent developments in IPA. Reflecting on IPA's progress since its inception over twenty years ago (Smith, 1996), it is fair to say that its scope and influence has increased substantially. IPA's place as an established experiential qualitative approach has, for some time, been widely recognised in UK psychology and in recent years, this is paralleled by its growth across the world. Moreover, researchers are now using IPA in fields beyond psychology such as humanities, sports science and organizational studies.

When we put out a call for papers, we hoped to tap into the rich seam of innovative ideas and thinking that we know is happening within the IPA community and we have not been disappointed. The papers in this special issue showcase several methodological and conceptual developments and we think both experienced IPA researchers as well as those considering using it for the first time will find this issue an exciting and essential resource.

There are nine papers in all and the first one by Jonathan is a synthesis of a series of keynotes given over the past year and it represents his current thinking on the meaning of meaning-making in IPA, for both the participant and the researcher. What this meaning-making looks like for both is described and fleshed out empirically and conceptually. The paper, like the others in this special issue, illustrates how IPA continues to evolve and develop, seeking to remain fresh and open to new ways of thinking.

The next three papers speak variously to important phenomenological concerns, namely, intersubjectivity, temporality and relationality in the context of developing novel IPA designs. The second paper by Michael Larkin, Rachel Shaw and Paul Flowers explores how the principles of IPA can be used productively within multi perspective designs to address systemic experiential phenomena, often in applied settings. They identify several design types to guide researchers wanting to understand, for instance, intersubjective meaning from a dyadic, group or systemic perspective. The take-home message from the paper is

that these designs can have greater impact because of the multiple vantage points which can strengthen the explanatory power of the analysis.

The third paper by Joanna Farr and Isabella Nizza how IPA researchers are turning their attention to more complex and pioneering designs in order to capture the temporal dimensions of our lived experiences. They review longitudinal designs with IPA (LIPA) elaborating on those qualities which make for a successful LIPA study as well as examining a range of methodological choices such as different data gathering techniques.

Similarly, the fourth paper by Zoë Boden, Michael Larkin and Malvika Iyer attends to another important phenomenological concept, that of relationality, and explores it via the synthesis of multimodal data gathering techniques. Their specific focus is those sometimes hard-to-grasp relational experiences which participants might struggle to reflect on and articulate. Here, the authors describe how they employed a 'drawing and talking' approach to explore disruptive relational experiences via what they call a Relational Mapping interview which adapts the traditional IPA interview format.

Jonathan introduced the concept of the 'gem' (Smith, 2011) as an analytic tool to enhance researcher interpretation. This concept is fruitfully deployed in the fifth paper by Gayle Clifford, Gill Craig and Christine McCourt who aim to understand the lived situation of Jamaican mothers who are HIV positive and who talk to their children about maternal HIV. They undertake a close analysis of three gems, informed by a critical feminist framework and utilising feminist writings on sexuality, mothering and emotion work. The paper problematises policies around disclosure of HIV through the analytic force of those gems.

IPA is widely used within the broad context of health and illness and in the sixth paper, Gianina Postavaru reviews a corpus of IPA studies on parents' experiences of their children's life-limiting illnesses. She applies a meta-ethnographic approach to these studies from which she develops a conceptual model of the parents' experiences. Aspects of the lifeworld such as spatiality and temporality lie at the core of this model, pointing to the capacity of IPA to tap into these human features of the lifeworld. The rapid growth of IPA means there

will be more need, and value, in the future to synthesise results from multiple studies and this paper offers useful insight into the process of doing this.

In the seventh paper, Johanna Spiers and Ruth Riley demonstrate IPA can work usefully alongside other forms of analysis, in this case, thematic analysis. In a large sample of forty seven GPs they were keen to mine the participant's accounts for both depth and breadth, concluding that the combination of these two approaches demonstrates the benefits of analytic pluralism. Whilst depth vs breadth is perhaps the contrast or tension that first springs to mind, Johanna and Ruth go on to identify two further divergences: explicit vs hermeneutic interpretation and pragmatic vs existential focus.

The penultimate paper by Sally Goldspink and Hilary Engward addresses a key concern for all qualitative researchers, that of reflexivity. The paper describes how Sally, during the process of analysing material for her doctoral thesis, became aware of how some of what her participants said chimed with aspects of her own life. Through discussion with Hilary, the idea of 'echoes' to denote these resonances was employed to provide a more detailed understanding of what we are doing when we are reflexive in IPA research.

The final paper sees IPA move into the field of engineering education with a collaborative inquiry of what happens when the cultural practices and norms of a discipline (engineering) are at odds with the philosophical commitments of a phenomenological qualitative approach (IPA). The paper by Adam Kirn, James Huff, Allison Godwin, Monique Ross and Cheryl Cass makes explicit their experiences and describes how they navigate these tensions through the process of collaborative inquiry. It provides a set of thoughtful deliberations which researchers who find themselves in a similar predicament can avail themselves of.

We close this brief introduction by thanking both the contributors and the reviewers. All of them have been a pleasure to work with and have helped make the putting together of the issue a smooth process. In particular we are extremely grateful to all of the reviewers whose careful and thoughtful considerations guided our final deliberations.

References

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