

Understanding more fully: A multimodal hermeneutic-phenomenological approach

Dr Zoë V.R. Boden & Dr Virginia Eatough

Birkbeck University of London

Accepted for publication in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*

Correspondence:

Dr Zoë V.R. Boden

Room 533

Department of Psychological Sciences

Birkbeck University of London

Malet Street

London

WC1E 7HX.

Tel: +44 (0)7966 253 172

Email: z.boden@bbk.ac.uk

This article shares a research methodology that we argue supports human science researchers in their aim to understand lived experiences more fully. Drawing on Merleau-Pontian thinking, the paper outlines three dimensions of sense experience that underpin our approach: the felt-sense, aesthetic aspects of language, and visual imagery. We then detail this approach: the data-collection phase is a creative interviewing method, adapted from Imagery in Movement Method (Schneier, 1989) and focusing technique (Gendlin, 1997). This results in multimodal data: drawings, bodily and verbal accounts, rich in imagery. The analysis is an expanded hermeneutic-phenomenology, and in this article we focus in particular on our method for interpreting visual data. Three examples taken from a case-study about feeling guilty are provided to illustrate the potential of the approach. The paper concludes with some reflections on the impact of using a multimodal approach in human science research.

This article describes a methodological approach that we believe may be useful to other human science researchers, who, like us, are interested in exploring lived experience as fully as possible. There are a growing number of researchers who are committed to moving beyond the reflected upon and languaged dimensions of experience, to additionally explore pre-reflective, bodily, felt experience through various means. This paper argues that one way these felt dimensions become (at least partially) accessible to qualitative researchers is by using a multimodal approach to data-collection and analysis. In this paper we describe and reflect upon one such approach, and to illustrate its potential, draw on material from a case-study about what-it-is-like to feel guilty. Through attention to the multi-sensory, aesthetic aspects of an experience, and how they are disclosed in our research encounters, we argue that researchers can gain a fuller understanding of lived experiences. Firstly, we will briefly situate our research approach within the landscape of hermeneutic-phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy interested in our encounters with phenomena as they appear to us in consciousness (Langdridge, 2007). It was articulated in the early twentieth century primarily by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. The principles of phenomenology were applied to psychological research by Van Kaam (1966), Fischer (1974) and Giorgi (1970) who aimed to illuminate the human condition through understanding lived experience (Langdridge, 2007). Phenomenological psychology offers a way to access human experiences that are often difficult and complex (Giorgi, 1997), particularly to explore subjectivity and embodiment, which are limited by the discursive paradigm (Willig, 2007). A phenomenological approach allows researchers to focus on how we perceive the world in all its fullness and richness; our lived experience (Langdridge, 2007). This includes both reflective meaning-making (using discursive resources) (Smith et al., 2009), but also pre-reflective, pre-linguistic understanding.

Broadly speaking there are two approaches to phenomenological psychology; descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretative). Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenology aims to generate a general structure of the phenomenon by comparing individual experiences to find elements in common. Idiographic elements are "discarded or typified and generalized" (Finlay, 2009, p9). However hermeneutic phenomenological methods, such as those of the Dallas school (Churchill, 2003; Garza 2007, Van Manen, 1990), or British approaches such as Embodied Enquiry (Todres, 2007) or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), embrace interpretation (Finlay, 2009). Our approach follows from these latter methods. We are interested in exploring all the dimensions of a participant's *lifeworld* (embodiment, temporality, selfhood etc.) as underpinned by the work of Merleau-Ponty. We have a specific and explicit commitment to the hermeneutic nature of phenomenological research, the embedded and intersubjective nature of human experience ('being-in-the-world'), and the primacy of the body.

Epistemologically, hermeneutic-phenomenological research does not subscribe to the 'God's eye view' because we (like our participants) are enmeshed with the world, and as such must take a perspective on the phenomena we encounter. We are always already interpreting as we perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 2002/1945), and it is both inevitable and fundamental to our human condition (Finlay, 2009). The world as disclosed to me, in my situated body, is different from the world disclosed to our research participants. Although we do share fundamental aspects of being human (the ontological conditions), we have idiographic ways of experiencing our lives (the ontic conditions) that can be explored through empirical phenomenological psychology (Langdrige, 2007). Following Merleau-Ponty (1968/1964), phenomena are seen as ambiguous and paradoxical, with nuanced and multiple meanings (Finlay, 2009). Finlay (2009) points to Ihde (1993; 2003), to suggest that when embracing multiplicity in this way, phenomenology can be placed within or even beyond postmodernism, in a realm where multiple voices can co-exist, and multistability and multidimensionality are permitted. Thus, the interpretations we offer, in this case regarding an experience of feeling guilty, are not the only interpretations available.

Understanding more fully

Merleau-Ponty begins his essay, *Eye and Mind* (1964: 159), by railing against science, describing it as artificial: "[s]cience manipulates things and gives up living in them", he argues, and scientific thinking 'looks on from above' at a generalised, objectified world. Merleau-Ponty was making the case for viewing art as a means toward better understanding, but his call to return to 'living in' phenomena, can also be seen as important for the human sciences. It is a call to accept, consider and portray phenomena as they are given to us, fully and sensuously, in order to 'get closer' to them. We share his concern that when it comes to understanding human experiences; we should

seek to know them directly (not generally or objectively), through embodied engagement with the world. To do this, we must develop multimodal approaches that consider phenomena in full regard of the “fundamental and most concrete level of human experience which the Greeks called *aisthesis*: ‘sense experience’” (Casey, 1973: xvi). Thus, understanding more fully is not about understanding a phenomenon more ‘correctly’ (multiple interpretations are possible), but about investigating an experience more comprehensively by acknowledging and exploring its sensory aspects, and thereby producing a more layered and nuanced account of the phenomenon. Our multimodal approach is underpinned by three dimensions of sense experience: the *felt-sense*, the aesthetic aspects of language, and visual imagery. First we will introduce these dimensions, before setting out the framework of our approach. The approach includes a four-phase interview process, involving the participant drawing an image in response to their experience, and attends explicitly to the felt-dimension of the experience. It also includes an expanded hermeneutic analysis, including a hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis of the drawing. We will then illustrate this approach in practice, through providing three examples from a case-study about the experience of feeling guilty.

The felt-sense

For Merleau-Ponty, embodiment is the most fundamental dimension of the *lifeworld*. Being-in-the-world accordingly is as a *bodysubject*, an embodied consciousness. Our bodies are how we exist in the world, view the world and express ourselves (Madison, 1981). As the body is ever-present and anterior to thought, it offers a means of communication with the world that is direct and holistic (Gendlin, 2004; Todres, 2007). Bodily being and knowing inhabits the fringes of our consciousness (James, 1890); it is pre-reflective, pre-linguistic, but nevertheless tangible, lived

experience. Sometimes, this bodily knowing is not an immediately identifiable specific emotion or sensation, but something ‘fuzzy’ and difficult to pin down, yet also clearly ‘there’ inside you, telling you about your situation. Gendlin (1997, 2004) describes this type of bodily knowing as the *felt-sense*. It is “blurred [...] diffuse, difficult to describe but nevertheless intense and specific”, it evokes “a complex world of fleeting impressions, which are fuzzy, but full of meaning.” (Petitmengin, 2007: 56). By turning our awareness inward to the centre of the body, and ‘listening’, the *felt-sense* can be identified and its meanings explored. As human science researchers, we attend to this fundamental dimension in order to account for lived experience more fully (Finlay, 2006). Practically, we can do this in three ways: by facilitating our participants to attend to their *felt-sense*; through awareness of our interembodied relationship with our participants; and by interrogating our own *felt-sense* responses reflexively (Finlay, 2005; Todres, 2007). Exploring the *felt-sense* of an experience through these layers of the research encounter enriches our understanding of the phenomenon.

The aesthetic aspects of language

An interest and commitment to bodily feeling does not however mean ignoring language, as the lived body is the source of felt *and* languaged experience (Todres, 2007). Rather the challenge is how to move from the meaning-rich *felt-sense* to the fullest possible verbal account of an experience. In order to help therapists and researchers do this, Gendlin (1997) developed the ‘focusing’ method. Focusing involves pursuing the meanings inherent in the *felt-sense* through a “back-and-forth movement between words and their felt complexity in the lived body” (Todres & Galvin, 2008: 575). Using focusing technique in a research context can help participants explore and language their *felt-sense* experience in ways that feel more ‘faithful’ to what they are trying to express (Todres, 2007). It does this by encouraging participants to ‘try out’ words, to explore

language anew by attending to its aesthetic qualities, and to see which words *feel* right (Todres and Galvin, 2008). When found, the 'right' words resonate in the body, leading to a visible indication of relief or release, for example relaxing back in their seat. But this is a tentative and iterative process. Finding the 'right' words necessarily begins with the *felt-sense*, but as language is itself is a bodily act, a gesture full of meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 2002/1945), it is only when words adequately 'speak' of the experience that they *feel* right. In this way, participant and researcher can slowly move towards a shared "bodily sensed understanding, which, when adequate, is experienced as a 'coming home'" (Todres and Galvin, 2008: 572); a sense of resolution in the communication of a felt experience.

Yet, certain experiences may seem 'unsayable', and in these instances analogy, metaphor and imagery can offer a means to communicate the complexities of *felt-sense* experience outside of literal language (Schneier, 1989). Sometimes participants will seek to express their bodily experiences through invented, spontaneous metaphors (Svendler Nielsen, 2009), but researchers can also prompt participants to try out metaphors and imagery. Metaphors can aid participants' meaning-making (Schön, 1993), act as a 'safe bridge' to enable expression of painful or distressing feelings (Shinebourne and Smith, 2009), and add "a more vivid level of understanding", evoking richer and more nuanced responses in the listener/reader (Levitt, Korman and Angus, 2000: 23). Metaphor is worth pursuing because it offers a link between the *felt-sense* and language (Stelter, 2000), connecting us to the place where "language speaks through silence" (Van Manen, 1990: 49). By listening and feeling for the sensuous, rich, aesthetic 'inner dimension' of the participants' words (Todres, 2007), researchers are provided with an additional layer of meanings to explore through interview and analysis.

Visual imagery

Non-linguistic metaphors may provide an alternative starting-place to explore participants' lived experience, especially where language seems inadequate and words are difficult to find. Visual images can provide the potential for "thick depiction", to complement the potential for 'thick description' in a traditional, in-depth interview, by providing a way to capture some of the participant's bodily knowing whilst circumventing language (Kirova and Emme, 2006: 2; see Ponterroto (2006) for a discussion of 'thick description'). Whilst partial and not capable of capturing any objective 'reality' (Kirova and Emme, 2006), visual images are a way of offering up and interpreting a particular experience. Images offer ambiguity, so they work best metaphorically, where multiple meanings can be found (Dake and Roberts, 1995). An image is also experienced on a sensory, felt level (Hustvedt, 2006) and in part echoes how its creator was bodily involved in the creation (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This kinaesthetic aspect of viewing an image mirrors the kinaesthetic aspect of making it, which in turn may reveal something of the experience being expressed. Merleau-Ponty (1964) draws attention to this by describing how an image is intertwined with its creator through the bodily relationship. The image is not a *representation* of the world, but a way of 'speaking' it and 'delivering up its meaning' (Madison, 1981:96). For the viewer, encountering an image is not a sequential experience, like reading, as an image presents itself all at once and remains there, unchanging, a permanent residue of the subjectivity present in its creation (Hustvedt, 2006). As such, visual imagery offers a 'way in' to the phenomenon that is non-linear, non-linguistic, and directly intertwined with the *felt-sense* experience. Thus, an image created by a participant can provide an interesting starting point for discussion in interview, but can also provide in itself a medium through which to explore the phenomenon more fully.

We have briefly outlined the importance of these three dimensions of sense experience (the *felt-sense*, the aesthetic aspects of language, and visual imagery) which form the underpinnings of our multimodal approach. In doing so we are subscribing to Kirova and Emme's (2006: 22) "*expanded hermeneutic phenomenology*", which understands research 'texts' to include any pertinent sensory information. Bodily, visual and verbal data are all valid forms of meaning and offer sites for interpretation. In the next section we will describe how we translated this thinking into a structured data-collection and analytic method.

Our approach

Multi-modal data collection

We used Imagery and Movement Method (IMM; Schneier, 1989) as the basis for a novel phenomenological, semi-structured interview that collected bodily, verbal and visual, data. IMM argues that typically we have two states of being, the 'analog', characterized by imagery, metaphor, analogy, pattern and intuition, and the more every-day 'digital' state, the rational, linear, verbal mode. IMM facilitates individuals to explore their feelings and thoughts more deeply by encouraging them to connect with their 'analog' state. It was originally developed as a therapeutic tool, but IMM can be adapted for phenomenologically-oriented research (Robbins, 2003; Schneier, 1989). Schneier argues that the method encourages participants to offer "visual, auditory, olfactory, proprioceptive, and kinaesthetic images as well as thoughts and feelings" (Schneier, 1989: 326), and that therefore it may prove valuable for exploring the body-world relationships associated with Merleau-Ponty's concerns.

An IMM therapy session (Schneier, 1989) has four phases:

- 1) Expression: The client is guided to make an abstract, colour drawing, either with or without the stimulus of a particular experience.
- 2) Mapping: The client is guided through a process of interpreting their drawing. This is firstly in terms of each separate element, and secondly in terms of the whole image.
This is an orientation phase, with the drawing providing a map to the client's "inner landscape" (Schneier, 1989: 316).
- 3) Fantasy Enactment: The client begins by 'inhabiting' the most powerful or 'charged' part of the image, and allowing the scene "to unfold before her like an inner movie" (Schneier, 1989: 316). The client is then helped to enact this scene, with the support of the therapist.
- 4) Verbal Translation: The client is encouraged to become more reflective, and to re-engage with their 'digital' mode of being. This stage includes the client's written reflections.

Our adaptation remains faithful to this process wherever possible, but some changes were necessary to fulfil the ethical and methodological requirements of the research context. Firstly, we felt that 'Fantasy Enactment' was too powerful to utilise outside a therapeutic context, so instead we turned to Gendlin's (1997) 'focusing' method as an alternative way of incorporating the focus on bodily experience. Focusing encourages the participant to move between their *felt-sense* experience and verbal, articulated understanding, just as IMM aims to move participants from their 'analog' to 'digital' states. We chose to begin the interview with a focusing exercise to support participants to shift into their 'analog' state, and we embedded focusing techniques throughout the interview process so as to integrate bodily awareness into each phase (expression, mapping, verbal translation). So, for example, during the expression stage, notes were made of the bodily way in which the participant attended to their drawing, and, during the interpretation stage we observed how the participant was bodily 'in the room' and occasionally a particular gesture was reflected back (e.g. 'I noticed you were making this gesture, can you tell me anything

more about that?'). Secondly, we adapted the verbal translation phase, in line with Robbins (2003), so that all reflections were spoken, rather than written, and included questions that were less directive and more open-ended than those in the original IMM. This aligned the process with a more traditional phenomenological research interview, which aimed to explore the experience, rather than bring about therapeutic change.

Therefore, the research interview was structured around four phases:

- 1) Focusing: The participant was guided through a preparation exercise. They were seated and it was suggested they close their eyes if they felt comfortable with this. They were asked to 'let the world sink away' and 'turn their attention inwards'. They were guided to focus their attention on different areas of their body and notice what was happening (any sensations, tension etc.) without trying to change it.
- 2) Expression: The participant was asked to think about a time they felt guilty about something that happened in an intimate relationship. They were then asked to look at a selection of coloured pens, crayons, pastels and pencils and to think about their experience. When ready they were asked to 'let' their hand pick up whichever colour they felt attracted to and to begin an abstract drawing. They were to continue focusing on their experience, and to keep drawing until they felt finished. The interviewer attended to how the participant went about the process of the drawing, for example the order in which elements were drawn, and the bodily way in which the participant engaged with the activity.
- 3) Mapping: Once the participant decided the drawing was finished, they were guided through a process of interpreting their image, firstly in terms of each separate element, and then as a whole. It is paramount that this interpretation is led by the participant,

(albeit within the context of the research encounter), so they discover their own meanings, as a process of 'unfolding' (Schneier, 1989). They were asked to choose one part of the drawing that seemed most important to them and to attune themselves again to their bodily *felt-sense* and report anything at all that came to mind. When needed they were prompted to describe any sensations, images or feelings that emerged whilst they were thinking about the guilt-experience and its relationship to that element of their drawing. Once the participant had spoken about each element, they were asked if there was a 'story' to the drawing or if they might choose a title. The mapping phase focused the participant entirely on their felt-sense, without consideration of how they or others had reflected on the experience. The interviewer attended not only to what was said, but to the participant's gestures and the bodily way they were 'in the room', as well as to the interviewer's own bodily responses.

- 4) Verbal Translation: Finally the participant was encouraged to become more reflective, and was asked to narrate the events that surrounded their guilt-feelings. The participant was encouraged to say how they ascribed meaning to what happened and to reflect on their feelings about the events. The interview ended by asking the participant how they had felt about taking part in the research.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the drawings were kept as part of the data. It is worth noting here that participants are not required to have any skill in drawing, and that a thorough briefing prior to the interview was needed so that participants were completely prepared for the interview format, and could be reassured that their creative skills were not being evaluated. After interview thorough reflexive notes were made, paying particular attention to the way in which the drawing was done, the interviewer's own bodily responses and the interembodied encounter, including the background 'tone' of the interview. Any sensations that

had been experienced by the interviewer, thoughts and feelings about the participant's drawing process, their emotional engagement, and so on, were included. The data therefore included the interview transcript (verbal), the drawing (visual), and the researchers' notes about the bodily and intersubjective aspects of the encounter (felt, kinaesthetic).

An expanded phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis

Having collected such rich, multimodal data, we required a complementary analytic method that was flexible enough to be adapted to suit all our data. We chose a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach with three distinct, but intertwined phases: analysis of the transcript, and analysis of the drawing, and thematic integration. The verbal transcripts were analysed following a conventional psychological method of hermeneutic phenomenology, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This was adapted so that during the initial noting (coding) stage, there was a constant back-and-forth between the drawing and the participant's verbal account, as one informed the other in hermeneutic dialogue. Particular attention was paid to the use of metaphors and imagery, and time was spent exploring the aesthetic qualities of the participant's language. However, as much has been written about using this method with verbal data, it is interpretation of the visual data in this study that warrants particular attention here, and this has been under-explored elsewhere.

The second, but intertwined, phase of analysis explored the researchers' own interpretations of the drawing. As with verbal data, there are different methods to interpret images, including compositional analysis, semiology, discourse analysis, content analysis, and psychoanalysis (Rose, 2001). Yet, Pink (2007) suggests researchers may also need to invent new methods of organising and interpreting visual materials, therefore, to complement our theoretical orientation, and to

encourage a rigorous approach, we developed a hermeneutic-phenomenological framework (Boxes 1 and 2). This drew on compositional analysis, which seemed to resonate most closely with hermeneutic-phenomenological research approaches, exploring how the image was made, how it is composed, and what meanings it may convey (Rose, 2001). Detailed commentary was produced that first described, and then explicitly explored the meanings inherent in each element of the framework. (See also Guillemin (2004), for an alternative adaptation of Rose's (2001) analysis.)

To interpret an image rigorously, the researcher must look at it very carefully (Rose, 2001), so that, through experiencing "the flux of tension and release, [they] can grasp the rhythms of visual forces making up the structure [...] arous[ing] each person's *resonating* personal associations and individual emotions" (Rose, 1991: 142, italics in original). At each stage of the analysis the researchers' paid attention to how the image and their analysis resonated in their bodies. In this way, the researcher is engaged multimodally with the data. This process is similar to 'dwelling' with verbal data; it is slow, careful and iterative. Merleau-Ponty (1964: 164) suggests the viewer must *be-with* the image, and "see according to, or with it". Its qualities (depth, colour) are not 'things' in-the-world, but they do exist and are experienced in a very particular way (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). A specific use of colour, for example, resonates with us because it tugs on the myriad sensory, culturally-embedded meanings we each hold in our memories.

Finally, having reached a feeling of gestalt (Smith et al., 2009) with both the analysis of the verbal transcript and drawings separately, all analytic comments were integrated to enrich one another in a hermeneutic dialogue. This resulted in one set of emergent themes that were then clustered to create a thematic structure, which informed the writing-up process.

A note on using drawings as data

It is worth mentioning here that within qualitative psychology specifically there is a paucity of research using images as data (rather than as an elicitation tool), and almost none using drawings/paintings (Gillies, Harden, Johnson, et al. 2005). We found only three psychological studies that used participant-produced drawings or paintings as data (Gillies et al., 2005; Guillemin, 2004; Robbins, 2003), and very little is written about undertaking this type of research in this context. Necessarily therefore, we have turned to the fields of sociology and art therapy to support our approach (e.g. Gladding, 1992; Pink, 2007) One important epistemological issue for researchers using images is how to 'read' visual material, because, as with verbal material, its 'status' requires definition (Gillies et al., 2005). Gillies et al. (2005) offer four different ways to read their research paintings; a) as telling something about the phenomenon, b) as telling something about the person who produced it, c) as telling something about the cultural resources available in relation to the topic, or d) as a stimulus to elicit further talk. In our study, we chose to 'read' the drawings firstly as a means to elicit verbal exploration in the interview, but secondly, as telling us something about the phenomenon itself, through interpretative analysis. We argue (like Guillemin, 2004) that drawings produce meanings independently of a verbal narrative, and that when situated within the context of the research as a whole, drawings can provide a rich source of meaning. Whilst images are undoubtedly ambiguous (Dake and Roberts, 1995; Pink, 2007), so is language (Lynn and Lea, 2005), therefore just as phenomenological researchers understand verbal data to *partially* represent a participant's reality (Smith, 1995), so drawings can also be seen as a partial manifestation of meaning and significance for the participant. Like language, images are the product of a particular shared culture (Reavey and Johnson, 2008), time and place (Guillemin, 2004). So, in line with an expanded hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, we treated visual and verbal data similarly: the participants' own meaning-making is primary (empathic

hermeneutics), but the researchers' meaning-making is also of importance (questioning hermeneutics; see Ricoeur, 1970, for the original description of empathic and suspicious hermeneutics, and Smith et al., 2009 for a description of the adaptation to which we subscribe).

Box 1. Framework for the analysis of the drawings

1. Contents: Describe each of the distinct elements of the image
2. Composition: How are the elements spatially laid out on the page? Are they sparse or dense, are there areas of blank page, do the elements overlap? Is there a sense of repetition, 'rhyme' or pattern?
3. Balance: How do elements interplay? Is there a sense of equilibrium or disequilibrium? Is there symmetry or pattern?
4. Geometry: What shapes are used? How do these interplay together?
5. Materials: Which material has been used for each element?
6. Texture: What are the textural characteristics of each element?
7. Colour: How have hue (colour), saturation (vividness) and value (lightness/darkness) been used?
8. Depth / Perspective: What spatial depth and perspective has been created through space and colour?
9. Temporality / Dynamism: Is there a sense of rhythm or movement? Does the image suggest a snapshot, continuity or duration?
10. Focus: What is the visual focus of the image? What is your eye drawn to?
11. Expressive content / Empathic reaction: What is the emotional tone of the image? What feelings does the viewer have in response (bodily, emotional, memories, images)?
12. Signs / Symbolism: Are there any overt symbols or cultural references included?

13. Style: Does the image 'shout' or is it 'quiet', or something inbetween? Does the drawing seem to imitate or reflect a particular trend or style e.g. cartoonish, child-like, modern, romantic, pop-art etc?

14. Text: Has any text been included, for example a title? Where has this been placed? In what way has it been included? What style, font, capitalisation etc. is used?

15. Distraction / Noise: Do any elements draw your attention away from the main focus? Is there a sense of confusion or clarity in the image?

Box 2. Framework for the analysis of the production of the image

1. Speed: How quickly or slowly was the image produced? Did the participant spend longer on particular elements?

2. Pressure: How were materials used bodily? How much pressure was applied to the page?

3. Colour: How was colour chosen? With what degree of speed, decisiveness etc.?

4. Expression: What did the participants facial, gestural, or verbal expressions suggest about their process?

5. Mood: What was the background atmosphere or 'tone' whilst the drawing was being created?

6. Emotion: Was any particular emotion evident in the production, or discussed in the interview?

7. Gestures: Were there any notable gestures or movements during the process?

8. Absorption: Were they involved or distanced from the activity?

9. Hesitancy: Were there any false starts or pauses in the process?

Edward's case: Three illustrations of a multimodal approach

To illustrate the potential of this multimodal approach, we now present three brief examples from one participant's account of his guilt-experience. These examples demonstrate the utility of:

visual-to-verbal imagery, multimodal metaphor, and the researchers' interpretation of the drawing. Our participant, Edward (a pseudonym), was in his early thirties. He was unknown to the researchers and responded to a call to interview men about their experiences of feeling guilty within an intimate relationship. This case-study followed the interview and analytic procedure described above, and formed part of a larger hermeneutic-phenomenological project that primarily asked 'what is it like to feel guilty?' Edward's account described an experience of infidelity during a long-term, heterosexual relationship (See Boden, 2013 for further details). He chose oil pastels for his drawing, which he originally produced 'landscape', but rearranged to a 'portrait' layout during the interview (Figure 1).

Visual-to-verbal imagery: A threshold

This first example illustrates how Edward 'discovered' a visual metaphor in his drawing, how this imagery was developed in the interview, and how this pointed us towards a fuller understanding of the centrality of ambivalence in Edward's guilt-experience. Edward had been reticent to engage with his drawing at first, but after turning his image around by 90°, he immediately identified a 'doorway' in the cavernous quality of his drawing. This doorway 'popped' out the moment he turned the drawing around and literally changed his perspective. This metaphor and associated imagery then became a touchstone throughout the interview, helping Edward communicate and make sense of his experience.

Edward described how the doorway led him to familiar location, where *"the things that I was alluding to before took place"*. Engaging imaginatively with this imagery, Edward was asked to describe what it was like outside that doorway:

E: Erm (5) I guess outside is a lot darker. It looks like inside is slightly warmer, but then at the same time it also looks like it's (2) like there's almost like a fiery aspect, which, erm, I don't know. I guess it indicates there's er, that going inside, although while it looks warmer and more inviting, there's um, it leads to more complications, than perhaps outside, that is colder and maybe darker, and gloomier [...] if you take the right route to avoid causing someone hurt or loss, it's even if it's the right route to take, that can perhaps lead to unhappiness or even complete discontent, whereas taking the wrong route, in a sense, although whilst warm and inviting, and it looks like the most positive thing to do, um, purely on a selfish level, it's not (3) I don't know, it invites further complications, so I don't know. [...]

In analysis we considered how Edward's doorway represents an important threshold, both as a material part of his experience, but also as a metaphorical route to understanding his infidelity. Outside the door represents his current relationship, cold and dark, whilst inside is warm and inviting. Outside is mundane, whilst inside remains mysterious. Edward's experience of this duality is complicated by his understanding that while inside may be inviting, that warmth is fiery; inviting him in, but also inviting complications into his life. Looking at this extract in terms of the *felt-sense* being explored here, we suggest that Edward's doorway communicates a feeling of paralysis. He feels pulled between two worlds (sameness and otherness), each of which simultaneously attract and repel him. His guilt-experience begins with a feeling of being pulled between, and apart, by his ambivalent desires.

Further, Edward accounts for his choice to 'cross the threshold' by describing being "*drawn to the idea*" of being with the "*other person*". His doorway symbolises his *felt-sense* of being *pulled* into

temptation, and he expands on this aspect through playing with the threshold imagery in layered ways:

E: It's about temptation I suppose, going through the door. [...] I think in most of these situations you do reach, you do reach an edge when you can go either way. And you know when you are there. [...] obviously you are aware of your own hesitancy, and you are aware of what's right and wrong, what you believe is, you know, the right thing to do in a certain situation. But you kind of reach a sort of precipice, where you can either go over or you can stay on the other side, where, the other side almost kind of denotes safety. It kind of denotes this idea of, yeah, it can be dull, grim, boring, I guess like the weather was. Or it can be, you know, doing the wrong thing, going over, is, can be more exciting, more interesting.

Here Edward extends the threshold metaphor through describing “going over” and standing on a “precipice”. This imagery further highlights Edward’s *felt-sense* of danger, and again illustrates his ambivalence. The Otherness tempts Edward precisely because it is paradoxical; a mesmeric alchemy of fiery danger and inviting warmth. The invitation of the situation cannot be separated from its danger; it is one and the same (Carr, 2009), and it is drawing him in. Yet simultaneously, there is again a sense of paralysis, as Edward vacillates on his threshold, uncertain which option is ‘right’. This lived experience of ambivalence is particularly evident in the incoherence of his imagery. For example, “you can go over or stay on the other side” reveals he is unclear which side is now ‘other’. Is he moving into difference, or already there? As sameness and otherness dissolve, Edward seems confused as to what represents the alterity of ‘Other’, and what he has already incorporated into himself. For us as researchers, Edward’s imagery allows us to see that whilst he acknowledged clear dichotomous moments of choice, his sense-making around this experience

remains confused because of his feelings of ambivalence. Edward's 'discovery' of this imagery within his drawing and our being able to 'play' with it during the interview powerfully facilitated a fuller understanding of this aspect of his experience.

Multimodal metaphor: A syrupy tone

In attempting to 'get-close' to the felt experience of guilt, part of the 'translation' phase of the interview explicitly asked Edward to explore various sensory metaphors. After 'trying out' some of our suggestions (colour, texture), Edward led himself to an evocative adjective, "syrupy", to describe what he called the 'tone' of his experience.

E: no one had really slept for a very long time, we were all in varying degrees of mood, and you know, had taken all sorts of intoxicants and I don't know why syrupy seems to be the, the tone that sort of fits, but I think most people were speaking in this kind of way, as you do when you get tired, but also er in a relatively flirtatious sort of way. [...] what should have been one night I guess but it just went on and it was very, it got murkier and more kind of, I don't know, uncertain as it continued. I think if we're trying to highlight something that comes out, rather than colour, or texture, I think the voice, the syrupy way that people were speaking, kind of like fits the memory the most.

'Syrupy' is initially chosen to describe the tired, flirtatious and intoxicated way that people were speaking (an auditory metaphor), but extending it to describe the 'feeling-tone' (Todres, Galvin & Dahlberg, 2007) of his whole experience feels right for Edward. This is because 'syrupy' is a multimodal metaphor, involving auditory, gustatory and kinaesthetic dimensions. In analysis we embraced this multimodality. Where Edward links 'syrupy' with the murkiness of his drawing to suggest disorientation, in analysis, we also explored the sweet, sticky, treacly, and treacherous

qualities of this word. We noted the sexuality this metaphor hints at, and how it echoes Edward's symbolic doorway as an experience that is ambivalently both inviting and dangerous. Further, 'syrupy' summons up a thick and viscous tactility, which through attending reflexively to our *felt-sense* responses, suggests melting and melding, which when coupled with sensuality, again echoes Edward's experience of a fluid merging of self and Other. This deep interpretation of 'syrupy' then illuminates Edward's altered experience of self, world and time:

E: I didn't um think about it at the time. It was more something that was just ongoing [...] It was before then (.) very, very hazy, very murky [...] things were just taking place, it was just on-going, and I guess that's where things do get a little bit hazy, do get a little bit murky.

Edward describes his infidelity as part of a hazy, murky world, an alternate reality that is disorientating and dis-inhibiting, where one thing morphs into another. Here is a further merging, this time of self and world, as both Edward's state of mind and his world seem hazy. His normal temporal experience also collapses, as time is stretched so that everything is eternally "on-going" in the immediacy of the present.

Edward's multimodal metaphor, 'syrupy', really illuminates the 'what-it-is-like' of his guilt-experience; sultry, distorted, decelerated and confusing. It is the temporal slow of moving through a viscous world, but also the sweet, headiness of intoxication, and the stickiness of a fly-trap. By finding 'syrupy' to be the "tone that sort of fits", Edward captures his *felt-sense*, but he also locates his guilt-experience as a feeling of being caught within a morphed alternate reality, where things are "uncertain", in essence a world of Otherness. Edward's discovery of this multimodal

metaphor was pivotal to our understanding of how his guilt as an altered way of being-in-the-world.

The researchers' interpretation of the drawing: Layers of deception

One aspect of Edward's experience that is problematic from an analytic perspective is the self-deception, justification and denial inherent in the guilt-experience. Taking a more critical perspective can partially illuminate this, for example exploring how Edward's account of being "drawn in" and overpowered by temptation is a way of minimising his personal accountability. But, for us Edward's self-deception was particularly highlighted by comparing our own interpretations of Edward's drawing with his account. Here he describes how he produced the drawing:

E: it was just about the importance I guess of filling the entire page, making sure that, you know- [...] now that it's completed, it's over, it's in the past, that sort of thing, that kind of makes, you kind of make a slowly, more clear picture. You can fill the whole picture in if you've experienced it and it's all done. And it's all to an extent out of the way.

It was very important to Edward that he cover the whole page with the oil-pastel, and he interprets this as indicating that he has dealt with this experience and put it behind him. Although Edward describes it as a 'clear picture', this interpretation was unconvincing. By comparing it with our own interpretation, we were able to interrogate alternate meanings concealed within Edward's statement. Looking at his drawing, we see it is murky grey, brown and black, and he chose oil-pastel, the most smudgy and greasy of the materials on offer, which he blended and merged layer over layer. A short extract of our interpretation emphasises these qualities:

This image is a powerful statement of the murkiness of Edward's experience. Every sweep of oil-pastel is used intently, and together they create a rough, furrowed, matt texture, like the battlefields of the Somme [...] The whole image is sludgy, difficult, dirty, heavy-going muddiness. Edward produced the drawing in a deeply focused way. He pressed hard on to the paper, trying to get as much colour from the pastel as he could, and chose each one with care, hesitating to check the colour was correct. There was a deliberateness about these actions. [...] There is depth in the nestling shapes, grey, red, brown, black, and a feeling of getting deeper into something, or being swallowed up by it. All the weight of the image sucks you in and down. [...] Arguably, the drawing is scatological; it is an excretion of everything he wishes to be rid of.

Edward suggests that it is only now his experience is truly over that he can fill in the picture clearly, yet in comparison, we suggest his image is covering, not clarifying this experience. It transpires at the end of the interview that Edward has kept his infidelity secret from both the other people involved. Keeping these 'others' in the dark perhaps means he cannot afford for his experience to be too self-apparent either. But by drawing this dark and murky image, he seems to reveal more of the 'truth' of his experience than his verbal account permits - rather than having resolved his guilt, he has attempted to obscure it. He is engaged in a process of self-deception that involves covering his experience under layers of justification, and burying it in his own confusion. Thus, from our perspective, having his drawing *and* verbal account to interpret together, helped us attend to how self-deception appears to play a part in Edward's guilt-experience. The apparent contradiction between Edward's interpretation of his image and ours sensitised us to other contradictions within the (verbal) account, and helped point us towards alternative interpretations of Edward's story, some of which we then chose to foreground. These interpretations helped us to

flesh out a deeper understanding of Edward's experience; one which was able to incorporate his disclosure about keeping his behaviour secret.

Reflections

In this article we have argued that to do justice to the richness of human experience, researchers should explore the use of multimodal methods of data-collection *and* analysis. We described how, with the help of Gendlin's (1997) focusing techniques, we adapted Schneier's (1989) *Imagery in Movement Method*, to collect multimodal data, and then undertook an 'expanded' hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis. We illustrated our approach with three examples that demonstrate how we explored visual-to-verbal imagery, multimodal metaphor, and our interpretation of the drawing. Finally, we want to reflect briefly on this approach.

The method we have described resulted in verbal, visual, and bodily data, rich in metaphorical imagery and ripe for interpretation. We feel that understanding bodily experience is fundamental to understanding lived experience, and that due attention needs to be paid to both the participants' and the researchers' *felt-sense* experience. Because a *felt-sense* often appears via multiple sensory registers simultaneously, including the visual, kinesic, tactile and auditory modes (Petitmengin, 2007), activities such as drawing, which tap into several registers at once, can provide a rich source of meaning about an experience (Malchiodi, 2005) and can be incorporated within the research process. Creating images aids exploration of those experiences (like feeling guilty) that are not easily communicated verbally (Temple and McVittie, 2005), and through drawing a participant may express something fundamental about their *lifeworld* that is not necessarily verbally conscious at the start of the interview encounter. Via their drawings, participants can experience themselves and their stories differently (Gladding, 1992). The drawing offers an anchor or container for their feelings (Malchiodi, 2005) providing enough distance to

permit a new perspective, such as when Edward reoriented his drawing and suddenly discovered the doorway image.

In the act of drawing, the participant is bodily engaged with their felt experience (Malchiodi, 2005). Merleau-Ponty (1964) draws attention to this when arguing that an artist translates the world into images via their body, not their mind. The bodily way in which an image is drawn does not just provide a clue to how the experience is *represented*, it is the *expression* of that experience (Schneier, 1989). The act of drawing and reflecting on the image can involve real-time discoveries for participants, but this approach also helps highlight inconsistencies and contradictions to the researcher. This was true in Edward's case, where by dwelling at length with the verbal, drawn and bodily data we could begin to make coherent sense of Edward's holistic guilt-experience, including the layers of deception and ambivalence. Edward spent so long painstakingly covering every section of the paper, and this was echoed in a *felt-sense* of him mired in his deception, persistently trying to conceal and contain his experience from himself and others. His image expressed his struggle to bury something without being buried along with it. The kinaesthetic qualities of his experience, re-enacted and captured in the drawing, illuminate meanings in ways that verbal or visual data independently would not do with such clarity or force.

The drawing process also gave rise to verbal interpretations that echoed the visual and bodily elements, including 'syrupy', a multimodal metaphor that illuminated Edward's feelings of disorientation and otherworldliness. Metaphors like this communicate *felt-sense* experience, which in turn helps reveal the participant's experience of being-in-the-world more fully. Edward struggled to find the 'right' metaphor, but with support found the word that adequately expressed his complex, multisensory experience, a metaphor that *felt* right. By exploring the aesthetic

aspects of his metaphors in our analysis, we were able to do justice to his attempts to translate his felt-experience into verbal language.

To conclude, working multimodally opens up multiple dimensions of experience for exploration, and combining these, so as to work simultaneously across different sensory registers (Petitmengin, 2007) was the key to developing a fuller understanding of Edward's guilt-experience. Methods like this allow the "multidimensional, subtle sense of embodied experience and meaning making" (Svendler Nielsen, 2009: 90) to be communicated in a research context. For us, those fragments of Edward's experience that were at first concealed or unspeakable were not only encouraged to surface, but helped illuminate his whole guilt-experience. We would urge other researchers interested in the experiential dimension of human life to follow colleagues in other fields by exploring multimodal approaches, such as the one described here, in order to more fully understand their participants' experiences, as they are lived.

[Figure 1. Edward's drawing after rotating it to reveal a 'doorway'.]

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank 'Edward' for sharing his story. We would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments.

References

- Boden, ZVR (2013) 'Mapping the multiple-dimensions of men's guilt-experiences: Feelings, temporality, narrative'. Unpublished PhD thesis. Birkbeck University of London.
- Carr D (2009) Virtue, mixed emotions and moral ambivalence. *Philosophy* 84: 31-46.
- Casey ES (1973) 'Introduction'. In: Dufrenne, M *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp.xlv- lxvii.
- Dake D.M & Roberts B (1995) 'The visual analysis of visual metaphor'. In: *Eyes on the Future: Converging Images, 27th Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association*, Chicago, IL October 18-22, 1995.
- Finlay L (2005) "'Reflexive embodied empathy": A phenomenology of participant-researcher intersubjectivity'. *The Humanistic Psychologist* 33(4): 271-292.
- Finlay L (2006) 'The body's disclosure in phenomenological research'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 19-30.
- Gendlin ET (1997) *A process model*. New York, NY: The Focusing Institute. Available at: <http://www.focusing.org/process.html>
- Gendlin ET (2004) 'The new phenomenology of carrying forward'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 37: 127-151.
- Gillies V, Harden A, Johnson K, Reavey P, Strange V, and Willig C (2005). 'Painting pictures of embodied experience: The use of nonverbal data production for the study of embodiment'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2: 199-212.

- Gladding S (1992) *Counseling as an art: The creative arts in counseling*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Guillemin M (2004) 'Understanding illness: Using drawings as a research method'. *Qualitative Health Research* 14(2): 272-289.
- Hustvedt S (2005). *Mysteries of the rectangle: Essays on painting*. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press.
- James W (1890) *Principles of psychology* (Two vols). London: Macmillan.
- Kirova A and Emme M (2006) 'Using photography as a means of phenomenological seeing: "Doing phenomenology" with immigrant children'. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 6(Spec. Ed.): 1-12.
- Kvale S and Brinkman S (2009) *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Levitt H, Korman Y, and Angus, L (2000). 'A metaphor analysis in treatments of depression: Metaphor as a marker of change'. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 13(1): 23-35.
- Lynn N and Lea S J (2005) 'Through the looking glass: Considering the challenges visual methodologies raise for qualitative research'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2: 213-225.
- Madison G B (1981) *The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A search for the limits of consciousness*. Ohio, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Malchiodi CA (2005) 'Expressive therapies: History, theory, and practice'. In Malchiodi CA (ed) *Expressive therapies* New York, NY: The Guildford Press, pp.1-15.

- Merleau-Ponty M (1964) 'Eye and Mind'. (Dallery C trans). In Edie JM (ed) *The primacy of perception, and other essays on phenomenological psychology, philosophy of art, history and politics* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp.159-192. Original work published in 1964.
- Merleau-Ponty M (2002) *Phenomenology of perception* (Smith C trans). London: Routledge. Original work published in 1945.
- Petitmengin C (2007) 'Towards the source of thoughts: The gestural and transmodal dimension of lived experience'. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14(3): 54-82.
- Pink S (2007) *Doing visual ethnography: Images, media and representation in research* (2nd ed). London: Sage.
- Ponterotto, J G (2006). 'Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept "thick description"'. *The Qualitative Report* 11(3): 538-549.
- Reavey P and Johnston K (2008) 'Using the visual image in qualitative research'. In: Stainton Rogers W and Willig C (eds) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* London: Sage, pp.296-314.
- Ricoeur P (1970) *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Robbins BD (2003) 'Being joyful: An empirical-phenomenological study'. In: Fischer CT (ed) *Qualitative research methods for psychologists: Case demonstrations*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- Rose G (2001) *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.

- Rose G J (1991) 'Abstract art and emotion: Expressive form and the sense of wholeness'. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 39: 131-156.
- Schneier S (1989) 'The imagery in movement method: A process tool bridging psychotherapeutic and transpersonal inquiry'. In: Valle RS and Halling S (eds) *Existential phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* New York, NY: Plenum Press, pp.311-328.
- Schön DA (1993) 'Generative metaphor: A perspective on problem-setting in social policy'. In: Ortony A (ed) *Metaphor and thought* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp.137-163.
- Shinebourne P and Smith JA (2009) 'The communicative power of metaphors: An analysis and interpretation of metaphors in accounts of the experience of addiction'. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 83: 59-73.
- Smith JA, Flowers P, and Larkin M (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, method, research*. London: Sage.
- Smith JA (1995) 'Semi structured interviewing and qualitative analysis'. In: Smith, JA, Harré R and Van Langenhove L (eds) *Rethinking methods in psychology* London: Sage, pp.9-26.
- Stelter R (2000) 'The transformation of the body experience into language'. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 31: 63-77.
- Svendler Nielsen C (2009) 'Children's embodied voices: Approaching children's experiences through multi-modal interviewing'. *Phenomenology and Practice* 3(1): 80-93.

- Temple M and McVittie M (2005). 'Ethical and practical issues in using visual methodologies: the legacy of research-originating visual products'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2: 227-239.
- Todres L (2007) *Embodied enquiry: Phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Todres L and Galvin KT (2008) 'Embodied interpretation: A novel way of evocatively representing meanings in phenomenological research'. *Qualitative Research* 8(5): 568-583.
- Todres L, Galvin K and Dahlberg K (2007) 'Lifeworld-led healthcare: Revisiting a humanising philosophy that integrates emerging trends'. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 10: 53-63.
- Van Manen M (1990) *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.