

Humanising Phenomenological analysis: using focus groups, food, and drink to collect data for Descriptive and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Dr Sean Beer

Bournemouth University, Department of Tourism and Hospitality

sbeer@bournemouth.ac.uk

Aim

To explore the use of focus groups, specifically those involving a meal, as a method for phenomenological data collection.

Method

Six focus groups were conducted, in order to examine participants' perceptions of the authenticity of food. The data were analysed using Descriptive, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This is somewhat controversial as many commentators maintain that focus groups cannot be used to collect phenomenological data, however, Smith (2004, p. 50) maintains that:

“While cautious about the use of focus groups for IPA this is another area ripe for exploration.”

Therefore it is a legitimate thing to try. At the same time, the Dialogical approach to phenomenology is based on cyclical interaction between researchers, literature and data where understanding is developed through discussion and reflection, amongst the researchers. Why not include some discussion and reflection, amongst the participants, and in a study looking at food, why not at a meal? What could be more human?

Findings

The focus groups produced data that lead to the construction of a rich phenomenological account. Analysis of the group dynamics, after Jacques Derrida, indicated a very constructive, supportive, but also refining environment.

Conclusion

The use of focus groups is an interesting and useful method of collecting data for phenomenological analysis and should be investigated further, along with the philosophical arguments for such an approach.

Smith, J. A., 2004. Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*; 1, 39-54.