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<cn>8.<em><ct>Thinking About, Doing and Writing up Research Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis<mark>*</mark>

<au>Craig D. Murray and David J. Wilde

<a>A FAMILY OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Phenomenology is the study of lived human experience and how that experience presents itself to, and is perceived by, consciousness. Most contemporary phenomenological approaches are seen as stemming from the founding work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who developed what is known as descriptive or transcendental phenomenology. Husserl (2012) drew a distinction between the act of consciousness and phenomena at which it is directed, and concerned himself with attempting to identify the invariant qualities (or essence) in how particular objects are perceived.

Another key aspect of Husserlian philosophy is that the investigator should suspend, or bracket out, any preconceptions they have in order to clearly identify experience as it is directly and pre-reflectively encountered. Therefore, bracketing involves setting aside or suspending judgement about an object's real or objective nature in order to focus analysis on how the object appears to one's consciousness. All abstract notions or symbolic representations of such objects are intentionally set aside in order to reach a pure phenomenological description of how the object is encountered or experienced in human consciousness.

Following on from Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) developed existential, hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger's (1996) work diverged from Husserl's project in that he viewed human beings as inextricably embedded in their everyday world and existence, as opposed to being external to it. For Heidegger, what was missing from Husserl's

emphasis on perception of the world was the intentional manner by which we are engaged within the world through practical activities and social relationships, and the meanings which occasion these engagements. This emphasis can therefore be seen as less concerned with invariant characteristics of phenomena as they appear in consciousness (as for Husserl), and more about how the particular intentions and projects of individuals make experience meaningful for them.

Despite the philosophical differences between Husserl's and Heidegger's approaches, there has developed a broad family of phenomenological methods influenced by aspects of both of them. Many of these focus on the more descriptive, than interpretative, aspects of phenomenology. In the descriptive phenomenological method (DPM), Giorgi (2009) carefully adheres to Husserlian principles of bracketing (suspending one's own pre-conceived ideas, biases or assumptions) and empathic attention to the experiences of participants' lifeworlds. Researchers focus on and are led by participants' descriptions; through empathic immersion with participants and their descriptions, the researcher arrives at (and seeks to describe) an understanding of how participants' experiences are lived by them. Examining participants' descriptions, the researcher imaginatively varies aspects of the phenomenon being attended to in order to identify which are essential in constituting the phenomenon of interest. If by imaginatively eliminating one aspect results in the collapse of the phenomenon, so that it no longer reflects the experiences indicated by a participant's description, then that aspect is essential. By contrast, if the variation of an aspect results in no significant change, then that aspect is non-essential. Once the essential features of a phenomenon have been identified they are then described by the researcher. Theoretical or speculative interpretation is avoided during this activity in order to elaborate the lived-meaning contained within the provided descriptions. Only after this process is complete is interpretation introduced, but

only in relation to the implications of the findings, not in relation to the lived meaning of the participants' experiences.

Template analysis (TA) is also a phenomenologically informed approach to exploring lived experience (King 2012) but can be distinguished from descriptive phenomenological approaches such as DPM through its inclusion of interpretative as well as descriptive themes (Brooks et al. 2015). However, unusually for a phenomenologically based approach, TA utilizes an a priori theoretically informed coding template to capture predetermined, important experiential features that the researcher defines early in the research to be of significance to the project outcomes. These a priori themes may or may not form part of the final analysis and should be treated as 'equally subject to redefinition or removal as any other theme should they prove ineffective at characterising the data' (Brooks et al. 2015, p. 218).

The descriptive lifeworld approach (Ashworth 2003, 2016) emphasizes the capacity for phenomenological psychology to make known the 'taken-for-granted which always lay right there, unrecognised and unverbalised' (Ashworth 2003, p. 146) and which forms fundamental components of everyday experience; the everyday, lived experiential world we inhabit and the phenomena (objects, events and feelings) that comprise our daily conscious existence or lifeworld). Ashworth has been formative in explicating a range of fractions of the lifeworld (Ashworth 2016), for example, self-hood (social identity and sense of agency within a considered situation), temporality (chronological, time-sensitive elements of the lifeworld as lived through and experienced) and spatiality (the geographical considerations of space and place and the meaningful acts within these as part of a particular situation).

The philosophical underpinnings and methodologies we have described here are but a small number of a much wider corpus of phenomenological approaches (see Finlay 2009) that precede or sit alongside that of IPA, which is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

In the next section, we provide an overview of the fundamentals of IPA and how these inform the research process.

<a>KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is principally phenomenological owing to the central importance it accords to the lived experience of a particular phenomenon as it is perceived and understood by the person concerned. The approach aims to capture the complexity inherent in individual experience and make transparent the person's sense making of that experience. Consequently, there is no attempt in the presentation of the findings to produce objective statements of truth about a phenomenon. Instead, a more interpretative account is given, comprising of detailed expositions of participants' understandings and meanings, and drawing out the psychological entailments of these.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis acknowledges that achieving an understanding of another's lifeworld is a delicate and collaborative social enterprise between participant and researcher; as Smith et al. (1999, pp. 218–19) note, access to a participant's lifeworld, 'depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions ... required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity'. Smith (2011b, p. 10) refers to this process of the researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experience as a 'double hermeneutic'.

In order to foreground the distinctive nature of personal experience, IPA takes an idiographic approach to research (Smith 2011b), involving the painstaking, fine-grained analysis of individual cases, and seeking to illuminate the meaning and sense-making of lived phenomena as divulged within personal narratives. Research outputs range from single case studies, where commitment to the idiographic approach is most evident in the detailed

reporting of one person's experience, to the more typical kind of IPA studies involving small numbers of participants, and where concerns centre around 'the balance of convergence and divergence within the sample, not only presenting both shared themes but also ... the particular way in which these themes play out for individuals' (Smith 2011b, p. 10).

There are four main features that characterize IPA, namely: an intense focus on language, phenomenology and cognition; the dynamic, active presence of the researcher in the process of collecting and analysing data; a commitment to idiographic research utilizing small, homogenous samples; and the predominance of the semi-structured interview as the main data-collection tool. In the rest of this section we consider these features in more detail.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is primarily a phenomenological methodology with an acute emphasis on the psychological study of lived experience and how people make sense of their experiences. However, it also has links with more mainstream psychology in that it recognizes that, inherent in the sense-making process, there is a 'chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state' (Smith and Osborn 2008, p. 54). However, as you might expect when carrying out psychological research, this 'chain of connection' is not straightforward – people often find it difficult to say what they mean and find it challenging to put into words complex feelings and thoughts (for example, as with some anomalous or religious experiences; Coyle 2008). Accordingly, it is incumbent on the researcher to draw out and interpret what people are thinking and feeling from the utterances they have made. When engaging in this type of interpretative activity, IPA acknowledges that it is impossible to 'get into the head' of another human being and know their thoughts directly. Instead, the IPA researcher tries to develop a critically formed viewpoint from which they can then try to understand what it is like to have a given experience.

Given the close attention to detail and the intense idiographic nature of the approach taken, IPA research necessitates the purposive recruitment of a small sample of people who share a common experience and possibly other characteristics as well. Consequently, IPA studies are typically conducted with small samples of four to ten participants that form a homogenous sample. Homogeneity can occur on a variety of levels. At the most fundamental level, participants in an IPA study are homogenous because they are all bound by the experience of a similar phenomenon. Beyond that there are other levels of homogeneity that can apply to a given sample but these parameters will vary according to the particular research question and topic area (Smith 2004). The analysis itself will pay concerted attention to the thorough examination of each participant case in turn until a point is reached where 'some degree of closure or gestalt has been achieved' (Smith 2004, p. 41) for each individual. Only then will the researcher consider a cross-case analysis with a view to teasing out the convergences and divergences available within the data.

As regards output, the proof of the idiographic focus of the analysis should be plainly evident in the writing up of the findings. A detailed, nuanced and resonant account of the participants' lifeworlds and meaning-making of their experiences of a given phenomenon should be presented. Smith (2004) notes that a good quality IPA write up should aim to strike a balance between addressing the common elements that participants as a sample experienced, while still retaining the uniqueness of each participant in such experiences.

As IPA has grown in stature and popularity, a variety of methods have been used to collect the experientially rich data necessary to perform a suitable analysis: for example, data have been culled from naturally occurring sources existing on the Internet, such as web discussion/message forums (Mulveen and Hepworth, 2006); through email interviews (Murray and Rhodes 2005); diaries (Boserman 2009); and focus groups (Palmer et al. 2010). However, the most popular and utilized method of data collection in the vast majority of IPA

studies remains the semi-structured interview. We shall cover the pragmatics of conducting IPA interviews later in this chapter, as we now turn our attention to detailing the key considerations in designing an IPA study.

DOING INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Now that we have introduced what IPA is and where it sits within a selection of phenomenologically based research methods, we turn our attention to detailing how to apply IPA in an empirical study. Our focus here is on IPA studies that recruit and interview a group of participants. Therefore, we begin by considering how to select a sample for an IPA study, how to devise an interview schedule and how to conduct interviews. Following this, we guide the reader through detailed steps for conducting the analysis of study data.

Selecting a Sample

In order to ensure that both the most appropriate persons and relevant data is accessed when conducting an IPA study, careful consideration is needed when selecting a sample, particularly because such work relies on a relatively small number of participants. An often cited tenet of IPA is that studies carried out within this framework should have a homogenous sample (see Smith et al. 2009, pp. 49–50). The argument for this is that, as IPA usually concerns small samples, it is not possible or desirable to obtain a random or representative sample in the manner that might be actively sought for larger-scale research studies (quantitative or qualitative). Instead, IPA's approach is one of purposive sampling, where a small yet well-defined group of individuals are recruited who have particular characteristics that makes the research question salient for them and therefore makes them the best group of individuals to help the researcher understand the topic (Smith and Osborn 2008). This is often interpreted as ensuring that participants have a very similar demographic background and so

there is frequently an expectation that a sample should be comprised of people of similar ages, ethnicity, the same gender or other general population characteristics. However, although Smith has stated that such considerations might shape the rationale for a target sample, he has also suggested that this would be when there is a 'less specific issue ... under investigation' (Smith and Osborn 2008, p. 56). What is important in respect of homogeneity in IPA work is that the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that might be used to define a study sample are appropriate given the particular experiences and meanings of research concern (Smith et al. 2009).

As an example of the confusion that sometimes arises in relation to homogeneity and selecting a sample in IPA work, consider the following study, involving the first author, exploring the experience of intimate relationships for nine adults with intellectual disabilities (Rushbrooke et al. 2014). As part of the review process for that paper before it was accepted for publication the following feedback was received which expressed a concern that our sample was not homogenous with regard to several demographic characteristics: 'The sample includes people who were married, single, divorced, in a variety of relationships, from different sexual orientations and of a wide age range (21–58 years). This may be thought of as a problem for IPA which emphasizes homogeneity within a sample.' The feedback in addressing this in the revised manuscript was 'The present sample differs on some characteristics and is more homogenous on others' (people will always differ from one another in more ways than they can ever be similar). Smith et al. (2009, p. 50) contend homogeneity in IPA work is about making the sample as uniform as possible with regards to 'obvious social factors or other theoretical factors *relevant to the study*' (emphasis added). The central focus of the paper is the experiences of intimate relationships by people with intellectual disabilities, and the sample was chosen accordingly. While it is possible to look at the same research topic in more detail for a more well-defined group (for example, young or

older people, or different sexual orientations) our work legitimately focused on people with intellectual disabilities more broadly. That is, the sample is homogenous according to the characteristics of research concern and our analysis is concerned with the convergences and divergences in the obtained sample.'

Therefore, the key issue to keep in mind with regard to how homogenous your sample should be when conducting IPA research is 'what does my research question (or questions) and the research "problem" I am attempting to address entail with regard to the particular characteristics my research sample should have?' Regardless of what constraints you put on these characteristics, your research participants will always differ from one another on a myriad of other characteristics (both in terms of demographic details and life experiences), so it is important that they have those characteristics which enable them to illuminate your topic of research interest.

<b>Devising the Interview Schedule

When you have decided who your participants should be and devised appropriate inclusion and exclusion criteria that define the target population, you need to consider what you will discuss with them. Although you will probably have a good idea about what you want to ask them about (that is, the research question), deciding how the topic should be broached with participants and which questions will work best in eliciting interviewees' accounts of experiences and meaning-making takes careful consideration. In order to interview your participants you need to have prepared well in a number of ways.

First, you will need an interview schedule – a set of topic areas and indicative questions – with which to conduct the interview. In deciding what these topics and questions are, it is useful to document your decisions about what to include in your interview schedule so you can provide an account of this in the write-up of your project. Thinking about this in a

reflexive manner will help you avoid focusing on areas which mirror your own preconceptions or assumed understandings of the topic area. Finlay and Gough (2008, p. ix] define reflexivity as a 'thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched [… which] requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process'. Indeed, the process of using reflexivity in order to identify and bracket (that is, to put aside) any taken-for-granted understandings you have about a topic is considered an important aspect of IPA (see the previous discussion of bracketing and Husserlian philosophy). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is used to privilege the understandings and meaning-making of your participants, so it is important not to allow your own understandings and meanings of the topic to dictate the course of the interview (or to colour the resultant analysis).

Your research project should arise from what is known about a topic and through identifying what needs further research attention. Given this, it is possible to identify topics and questions from reviewing research literature. This will help you avoid repeating what has already been done, while aiding you to address any gaps in knowledge this work identifies. To add to the rigour and relevance of the interview schedule, lines of inquiry (and advice on the appropriate wording of questions) can also be identified through discussion with members of the target research sample or professionals who work in different capacities with them. It may be that there is literature available that provides advice on conducting research with the particular sample you wish to access; consulting this literature and demonstrating awareness of it in your writing and how it has shaped the final design of your interview schedule helps to evidence a meticulous and robust approach to your research. Documenting how you have identified what topics and questions to include in your interview schedule should allow you to demonstrate that you have followed a thorough and systematic approach. For example, in

the study of intimate relationships for adults with intellectual disabilities referred to previously (Rushbrooke et al. 2014), a local group of people with intellectual disabilities were consulted during the design of the research materials, including the interview schedule, to ensure that the materials were accessible and readily understood.

When you know what the topics are that you want to include in the schedule, then you need to think about the best way you could ask your participants about those topics. Qualitative researchers often talk about the need to avoid leading questions, that is, questions which suggest a particular response is preferred (for example, 'What do you find difficult about having X?'). This is because it is thought that participants are more likely to respond in a way which they think the researcher expects or wants (in this example, an account of difficulties involved in having X). Therefore, it is often preferable to ask open-ended questions that do not indicate a preferred type of answer (for example, 'What is it like for you having X?'). However, using open-ended questions can sometimes lack the needed specificity for the research focus, meaning that participants have difficulty in identifying what information you would like them to discuss. This calls for a balance between increasing the specificity of your questions while not leading participants (for example, 'How does having X effect your social life?'). Prepared prompts (for example, a rephrasing of the original question or asking a similar question with increased specificity) can also help on those occasions when participants seem to have difficulty in responding to some questions. Box 8.1 shows two examples of an interview schedule from IPA studies involving the first author: the first example is from the study of intimate relationships for adults with intellectual disabilities (Rushbrooke et al. 2014), and the second is from a study regarding palliative-care professionals' experiences of unusual spiritual phenomena at the end of life (McDonald et al. 2014).

<PLEASE INSERT BOX 8.1 ABOUT HERE>

The design of your interview schedule may also need to consider the particular characteristics of the sample you intend to interview. Therefore, in addition to drawing on existing research and interest or advocacy groups to decide the content of the interview, where an argument is cogently and convincingly made it is also advisable to follow any particular methodological recommendations in the research literature for your target sample regarding the phrasing of questions. Again, the study of intimate relationships for adults with intellectual disabilities can be used to illustrate this issue. In this investigation, the research literature influenced the close attention given to the design of the interview schedule to use short, unambiguous questions, and attempts were made to put participants at ease by beginning the interview with some questions about general topics to gently introduces the participant into the main interview (see Box 8.1).

Although the above concerns are important considerations, it is important not to overcomplicate the content or procedure for conducting the interview. Remember that the interview schedule is a tool to help facilitate discussion and ensure that the most pertinent information for the research focus is covered in the time available (although there is no strict convention regarding how long interviews should be, a period of around one hour is usually allotted). In order for the interview schedule to aid the interviewer, it should be no longer than necessary. If the schedule is too detailed, this can result in the interviewer using it like a script, interrupting the flow of a more natural (and preferred) conversational discussion. Three to five topic areas with three or four questions per topic are usually ample. However, one of the most advantageous features of a well-conducted qualitative interview is that participants will raise issues, in response to these questions, which could not have been anticipated in advance. Participants are the experts on their own experience; as researchers

we should be informed, intrigued and surprised by what they have to say. Listening to this novel information provides the interviewer opportunity to ask follow-up questions that have been generated from the perspective of participants. Having discussed the interview schedule, we now turn our attention to conducting the interview.

<b>Conducting the Interview

As with many qualitative approaches, IPA has a strong reliance on the spoken (and sometimes written) word, assuming as it does a relationship between what people say, their thoughts and emotions (Smith and Osborn 2008). Therefore, language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating these thoughts and making participants' experiences known and understood by another person. Analysis needs to draw on what is said and to evidence any interpretations using excerpts from an interview that are primarily spoken by the participant. When subsequently providing excerpts in a written report, it can sometimes be useful to include the questions asked by the interviewer, or some of the dialogue exchanged between both interviewer and participant(s) (see Box 8.2 for a data excerpt showing dialogue exchanged between interviewer and participants), but the analysis remains primarily predicated on what your participant has to say. Therefore, conducting a good (that is, an incisive and explanatory) IPA is aided by ensuring that the data you have to work with has sufficient depth and breadth; that is, you require full, detailed accounts from your participants of the meanings and understandings that are of interest to your research questions. For this reason, it is important to build up rapport with your participant during the interview.

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As the interviewer, you are often asking participants to tell you about personal aspects of their lives, yet they will most probably have never met you before and will have little if any involvement with you once the interview has taken place. Again, in our study example of intimate relationships for people with intellectual disabilities, extant research literature with this population guided the interviewer to be sensitive to the language skills of participants, while any indication of interviewee anxiety was monitored and responded to by adapting the questions accordingly. However, to engage with the interview as fully as possible, it is important that participants feel at ease and comfortable with the interviewer in order to provide such personal disclosures.

Careful attention to your own body language can help facilitate good interviewer–interviewee rapport. For example, if you look at your watch a lot during the interview (even if this is out of concern to not inconvenience your participant by going over time) your participant may infer you are bored or uninterested in what they are saying. Frequent checking of an interview schedule during the interview can have a similar effect; therefore, being familiar with it so as to consult it sparingly is advised. In contrast, making eye contact, leaning towards your participant, and nodding your head to signal understanding of what is being said can (if not over used) signal to your participant that you are interested in and are following what they have to say.

Summarizing at regular intervals what a participant has said can allow you to check your understanding and for participants to elaborate further. It is important to remember to listen during the interview. This may seem obvious but researchers frequently find when transcribing the audio-recording of an interview that thought-provoking areas were raised by the participant that they did not adequately follow up by asking more about what was said at the time. Without this further exploration of what was said the researcher can be left with tantalizing but insufficient data in which to ground particular interpretations. Using follow-up

questions to further probe interesting disclosures, such as 'Can you tell me more about that?', 'What was that like for you?', 'How did that make you feel?', and so on, can encourage your participant to provide additional information which enables a deeper understanding of what is being spoken about. Letting your participant choose the interview venue (or even mode, such as via telephone or webcam) can also aid this process, allowing them to choose somewhere that feels comfortable and non-threatening for them (this might be their home, for example, or a public place, such as a café that they frequent). Following your interview, you can type up a verbatim record of your conversation in the form of a transcript and then begin the process of analysis.

<a>BEGINNING ANALYSIS

In this section we detail how to conduct the analysis of transcripts when one-to-one interviews from different participants have been used to generate the data. However, it is possible to use the same steps with other data-sets where one-to-one interviews have not been used. For example, the unit of data analysis might be a diary kept by one person over an extended time period, or a set of posts made to an Internet discussion group. It is also possible to use the same steps when the data is produced from multiple interviews with the same participant (such as in a detailed case study over an extended time period) or when examining the co-constituting experiences of certain dyads (for example, see: Box 8.2 and Quinn et al. 2014, on the experience of couples when one partner has a stroke at a young age; Wyatt et al. 2015, on postpartum psychosis and relationships from the perspective of women and significant others; and Donnellan et al. 2014, on couples' experiences of their relationship surrounding trauma). The issue is more complex when the unit of analysis involves multiple conversants, such as in focus group interviews (for which we refer the interested reader to Palmer et al. 2010 and Tomkins and Eatough 2010).

<b>Forms of Analysis

There are many guides available on how to conduct IPA, discussing different levels of analysis that may be attempted (Smith 2007), and different ways of presenting IPA findings. We have developed and refined the following way of conducting IPA during many years of supervising undergraduate and postgraduate IPA projects, and both we and our students have found this approach to be effective in cultivating proficiency in applying IPA. Although we outline in this chapter the central characteristics of IPA work, IPA is an epistemological and methodological approach that can tolerate some variation in procedures and presentation (Smith and Osborn 2008). For example, we focus our own description of analysis here on identifying themes within and across transcripts. Other guides and published examples often discuss identifying both themes and sub-themes, or superordinate themes and subordinate themes, and so on. In those examples a main theme may comprise several discrete elements or components (or, themes within a theme). Our own reasons for not doing this here is not because we think this is incorrect or necessarily undesirable, but because this approach – particularly for novice IPA researchers – can sometimes produce outcomes that look and read as fragmented or list-like. Our own approach is to develop discrete themes in which the particular dimensions of relevant experience and meaning-making are elaborated in one encompassing, interpretative narrative (see Smith 2011a, p. 58), instead of an approach in which findings are presented in a staggered, sequential manner using themes and sub-themes.

In addition, our own description of analysis focuses on identifying particular experiences and meaning-making associated with those experiences. This is central to IPA, although some guides advocate moving between and linking up levels of analysis, where analysis of a transcript can be divided between descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes. In that scenario it would then be possible to focus on, for example, particular linguistic features

contained within participants' accounts (such as the use of metaphors) (Shinebourne and Smith 2010). Again, although we see value in these other approaches to analysis, we concern ourselves here solely with the broad aim of understanding experience and meaning-making; indeed, it is perhaps advisable to develop this broader and foundational skill before attempting more nuanced and finer-grained forms of IPA.

<b>Becoming Familiar with your Data

Analysis usually begins with a single, typed transcript of a one-to-one interview (semantic-level detail rather than a prosodic transcription usually suffices, and we recommend having line numbers to help locate information more easily during analysis). There are several activities which can help prepare you for conducting the analysis. Although not a requirement, it is helpful (particularly as a novice IPA researcher) if you are the person who has been involved in devising the research project and the person who conducted the interview. This is because it is more difficult for someone who is not familiar with the research background and rationale for the research project to identify all of the most relevant information contained within a transcript for analysis. For example, terminology used by participants and certain processes or procedures they refer to may not be readily understood by an outsider. For instance, if examining clients' experiences of talking-therapy following a traumatic experience, a certain level of familiarity with what such interventions involve is helpful in guiding the interview and understanding what participants have to say about their experiences of that intervention. (Interestingly, this also points to a tension in IPA work regarding the need to bracket your preconceptions; that is, our own experiences and understandings are needed in order to make sense of another person's experiences, but the IPA researcher seeks to ensure that they do not impose their own understanding on the experiences of participants.)

Most guides on conducting qualitative data analysis will advise on the importance of first being familiar with the data, as occurs through repeated listening of an interview and reading of its transcript. This is certainly the case for IPA, where it helps to have a good working knowledge of a transcript to be able to develop an analysis that is considerate and integrative of the interview as a whole. If the person conducting the analysis has also conducted the interview, this can be helpful in building up familiarity with the data. As an active participant in the interview, the person conducting the analysis has already been involved in a double hermeneutic process of trying to understand, and be understood by, the participant (as takes place in everyday conversations). Although it does not constitute a formal stage of analysis, during the interview the interviewer is actively engaged in attempts to understand a participant's experience. This may involve rectifying misunderstandings, or deepening understanding of other areas of research interest; for example, when participants say things which were not anticipated and follow-up questions are used by the interviewer to delve into these areas in more depth. These unanticipated statements regarding aspects of experience are precisely what are of value in qualitative research. They are also useful in aiding our reflexivity; a further process in producing a robust analysis, in that these occurrences can help to highlight to us (and put aside) our preconceptions that we hitherto were unaware of.

<b>Choosing a Transcript

These informal and mostly instinctive attempts to understand a participant's experience, to steer the interview through relevant terrain, are echoed in the more procedural steps (by which we mean intentional attempts rather than prescriptive stages) of analysis. The first formal stage of analysis begins with choosing one transcript to start with. For some forms of qualitative analysis there is an expectation that analysis should not begin until all the data has

been collected. (Notable exceptions to this are grounded theory studies, which often use the analysis that results from one or more transcripts to select subsequent participants in order to test and develop emerging theory.) This is because some researchers are wary of the possibility, however unintentional, for the analysis that results from one interview transcript to then drive the line of questioning in subsequent interviews. This may mean that the researcher seeks and finds the recurrence of data and interpretations that they already possess, instead of being open to identifying alternative or more nuanced meanings and experiences available in the data.

Many researchers employing IPA also take the above approach (and IPA how-to-do guides frequently imply, even if they do not state, this is what should happen), waiting until all project data has been collected before beginning analysis. However, we argue that it is not strictly necessary to wait until all study data has been collected before analysis can begin. One argument in support of this comes from a principle which underpins IPA work, namely, the ability to bracket or put aside the analysis which is carried out on one interview transcript from that which is carried out on subsequent transcripts (Smith et al. 2009, p. 100). That is, analysis of each transcript should begin afresh, instead of looking for the recurrence of themes identified in one transcript in other transcripts (see Smith 2011b, p. 10). This allows the preservation of the idiographic concern of IPA that is needed when a set of interpretations for the sample as a whole have been arrived at. We suggest that, to the extent that this principle of IPA is possible, it can also be extended to apply to collecting and analysing data in tandem; that is, it should be possible to bracket the analysis of one transcript so that it does not unduly influence the manner in which discussion is developed in subsequent interviews. Therefore, where it is decided to conduct data collection and analysis concurrently, then the decision of which transcript to begin with does not arise; it simply begins with the interview most recently conducted and transcribed.

In study designs involving several participants, and where data analysis does not proceed until all data has been collected, then an active choice will have to be made about which transcript to begin analysis with. Should it be the first transcript, or the transcript that the researcher thinks is rich (that is, a particularly interesting, extended and dense account)? We suggest that, generally, analysis should occur in the order that data was collected. This can help novice researchers who might struggle at first to bracket as fully as they should one analysis from another, and therefore help avoid being unduly drawn to and influenced by more articulate or charismatic participants. However, on occasion it may make good sense not to do this. For example, novice interviewers and IPA researchers may find that their confidence and skill in conducting interviews grows over time and that this is accompanied by what appears to be a set of increasingly complex, detailed or in-depth interviews. Where this is the case, beginning analysis with an interview in which the conversation seemed to flow well and perhaps lasted longer than some of the other available interviews can be more fruitful. This experience and increasing level of skill in developing analysis of the data contained in such transcripts can then aid the often more difficult task of analysing shorter transcripts or those in which the conversation is less developed (where participants responses might be brief or lack detail). We have rarely found that a particular transcript does not make a contribution to analysis; even those interviews that our students consider did not go well. However, analysis of these transcripts does tend to require more time and skill that can be better aided through analysis of more developed interviews to begin with.

<a>INITIAL CODING

Having chosen the transcript that you will analyse first, we would advise you to create a two-column table with the transcribed text placed in one column. (We prefer to complete the next task with hard copies; you may also want to print this out so that you can annotate it, typing

up these comments later.) An example of this can be found in Box 8.3, which is drawn from a study involving the first author on adult service-users' experiences of trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (Lowe and Murray 2014) . This then leaves a column which can be used to note the first part of the analysis. (We tend to place the transcribed text in the right-hand column and make our notations in the left-hand column, but these can be reversed.)

<PLEASE INSERT BOX 8.3 ABOUT HERE>

Having taken the time to listen to the audio recording and repeated reading of the transcript, you will now be ready to read through the transcript and make notations in the blank column. It is important that this is done with the research questions kept clearly in mind; it helps to have these written down in front of you as you begin the analysis to aid you to keep focused on relevant data within the transcript. In our example in Box 8.3 this research was concerned with service users' experiences of receiving a positive outcome following trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) following a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The analysis therefore focused on participants' views and experiences of the service, specifically which aspects of the service they received made the most useful contribution towards effective therapeutic change. Your research questions act as the lenses through which you look at your data and, just as your interview schedule and follow-up questions in an interview help you and your participant navigate those meanings and experiences of research interest, your research questions keep you on those parts of the transcript that are relevant, helping you not to lose your research focus.

As you read through your transcript with your research questions in mind, highlight where anything your participant says relates to your research questions (for example, using a

yellow highlighter pen). As you do this, in the left-hand column provide a summary phrase that encapsulates the observation you want to record. These notations should be as close to the experience and sense-making of the participant as possible. To achieve this you might want to use the actual phrase that a participant uttered, or you might want to paraphrase a sentence (or several sentences) into a succinct description of your participant's expressed experience. Try not to use single words here (for example, 'demon' or 'suffering'), but instead use phrases or succinct sentences which express some aspect of experience or meaning (for example, 'relief at having a name for this demon, the suffering'). As with recommendations in some other IPA guides (for example, Smith et al. 2009), some of your notations may be purely descriptive (for example, 'Relief at diagnosis of PTSD'), others could refer to linguistic aspects (for example, a notation in Box 8.3 could have been provided with a focus on the use of 'demon' and hence personification of psychological distress), and others will be more conceptual and interpretative (although in the approach we advocate here this is more fully developed at the next stage of analysis, when grouping codes).

The task in this activity is to identify those aspects of your participant's account that you feel are of importance and value in understanding the topic or phenomenon under study. Do not be surprised or worried if you have a large number of notations. Somewhere in the region of 40–90 is common in our own work. Once you have completed this for one transcript, go through your notes in the left-hand column and review them to make sure they are as explanatory and succinct as possible (as in the above example with 'relief at having a name for this demon, the suffering' instead of 'demon' or 'suffering').

Throughout the process of analysis there are several junctures at which you are involved in simultaneously distilling the core experiences of research interest while reducing the size and complexity of the data you are working with. The process of producing notations, for example, condenses the information contained in your whole transcript in the

form of codes that serve as succinct signposts to important information within your transcript. However, instead of diminishing the information contained within the transcript, these summaries are densely packed descriptions that will first be used to help you begin looking at patterns and divergences regarding key phenomena contained within the transcript as a whole, and then later to produce your interpretations of these patterns and divergences. You may wish to have an experienced researcher (ideally someone familiar with IPA) read through the same transcript and inspect your notations before you progress with the analysis. Discussing this with them can allow you to consider alternative ways of conceiving your data and can help in identifying any assumptions you have made based on your own (and perhaps hitherto unidentified) preconceptions. When you are satisfied with your notations on the transcript, go on to the next step of grouping codes.

<a>GROUPING CODES

When you have produced your set of notations in the left-hand column, these can be typed up and saved as in Box 8.3. For the next stage it can help to make physical copies that you can readily move about (the second author frequently follows a similar process but using electronic databases, with copy and paste functions to move cells around, instead of using physical copies). One way that that this can be done is by copying the notations on to Post-it notes (include the page and line number of the transcript from which the notation is abstracted so you can easily locate where it came from originally), or by printing them out on separate pieces of paper (if you use a word processor you can copy your notation column in to a new document and make the font larger, then print the document and use scissors to separate the notations from one another). These Post-it notes then serve as your data for the next task.

Having read the transcript and produced the Post-it notes, the notations on them should mean something to you in a way they would not for someone unfamiliar with the transcript. The Post-it notes work as short-cuts or reminders for you as to what was going on in a particular portion of the text. That is, they should evoke in you detailed recollections of the transcript and not just be abstract notations. As well as being dense summaries of phenomena of key interest, they serve as triggers to you for additional information which your familiarity with the data makes readily available. However, problems can occur with this activity if too much time elapses between making the notations and conducting the next stage of analysis, as your familiarity and your understanding of the data can ebb away. For this reason we would advise that, where possible, the processes of analysis we describe for one transcript take place over a dedicated period of time, or adjoining time periods, spread over one to three days.

After you have your collection of notations, find a large surface (for example, a table, floor or wall). Your next task is to try to cluster the notations into small groups. Begin by spreading out the notations, leaving some space between each one. Standing or sitting over the notations will allow you to view all of them at the same time and help you begin identifying relationships between the notations. Your aim in this activity is to group notations together so that you are left with a small number of piles, with each pile containing several notations. Put notations together which seem to be about similar issues. However, in considering how they are similar, think in terms of relationships too; you are not necessarily looking for the recurrence of the same features, but how one notation may elaborate the information described in another.

The notations should work as short cuts or memory aids for you in relation to the fuller content of the transcript; that is, you will be able draw on the context within which the notes were made (the spoken words by your participant at particular junctures in the

interview) in order to decide how to group things together. For example, a person's account of the meanings and experiences of talking therapy for them may differ or have distinct characteristics according to the particular point in time that they are describing, the work being attended to by the intervention, or other particular life events which make up the background or context to these discrete experiences. Interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks, in part, to account for how and why these experiences occur in particular contexts and change over time. Therefore, this stage of analysis seeks to identify various thematic threads which are woven throughout a transcript. Grouping your notations together should result in piles of notations which together articulate the dimensions of particular experiences, rather than simply identify thematic chunks that occur or reoccur.

Do not be afraid to experiment; pick notes up and place them together – are they about something similar or not? This is an iterative process and you might move these notes about many times before you arrive at your final set of groupings. You might end up with between four and eight clusters. If there are more than eight, it may be that some clusters can be merged together or that a cluster can be divided up across several clusters. Continue this activity until you are confident that the clusters you have all relate to something relatively discrete in your transcript and you have avoided as much overlap between clusters as possible. Do not worry if one set has more Post-it notes than another; there is no minimum or maximum number.

As you group your Post-it notes in this way, you may find you have an implicit rather than explicit understanding of why you have grouped things together; for example, you might think one group of notations relate to 'involvement and autonomy in therapeutic outcome' while another relates to 'the experience of therapeutic change'. As you carry out this activity, moving and relocating notations into different groupings, you will progress from an implicit understanding of what the groupings are about (that is, in which you cannot readily or fully

articulate why you are putting certain notations together) to a more explicit understanding (in which you are generating working hypotheses and explanations as to why notations might or might not sit together). Remember, try to make your groupings include different dimensions of the central issue you think the set of Post-it notes exemplify, rather than having too many groupings. You are aiming to achieve a set of groupings without too much overlap.

<a>PRODUCING INTERPRETATIVE SUMMARIES AND TITLING THEMES

When you have settled on your notation groupings, you are ready for the next stage of analysis. Your task here is to take each cluster of notes, one at a time, and write an extended paragraph or set of paragraphs (narrative summaries) which explain what that cluster of notations is about. In order to continue the analysis in this manner, it helps to construct a word-processed table in landscape format with two columns. An illustration of this can be seen in Box 8.4, which comes from a study of intimacy for people with bladder exstrophy (a congenital health condition involving physiological anomalies of the bladder, pelvis, lower urinary tract, genitalia and abdominal wall) (Anderson et al. 2013). The left-hand column should contain all the notations that you placed together to form your cluster. In the right-hand column of the table write an extended paragraph or set of paragraphs which explain what your theme is about (aim for around 300–400 words – this will depend on the complexity of what you have to present but you are trying to balance sufficient depth with brevity). Your paragraphs should articulate what the theme relates to, what it encompasses, and what the dimensions or variation in the particular experience and meanings you are writing about are. Use your own words rather than paraphrasing or directly quoting your participant.

<PLEASE INSERT BOX 8.4 ABOUT HERE>

The most important feature that should characterize these narrative summaries is that they are interpretative rather than purely descriptive. This involves you making interpretative leaps in describing your data; that is, positing the psychological implications or entailments of particular experiences and meaning-making. However, these expositions need to be grounded within the data so that when, later, data excerpts are presented together with your interpretations, the interpretations are both insightful and warranted (that is, they appear reasonable instead of speculative or outlandish and poorly supported by the data).

Novice qualitative researchers frequently find it difficult to generate a convincing analysis because they begin by identifying a set of quotations they think group together thematically and then struggle to produce something more than a descriptive rephrasing of what is already contained within the quotations. In contrast, we advise continuing the analysis here by avoiding using quotes at this stage, but instead writing summaries that explain as clearly as possible what the salient experiences and meanings recounted by participants are based on each set of notations. Setting the quotations aside at this stage forces the researcher to articulate what they think is going on in the data and is more conducive to generating interpretations – as is the aim of IPA. However, when you have completed this process, you can add a third column to this table and place illustrative quotes from your transcript in the final column of your table to evidence your analysis (again, including the corresponding transcript page and line numbers is advised for a thorough audit trail). You should be able to easily locate these from the table you had already produced (see Box 8.1), in which relevant text has been highlighted against the notations. This is another juncture in analysis where it can help to have an experienced IPA researcher read your work and offer feedback on how well the notations group together and how interpretative your summaries are before you continue the analysis. Keeping a record of these discussions and how they influenced the

course of analysis (for example, titling, content and interpretations) can help further demonstrate a rigorous approach to analysis when you describe this in the method section of your report.

When you are satisfied with the summary that you have produced, the next task is to give it an informative and explanatory title. It is important that this takes place last, as the aim is to provide a succinct set of words which encapsulates the summary, in the same way that your notations were summaries of interview content. (If the titling is decided in advance of completing the notations, the grouping of them, or the summary, then this acts to funnel or direct these other activities.) This title becomes your first identified theme from your transcript. This process should be repeated for all notation groupings so that you are left with a complete analysis of the transcript. By following this process you will also have a full audit trail of your analysis. Whether you are writing up your research for assessment or publication purposes, you will be able to provide full copies or excerpts from your tables (for example, in appendices) to demonstrate a rigorous and robust approach to data analysis.

Once you have completed the above process for your first transcript you should repeat the same activities for your remaining transcripts. In keeping with a key principle of IPA, as you continue your analysis with other transcripts you should bracket your completed analyses and start afresh. Avoid the temptation to identify patterns already identified from your previous analysis; instead you should be led by each participant's own meaning-making contained within their account. When this is complete for all transcripts you need to produce an integrative analysis that pays attention to areas of convergence and divergence across all interview data. This process is outlined in the next section.

<a>MERGING ANALYSIS ACROSS TRANSCRIPTS

If you have a typical sample for IPA studies you will have between four and ten participants and your analysis would have identified between four and seven themes per participant. So that means you may have identified anything in the region of 16–70 themes across your data-set. Your task now is to examine ways in which the analysis of each of your participants is both similar and different. The process of conducting IPA means that until this point you have avoided making direct and explicit comparisons between the data obtained from different participants, but now you want to examine the ways in which participants' data converges and diverges. However, these convergences and divergences should also enable a deeper and more complete understanding of the phenomenon of research concern. By pooling participants' experiential accounts, we come to understand more about the salient aspects of experiences both for an individual and for a well-defined group.

At this juncture, it helps to write down all the themes for each participant that you have identified. Putting each theme title (together with the participant's pseudonym) on a separate Post-it note can aid in the following process. By now, providing you do not let long periods elapse between the analyses of each transcript, you will be very familiar with your data and analysis. The titles of each participant's themes should be sufficient to evoke adequate recall of the theme content. In a similar process to that described earlier with regards to grouping notations into clusters, you can now attempt to group the themes identified across participants together.

As before, using a large surface area on which the Post-it notes are spread out and that you can observe from above (in a standing or sitting position) will allow you to quickly inspect the collection of Post-it notes as a whole. Your aim in this activity is to group theme titles together so that you are left with a small number of piles, with each pile containing several theme titles. Can you cluster some of the titles together to create new themes that incorporate several participants? Put titles together which seem to be about similar issues.

However, in contemplating how they are similar, think in terms of relationships too; consider how the content encapsulated by one title may elaborate the information contained in another. As with the process for single transcript notations, some clusters may be comprised of more theme titles than others. However, once you have grouped theme titles together you should have between four and seven sets of theme titles. Each set will be used as the basis for a discrete theme that informs the reader about an important aspect of your research question(s) for your sample as a whole, but paying attention to convergences and divergences across your participants.

When you have a set of theme-title groupings that you are happy with (this may take much experimentation and several iterations), you will need to consider how you can modify the narratives you have already produced for each theme for each participant. For example, if you have placed one theme from each of four participants together, you will need to consider how you can edit and merge the original narratives together so that they become one narrative that recounts the experiences and meanings for the four participants in an integrative manner (as opposed to a list which presents everything in order of each participant). In doing this you do not simply cut and paste the paragraphs together, but you try to write a synthesized account which draw on the paragraphs or themes you cluster together as new themes.

As with the original narrative summaries, you should be aiming for around 300–400 words for each synthesized narrative summary. This requires the removal of redundancy and the production of an explanatory account that unfolds in a logical sequence – as with a good story, it should have a well-developed beginning, middle and end. After you have settled on the theme content by merging the narrative summaries you originally wrote for each participant, you need to consider new titles that capture the modified content as succinctly and explanatory as possible. Try to use evocative titles that convey the lived experience or

meaning-making of participants as vividly as possible (that is, avoid dull descriptive labelling) and which articulate the central issue that your theme is concerned with.

When you have titled your synthesized narratives, you can then add in quotes from the transcripts to illustrate the points and evidence the interpretations you have made in your paragraphs. These quotes should be placed within the text you have written at various junctures where they can provide support for the particular arguments and interpretations that you make. If you have followed the steps outlined in this chapter then it should be relatively easy to select these from the quotes you placed alongside your original narrative summaries for each participant. Avoid the temptation to provide several quotes from different participants that are very similar and interchangeable (a table for each theme containing additional quotes from each participant can be placed in appendices of reports if desired). Instead, it is advisable to be selective and to present a series of quotes (ideally interspersed with interpretation than presented in a list) that together develop an understanding of the issue you are presenting. Try to draw on your participants who contribute to the theme in an even manner when doing this.

One of the key skills of writing up good qualitative research findings is to produce a narrative account of the experience of the phenomenon that is not only interpretative and grounded in the data extracts presented, but can also resonate with the reader. By this we mean when a viewer of your article (or a marker of your assessment) reads your findings section, is the narrative engaging, interesting and allowing the reader to imaginatively experience what it must be like to be a person experiencing the phenomenon under consideration? Does the account draw the reader into the lifeworld of the participant; engrossing them in a way that enables them to engage with the existential concerns of the people having these experiences? Well written, nuanced, empathic and interpretative accounts, supported by a balanced, judicious choice of suitable extracts, can achieve just that.

<a>CHOOSING WHAT TO PRESENT

At the end of the above process you will in effect have written the results section of your empirical report. Unless you want to write a combined results and discussion section (in which case you would need to add another step of weaving-in and relating your findings to extant research and theory), your final task here should be to edit the material you have produced to fit in with the requirements of the publication outlet you intend to submit your work to, or the assessment requirements of your educational establishment. These requirements will mainly relate to word count. Where restrictions on word count or manuscript length are in place, a frequent difficulty in writing up qualitative work is being able to present your findings with sufficient depth and clarity. Therefore, while you might have upwards of seven or eight themes identified in your analysis, typically in order to present a strong and clear analysis within the word constraints of an academic journal, you may only have room to present between three and five in detail (the assessments for student work vary considerably and may allow more than this to be accommodated).

Where there are space constraints on what can be presented, our advice is to choose the best themes to present (see Smith 2011b; p. 24, who argues that it is better to present a subset of themes in detail rather than all themes superficially). However, we are not advocating an arbitrary approach to what you choose to present. Instead, these choices should be clearly reasoned and articulated to the reader. For example, are some themes more supported (for example, evidenced by all participants rather than just applying to one participant)? Smith (2011b) suggests that some indication of the prevalence of a theme should be provided when presenting IPA studies. He also proposes that with small samples (n = 1–3) all themes should be supported by extracts from all participants, for sample sizes of between four and eight extracts from half the sample should be given, and for larger samples

this should be at least three or four participants per theme. These are useful rules of thumb for considering how to sample data excerpts. It is important to ensure that this sampling of data excerpts is considerate of the whole sample (all participants should ideally appear in the analysis with equal prominence when the sample size is manageable and proportionate to the number of data excerpts used). However, our own thinking on the issue of prevalence of a theme in IPA work is that this is not as helpful as considering the contribution that participants make to a theme. This change in emphasis from prevalence to contribution more accurately reflects both the patterns and divergences across participants in regards to particular issues which are captured in IPA work, rather than an aggregation of identikit experiences across the sample as in other approaches.

Another way of deciding on the relative merits of which themes to present, or not, concerns the degree to which they are novel or more interesting than others. If some of your themes are already well established and represented in the research literature, these will have little of value or interest to add. You should instead focus on those themes which are most informative and will make the most useful contribution to knowledge.

<a>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Within this chapter we have introduced IPA and a selection of the phenomenological-based research methods it sits alongside. We have also summarized how to select a research sample, construct an interview schedule and conduct a research interview in a manner appropriate for IPA. Finally, we have presented in detail how to analyse interview transcripts for individual participants and groups of participants. A précis of the steps of analysis we advocate here is produced in Table 8.1. The steps we have detailed are one way of going about applying the principles which underpin IPA which both we and our students have

found productive in developing competence in IPA and adding to the research base. We hope the reader finds similar utility in applying the guidelines we have set out.

<PLEASE INSERT TABLE 8.1 ABOUT HERE>

<a>NOTE

<Please take in note * here>

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