

# Four

## Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants. The approach is phenomenological (see Chapter 3) in that it involves detailed examination of the participant's life-world; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself. At the same time, IPA also emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process. One is trying to get close to the participant's personal world, to take, in Conrad's (1987) words, an 'insider's perspective', but one cannot do this directly or completely. Access depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions; indeed, these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved. The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world. IPA is therefore intellectually connected to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation (Packer and Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969; Smith, in press; see also Chapter 2 this volume). Different interpretative stances are possible, and IPA combines an empathic hermeneutics with a questioning hermeneutics. Thus, consistent with its phenomenological origins, IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side. At the same time, a detailed IPA analysis can also involve asking critical questions of the texts from participants, such as the following: What is the person trying to achieve here? Is something leaking out here that wasn't intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of?

We would say that both styles of interpretation are part of sustained qualitative inquiry but that the degree of emphasis will depend on the particularities of the IPA study concerned. The ordinary word 'understanding' usefully captures these two aspects of interpretation-understanding in the sense of identifying or empathizing with and understanding as trying to make sense of. Allowing for both aspects in the inquiry is likely to lead to a richer analysis and to do greater justice to the totality of the person, 'warts and all'. IPA also acknowledges a debt to symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1995) with its concern for how meanings are constructed by individuals within both a social and a personal world.

IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state. At the same time, IPA researchers realize this chain of connection is complicated – people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose, and the researcher has to interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say.

IPA's emphasis on sense-making by both participant and researcher means that it can be described as having cognition as a central analytic concern, and this suggests an interesting theoretical alliance with the cognitive paradigm that is dominant in contemporary psychology. IPA shares with the cognitive psychology and social cognition approaches in social and clinical psychology (Fiske and Taylor, 1991) a concern with mental processes. However, IPA strongly diverges from mainstream psychology when it comes to deciding the appropriate methodology for such questions. While mainstream psychology is still strongly committed to quantitative and experimental methodology, IPA employs in-depth qualitative analysis. Thus, IPA and mainstream psychology converge in being interested in examining how people think about what is happening to them but diverge in deciding how this thinking can best be studied.

Indeed, we would argue that IPA's commitment to the exploration of meaning and sense-making links it quite closely to the original concerns of cognitive psychology in its rejection of the behaviourist paradigm that had thus far dominated the discipline. It is interesting to see how Bruner (1990), one of the founders of the cognitive approach, regrets how it swiftly moved from a central concern with meaning and meaning making into the science of information processing. For more on the theoretical foundations of IPA, see Smith (1996a) and Eatough and Smith (in press).

The aim of this chapter is to provide for the reader new to this way of working a detailed presentation of the stages involved in doing interpretative phenomenological analysis. It gives details of each stage and illustrates them with material taken from a study conducted by the authors. At the same time, it should be recognized that, as is generally the case with qualitative research, there is no single, definitive way to do IPA. We are offering suggestions, ways we have found that have worked for us. We hope these will be useful in

helping the newcomer to IPA to get under way, but remember that, as you proceed, you may find yourself adapting the method to your own particular way of working and the particular topic you are investigating. We would also point the reader to related writing on interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1994; Van Manen, 1997).

## **l| Constructing a Research Question and Deciding a Sample**

As will be apparent, IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world. IPA is especially useful when one is concerned with complexity, process or novelty. Box 4.1 illustrates the type of research questions that have been addressed by IPA. Research questions in IPA projects are usually framed broadly and openly. There is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather, the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern.

### **Box 4.1 Examples of psychological research questions addressed in IPA studies**

- How do gay men think about sex and sexuality? (Flowers et al., 1997)
- How do people with genetic conditions view changing medical technologies? (Chapman, 2002)
- What is the relationship between delusions and personal goals? (Rhodes and Jakes, 2000)
- How do people come to terms with the death of a partner? (Golsworthy and Coyle, 1999)
- How does a woman's sense of identity change during the transition to motherhood? (Smith, 1999)
- What model of the person do priests have? (Vignoles et al., 2004)
- How do people in the early stage of Alzheimer's disease perceive and manage the impact on their sense of self? (Clare, 2003)
- What influences the decision to stop therapy? (Wilson and Sperlinger, 2004)
- What forms of social support are helpful to people in pain? (Warwick et al., 2004)
- How does being HIV impact on personal relationships? (Jarman et al., 2005)

IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. The detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts takes a long time, and the aim of the study is to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of this particular group rather than prematurely make more general claims. This is

not to say that IPA is opposed to more general claims for larger populations; it is just that it is committed to the painstaking analysis of cases rather than jumping to generalizations. This is described as an idiographic mode of inquiry as opposed to the nomothetic approach which predominates in psychology (Smith et al., 1995). In a nomothetic study, analysis is at the level of groups and populations, and one can make only probabilistic claims about individuals; for example, there is a 70 per cent chance that person x will respond in this way. In an idiographic study, because it has been derived from the examination of individual case studies, it is also possible to make specific statements about those individuals.

IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogeneous sample. The basic logic is that if one is interviewing, for example, six participants, it is not very helpful to think in terms of random or representative sampling. IPA therefore goes in the opposite direction and, through purposive sampling, finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant. How the specificity of a sample is defined will depend on the study; in some cases, the topic under investigation may itself be rare and define the boundaries of the relevant sample. In other cases where a less specific issue is under investigation, the sample may be drawn from a population with similar demographic/socio-economic status profiles. The logic is similar to that employed by the social anthropologist conducting ethnographic research in one particular community. The anthropologist then reports in detail about that particular culture but does not claim to be able to say something about *all* cultures. In time, of course, it will be possible for subsequent studies to be conducted with other groups, and so, gradually, more general claims can be made, but each founded on the detailed examination of a set of case studies. It is also possible to think in terms of theoretical rather than empirical generalizability. In this case, the readers make links between the findings of an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature. The power of the IPA study is judged by the light it sheds within this broader context. A final note on sampling: it should be remembered that one always has to be pragmatic when doing research; one's sample will in part be defined by who is prepared to be included in it!

There is no right answer to the question of the sample size. It partly depends on several factors: the degree of commitment to the case study level of analysis and reporting, the richness of the individual cases, and the constraints one is operating under. For example, IPA studies have been published with samples of one, four, nine, fifteen and more. Recently there has been a trend for some IPA studies to be conducted with a very small number of participants. A distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included and many researchers are recognizing that this can only realistically be done on a very small sample – thus in simple terms one is sacrificing breadth for depth. Recently the first author has been arguing the case for the single case study (Smith, 2004) and for recent examples of IPA case studies, see Eatough and Smith (2006a, 2006b). In the recent past, five or six has sometimes been recommended as a reasonable sample size for a student

project using IPA. Our current thinking is that for students doing IPA for the first time, three is an extremely useful number for the sample. This allows sufficient in-depth engagement with each individual case but also allows a detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence. The danger for the newcomer is that if the sample size is too large they become overwhelmed by the vast amount of data generated by a qualitative study and are not able to produce a sufficiently penetrating analysis. We express an intellectual debt to George Kelly here (see Bannister and Fransella, 1971; Smith, 1990 and Chapter 2 in this volume). To facilitate accessing an individual's personal constructs, Kelly suggested considering three elements at a time, allowing the individual to focus closely on the relationship between the elements in considering a way in which two were similar to and different from the third. IPA doesn't prescribe a technique in the same way but our thinking is clearly related.

### **||| Collecting Data: Semi-structured Interviews as the Exemplary Method for IPA**

IPA researchers wish to analyse in detail how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them. It therefore requires a flexible data collection instrument. While it is possible to obtain data suitable for IPA analysis in a number of ways – such as personal accounts, and diaries – probably the best way to collect data for an IPA study and the way most IPA studies have been conducted is through the semi-structured interview. This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise. Therefore, we will discuss semi-structured interviewing in detail in this chapter. For discussion of other data collection methods either used in or consonant with IPA, see Smith (1990) and Plummer (2000). It is useful first to contrast the primary features of a semi-structured interview with those of a structured interview.

#### **||| The Structured Interview**

The structured interview shares much of the rationale of the psychological experiment. Generally, the investigator decides in advance exactly what constitutes the required data and constructs the questions in such a way as to elicit answers corresponding to, and easily contained within, predetermined categories, which can then be numerically analysed. In order to enhance reliability, the interviewer should stick very closely to the interview schedule and behave with as little variation as possible between interviews. The interviewer will aim to:

- use short specific questions
- read the question exactly as on the schedule

- ask the questions in the identical order specified by the schedule
- ideally have precoded response categories, enabling the questioner to match what the respondent says against one of those categories.

Sometimes the investigator will provide the respondent with a set of possible answers to choose from. Sometimes the respondent is allowed a free response, which can then be categorized.

Thus, in many ways, the structured interview is like the questionnaire; indeed, the two overlap to the extent that often the interview is simply the investigator going through a questionnaire in the presence of a respondent the interviewer filling in the answers on the questionnaire sheet based on what the respondent says.

The alleged advantages of the structured interview format are control, reliability and speed. That is, the investigator has maximum control over what takes place in the interview. It is also argued that the interview will be reliable in the sense that the same format is being used with each respondent, and that the identity of the interviewer should have minimal impact on the responses obtained.

The structured interview has disadvantages which arise from the constraints put on the respondent and the situation. The structured interview deliberately limits what the respondent can talk about – this having been decided in advance by the investigator. Thus, the interview may well miss out on a novel aspect of the subject, an area considered important by the respondent but not predicted by the investigator. And the topics which are included are approached in a way which makes it unlikely that it will allow the unravelling of complexity or ambiguity in the respondent's position. The structured interview can also become stilted because of the need to ask questions in exactly the same format and sequence to each participant.

This section has offered only a brief introduction to the structured interview, the aim being to provide a context in which to place a discussion of semi-structured interviewing. For more on the different types of interview used by researchers, see Brenner et al. (1985) and Breakwell (2006).

### ||| **Semi-structured Interviews**

With semi-structured interviews, the investigator will have a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than be dictated by it. Here then:

- There is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent.
- The ordering of questions is less important.
- The interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise.
- The interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns.

These differences follow from the basic concerns of an approach such as IPA. The investigator has an idea of the area of interest and some questions to

pursue. At the same time, there is a wish to try to enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent. Therefore, the respondent shares more closely in the direction the interview takes, and the respondent can introduce an issue the investigator had not thought of. In this relationship, the respondents can be perceived as the experiential expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story.

Thus, we could summarize the advantages of the semi-structured interview. It facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data. On the debit side, this form of interviewing reduces the control the investigator has over the situation, takes longer to carry out, and is harder to analyse.

## ||| Constructing the Interview Schedule

Although an investigator conducting a semi-structured interview is likely to see it as a co-determined interaction in its own right, it is still important when working in this way to produce an interview schedule in advance. Why? Producing a schedule beforehand forces us to think explicitly about what we think/hope the interview might cover. More specifically, it enables us to think of difficulties that might be encountered, for example, in terms of question wording or sensitive areas, and to give some thought to how these difficulties might be handled. Having thought in advance about the different ways the interview may proceed allows us, when it comes to the interview itself, to concentrate more thoroughly and more confidently on what the respondent is actually saying. For example, Box 4.2 presents a schedule from a project one of us conducted on kidney disease patients' response to their illness. The participants are undergoing dialysis treatment for their kidney disease – an extremely demanding treatment regimen which involves going to hospital three or four times a week and being attached to a dialysis machine for about three hours.

### Box 4.2 Interview schedule: patient's experience of renal dialysis

#### A. Dialysis

- 1) Could you give me a brief history of your kidney problem from when it started to your beginning dialysis?
- 2) Could you describe what happens in dialysis, in your own words?
- 3) What do you do when you are having dialysis?
- 4) How do you feel when you are dialysing?  
*prompt: physically, emotionally, mentally.*

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

- 5) What do you think about?
- 6) How do you feel about having dialysis?  
*prompt: some people/relief from previous illness/a bind.*
- 7) How does dialysis/kidney disease affect your everyday life?  
*prompt: work, interests, relationships.*
- 8) If you had to describe what the dialysis machine means to you, what would you say?  
*prompt: What words come to mind, what images? Do you have a nickname for it?*

## B. Identity

- 9) How would you describe yourself as a person?  
*prompt: What sort of person are you? Most important characteristics: happy, moody, nervy.*
- 10) Has having kidney disease and starting dialysis made a difference to how you see yourself?  
*prompt: If so, how do you see yourself now as different from before you started dialysis? How would you say you have changed?*
- 11) What about compared to before you had kidney disease?
- 12) What about the way other people see you?  
*prompt: members of your family, friends? changed?*

## C. Coping

- 13) What does the term 'illness' mean to you? How do you define it?
- 14) How much do you think about your own physical health?
- 15) Do you see yourself as being ill?  
*prompt: always, sometimes? Would you say you were an ill person?*
- 16) On a day-to-day basis, how do you deal with having kidney disease (the illness)?  
*prompt: do you have particular strategies for helping you? ways of coping, practical, mental.*
- 17) Do you think about the future much?

The following list suggests a sequence for producing an interview schedule. This is intended to be only suggestive, not prescriptive. Note also that doing this sort of work is often iterative rather than linear, and you may find your ideas of what the interview should cover changing or developing as you work on the schedule.

1. Having determined the overall area to be tackled in the interview, think about the broad range of issues you want your interview to cover. The three issues in the kidney dialysis project are description of dialysis, effect on the self and coping strategies.
2. Put the topics in the most appropriate sequence. Two questions may help here. What is the most logical order in which to address these areas? Which is the most sensitive area? In general, it is a good idea to leave sensitive topics until later in the interview to allow the respondent to become relaxed and comfortable speaking to you. Thus, an interview on political affiliations might begin with questions on what the different political parties represent, and then move on to the question of societal attitudes to politics before, in the final section, asking about the person's own voting behaviour – thus leaving the most personal and potentially most sensitive area until last. In the dialysis project, one could say that all the material is sensitive – but then the respondents know the project is about their health condition and have agreed to talk about it. It was decided that talking about the illness itself was the best way into the interview, and to allow discussion of the effect on the respondent's sense of self to come later.
3. Think of appropriate questions related to each area in order to address the issue you are interested in.
4. Think about possible probes and prompts which could follow from answers that might be given to some of your questions (see below).

### ||| **Constructing Questions**

A strategy often employed in this type of interviewing is to encourage the person to speak about the topic with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible. One might say that you are attempting to get as close as possible to what your respondent thinks about the topic, without being led too much by your questions. Good interview technique therefore often involves a gentle nudge from the interviewer rather than being too explicit. This aspect of the methodology runs counter to most of the training received for more orthodox psychology methodologies. Thus, you may well find that in the course of constructing your schedule, your first draft questions are too explicit. With redrafting, these become gentler and less loaded but sufficient to let the respondents know what the area of interest is and recognize that they have something to say about it. It may be useful to try out possible questions with a colleague and get some feedback on the level of difficulty and tone.

Sometimes this initial question will be insufficient to elicit a satisfactory response. This may be for various reasons – the issue is a complex one or the question is too general or vague for this particular participant. To prepare for this, you can construct *prompts* that are framed more explicitly. Indeed, some of your first draft questions may serve as these prompts. You do not have to prepare prompts for every question, only those where you think there may be some difficulty. So, for example, after question 4 in the dialysis schedule (Box 4.2), there is a prompt to remind the interviewer to ask about each of these domains. After question 8, a prompt is provided in case the respondent has difficulty with the main question itself.

Thus, the interviewer starts with the most general possible question and hopes that this will be sufficient to enable the respondent to talk about the subject. If respondents have difficulty, say they do not understand, or give a short or tangential reply, the interviewer can move to the prompt, which is more specific. Hopefully, this will be enough to get the participant talking. The more specific level questions are there to deal with more difficult cases where the respondent is more hesitant. It is likely that a successful interview will include questions and answers at both general and more specific levels and will move between the two fairly seamlessly. If an interview is taken up with material entirely derived from very specific follow-up questions, you may need to ask yourself how engaged the respondent is. Are you really entering the personal/social life world of the participants, or are you forcing them, perhaps reluctantly and unsuccessfully, to enter yours?

*Funnelling* is a related technique. For certain issues, it may well be that you are interested in eliciting both the respondents' general views and their response to more specific concerns. Constructing this part of the schedule as a funnel allows you to do this. Thus, in Box 4.3, the first question attempts to elicit the respondent's general view on government policy. Having established that, the interviewer probes for more specific issues. The general point is that by asking questions in this sequence, you have allowed the respondents to give their own views before funnelling them into more specific questions of particular concern to you. Conducted in the reverse sequence, the interview is more likely to produce data biased in the direction of the investigator's prior and specific concerns. Of course, it is possible that when answering the first question, the respondent may also address the targeted issue and so make it redundant for you to ask the more specific questions.

### Box 4.3 Funnelling

- 1) What do you think of current government policies?
- 2) What do you think of the current government policies towards health and welfare issues?
- 3) Do you think the government record in this area is okay, or should it be doing anything different?
- 4) If so, what?
- 5) It has been suggested that government policy is moving towards one of self-reliance, the welfare system being there only as a safety net for people unable to finance their own provision. What do you think of this as a policy?

Below we provide some more tips on good practice for constructing the interview schedule:

- *Questions should be neutral rather than value-laden or leading.*  
 Bad: Do you think that the prime minister is doing a good job?  
 Better: What do you think of the prime minister's record in office so far?
- *Avoid jargon or assumptions of technical proficiency.* Try to think of the perspective and language of the participants in your study and frame your questions in a way they will feel familiar and comfortable with.  
 Bad: What do you think of the human genome project?  
 Better: What do you know about recent developments in genetics?  
 Obviously, the first question would be fine if one were talking to biologists!
- *Use open, not closed, questions.* Closed questions encourage Yes/No answers rather than getting the respondent to open up about their thoughts and feelings.  
 Bad: Should the manager resign?  
 Better: What do you think the manager should do now?  
 It all depends on intent and context, however. It is possible to ask what seems like a closed question in such a way and at such a point in the interview that it is actually unlikely to close down the response.

Having constructed your schedule, you should try and learn it by heart before beginning to interview so that, when it comes to the interview, the schedule can act merely as a mental prompt, if you need it, rather than you having constantly to refer to it.

## || Interviewing

Semi-structured interviews generally last for a considerable amount of time (usually an hour or more) and can become intense and involved, depending on the particular topic. It is therefore sensible to try to make sure that the interview can proceed without interruption as far as possible, and usually it is better to conduct the interview with the respondent alone. At the same time, one can think of exceptions where this would be neither practical nor sensible. For example, it may not be advisable with young children. The location of the interview can also make a difference. People usually feel most comfortable in a setting they are familiar with, as in their own home, but there may be times when this is not practicable and a different venue will need to be chosen.

It is sensible to concentrate at the beginning of the interview on putting respondents at ease, to enable them to feel comfortable talking to you before any of the substantive areas of the schedule are introduced. Hopefully, then, this positive and responsive 'set' will continue through the interview.

The interviewer's role in a semi-structured interview is to facilitate and guide, rather than dictate exactly what will happen during the encounter. If the interviewer has learnt the schedule in advance, he or she can concentrate during the interview on what the respondent is saying, and occasionally monitor the coverage of the scheduled topics. Thus, the interviewer uses the schedule to indicate the general area of interest and to provide cues when the

participant has difficulties, but the respondent should be allowed a strong role in determining how the interview proceeds.

The interview does not have to follow the sequence on the schedule, nor does every question have to be asked, or asked in exactly the same way, of each respondent. Thus, the interviewer may decide that it would be appropriate to ask a question earlier than it appears on the schedule because it follows from what the respondent has just said. Similarly, how a question is phrased, and how explicit it is, will now partly depend on how the interviewer feels the participant is responding.

The interview may well move away from the questions on the schedule, and the interviewer must decide how much movement is acceptable. It is quite possible that the interview may enter an area that had not been predicted by the investigator but which is extremely pertinent to, and enlightening of, the project's overall question. Indeed, these novel avenues are often the most valuable, precisely because they have come unprompted from respondents and, therefore, are likely to be of especial importance for them. Thus quite a lot of latitude should be allowed. On the other hand, of course, the interviewer needs to make sure that the conversation does not move too far away from the agreed domain.

Here are a few tips on interviewing techniques.

- *Try not to rush in too quickly.* Give the respondent time to finish a question before moving on. Often the most interesting questions need some time to respond to, and richer, fuller answers may be missed if the interviewer jumps in too quickly.
- *Use minimal probes.* If respondents are entering an interesting area, minimal probes are often all that is required to help them to continue, for example: 'Can you tell me more about that?' or 'How did you feel about that?'
- *Ask one question at a time.* Multiple questions can be difficult for the respondent to unpick and even more difficult for you subsequently, when you are trying to work out from a transcript which question the respondent is replying to.
- *Monitor the effect of the interview on the respondent.* It may be that respondents feel uncomfortable with a particular line of questioning, and this may be expressed in their non-verbal behaviour or in how they reply. You need to be ready to respond to this, by, for example, backing off and trying again more gently or deciding it would be inappropriate to pursue this area with this respondent. As an interviewer, you have ethical responsibilities toward the respondent. For more on interviewing, see Taylor and Bogdan (1998), Breakwell (2006) and Burgess (1984).

### ||| **Tape Recording and Transcription**

It is necessary to decide whether to tape-record the interview or not. Our view is that it is not possible to do the form of interviewing required for IPA without tape recording. If one attempts to write down everything the participant is saying during the interview, one will only capture the gist, missing important nuances. It will also interfere with helping the interview to run smoothly and with establishing rapport.

Of course, the respondent may not like being taped and may even not agree to the interview if it is recorded. It is also important not to reify the tape recording. While the record it produces is fuller, it is not a complete 'objective' record. Non-verbal behaviour is excluded, and the recording still requires a process of interpretation by the transcriber or any other listener.

If you do decide to tape and transcribe the interview, the normal convention is to transcribe the whole interview, including the interviewer's questions (see Box 4.4 for a sample). Leave a margin wide enough on both sides to make your analytic comments. For IPA, the level of transcription is generally at the semantic level: one needs to see all the words spoken including false starts; significant pauses, laughs and other features are also worth recording. However, for IPA, one does not need the more detailed transcription of prosodic features of the talk which are required in conversation analysis (see Chapter 7). Transcription of tapes takes a long time, depending on the clarity of the recording and one's typing proficiency. As a rough guide, one needs to allow between five and eight hours of transcription time per hour of interview.

#### Box 4.4 Sample of transcription from dialysis project

- Q Right, okay, em, so I would like to start with some questions about dialysis, okay? And a very basic one just to start with, can you tell me what you do, physically do, when you're dialysing?
- R What I actually do with myself while I'm sat there?
- Q Yeah.
- R Well, what I tend to do is, I always have a paper, or I watch TV, you mean actually just sat there?
- Q Yeah.
- R I read the papers, I always take two papers from work or a magazine and read those.
- Q Do you mean work papers or?
- R No, just normal everyday papers cos the problem I've got is because I'm right-handed and the fistula (?) is on the right-hand side, which is the one annoyance but I can't write.
- Q Because you can't write, yeah.
- R Or else I would be able to, so I read the papers or take as many magazines as I can and I always keep myself busy or watch TV. If I'm getting a good enough sound from the television point I watch the news, I always do it the same way, get in, get on, read the news daily papers, any magazines I've got, then if I've got a good enough sound on the TV I watch the news from half 6 to half 7, that's during the week when I'm in there, on the Sunday now I do it on a morning, I just buy a Sunday paper and I always read the paper or read a magazine. Always the same, just so I can keep my mind occupied. I always need to do that.

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

- Q So you are able to concentrate enough to be able to do?
- R Yeah. And sometimes if I'm tired I can go to sleep for an hour.
- Q Right.
- R Or if I've run out of papers and sometimes I just shut me eyes for an hour, and I can fall asleep but normally if I can I always make sure I get a magazine or a paper and read that and do something.
- Q And that sounds as though you're, that's quite a determined routine.
- R Yeah.
- Q Do you, what's behind that, what what why do you feel the necessity to be so methodical?
- R I think what I try and do is, yeah, so that I treat it as part of normal routine, I think that's what I do it for, I'm sometimes, I always get a paper from work, the same papers, always try and borrow a magazine and read and keep myself, a way not thinking about it while I'm on, that is why I do it and watch TV, so I don't think about the machine or I get bored if I'm just sat there doing nothing, but mainly not so I don't think about it, so I can just think about reading the paper, and I read the paper from top to bottom even if I've, I just read everything, it's the same things in the same papers in the daily paper, but I always read the same things, even if it's just reading the same things again I read the papers from top to bottom all the way through, and any magazines I always read them and read it from the beginning to the end or watch the TV, always keep myself busy thinking about something rather than that, that's what I feel I do it for.

## **I| Analysis**

The assumption in IPA is that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world. This may be in the form of beliefs and constructs that are made manifest or suggested by the respondent's talk, or it may be that the analyst holds that the respondent's story can itself be said to represent a piece of the respondent's identity (Smith, 2003). Either way, meaning is central, and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency. This involves the investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. While one is attempting to capture and do justice to the meanings of the respondents to learn about their mental and social world, those meanings are not transparently available – they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation.

The following section describes a step-by-step approach to the analysis in IPA, illustrated with a worked example from a study on the impact of chronic

benign pain on the participant's self-concept. Chronic benign low back pain is a useful subject for IPA, as the context and personal meanings of the pain to the sufferers are critical to their experience. The example is taken from a project using IPA to try to understand the experience of chronic back pain by patients from one clinic in northern England. Participants were interviewed in the style outlined above and the transcripts subjected to IPA. For more on the study, see Osborn and Smith (1998) and Smith and Osborn (in press).

This is not a prescriptive methodology. It is a way of doing IPA that has worked for us and our students, but it is there to be adapted by researchers, who will have their own personal way of working. It is also important to remember that qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages. The approach is both similar to and different from phenomenology and grounded theory (Chapters 3 and 5) as, hopefully, will become apparent.

A project may take the form of a single case design or involve a number of participants. For the latter, it is advisable to begin by looking in detail at the transcript of one interview before moving on to examine the others, case by case. This follows the idiographic approach to analysis, beginning with particular examples and only slowly working up to more general categorization or claims (see Smith et al., 1995).

### || Looking for Themes in the First Case

The transcript is read a number of times, the left-hand margin being used to annotate what is interesting or significant about what the respondent said. It is important in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account. Each reading has the potential to throw up new insights. This is close to being a free textual analysis. There are no rules about what is commented upon, and there is no requirement, for example, to divide the text into meaning units and assign a comment for each unit. Some parts of the interview will be richer than others and so warrant more commentary. Some of the comments are attempts at summarizing or paraphrasing, some will be associations or connections that come to mind, and others may be preliminary interpretations. You may also find yourself commenting on the use of language by the participants and/or the sense of the persons themselves which is coming across. As you move through the transcript, you are likely to comment on similarities and differences, echoes, amplifications and contradictions in what a person is saying.

The extract which follows shows this first stage of analysis for a small section of the interview with Martha, who was the first participant in our study:

*Int.* How long has it been like that?

*Aggression*

*Not who I am – identity*

*Being mean*

*Can't help it – no control*

*Me doing it but not me*

*Conflict, tension*

*Me vs nice*

*Shame, if you knew – disgust*

*Fear of being known*

*M.* Since it started getting bad, I was always snappy with it but not like this, it's not who I am it's just who I am if you know what I mean, it's not really me, I get like that and I know like, you're being mean now but I can't help it. It's the pain, it's me, but it is me, me doing it but not me do you understand what I'm saying, if I was to describe myself like you said, I'm a nice person, but then I'm not am I, and there's other stuff, stuff I haven't told you, if you knew you'd be disgusted I just get so hateful.

*Int.* When you talk about you and then sometimes not you, what do you mean?

*Not always me, part of*

*himself that is rejected*

*– hateful, the 'not me'*

*Not me = pain, defending*

*against implications that*

*it is 'me'*

*Helpless*

*Mean/sour – worse than the*

*pain*

*M.* I'm not me these days, I am sometimes, I am all right, but then I get this mean bit, the hateful bit, that's not me.

*Int.* What's that bit?

*M.* I dunno, that's the pain bit, I know you're gonna say it's all me, but I can't help it even though I don't like it. It's the mean me, my mean head all sour and horrible, I can't cope with that bit, I cope with the pain better.

*Int.* How do you cope with it?

*Tearful/distressed,*

*avoidant/resistant*

*Unbearable, shocked at self*

*M.* Get out the way, [tearful] sit in my room, just get away, look do you mind if we stop now, I didn't think it would be like this, I don't want to talk any more.

This process is continued for the whole of the first transcript. Then one returns to the beginning of the transcript, and the other margin is used to document emerging theme titles. Here the initial notes are transformed into concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text. The themes move the response to a slightly higher level of abstraction and may invoke more psychological terminology. At the same time, the thread back to what the participant actually said and one's initial response should be apparent. So the skill at this stage is finding expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said. From Martha's account, related above, the following themes emerged and were noted:

*Int.* How long has it been like that?

*Anger and pain*

*Struggle to accept self and*

*identity – unwanted self*

*Lack of control over self*

*Responsibility, self vs pain*

*Shameful self – struggle with*

*unwanted self*

*Fear of judgement*

*M.* Since it started getting bad, I was always snappy with it but not like this, it's not who I am it's just who I am if you know what I

mean, it's not really me, I get like that and I know like, you're being mean now but I can't help it. It's the pain, it's me, but it is me, me doing it but not me do you understand what I'm saying, if I was to describe myself like you said, I'm a nice person, but then I'm not am I, and there's other stuff, stuff I haven't told you, if you knew you'd be disgusted I just get so hateful.

*Int.* When you talk about you and then sometimes not you, what do you mean?

*M.* I'm not me these days, I am sometimes, I am all right, but then I get this mean bit, the hateful bit, that's not me.

*Unwanted self rejected as true self*

*Int.* What's that bit?

*M.* I dunno, that's the pain bit, I know you're gonna say it's all me, but I can't help it even though I don't like it. It's the mean me, my mean head all sour and horrible, I can't cope with that bit, I cope with the pain better.

*Attribution of unwanted self to the pain*

*Defence of original self*

*Ranking duress, self vs pain*

*Int.* How do you cope with it?

*Shame of disclosure*

*M.* Get out the way, [tearful] sit in my room, just get away, look do you mind if we stop now, I didn't think it would be like this, I don't want to talk any more.

This transformation of initial notes into themes is continued through the whole transcript. It may well be that similar themes emerge as you go through the transcript and where that happens the same theme title is therefore repeated.

We have presented the two stages for a small extract above to show the way in which the transformation into themes works. To illustrate this process further, here is another section of the transcript, showing first the initial notes and then the emergent themes:

*Resistance to change*

*Avoidance*

*Struggle against being*

*'bad person', depression*

*Fear of exposure/public*

*knowledge*

*Mean, unsociable, undesirable*

*Schadenfreude*

*Loss of care, bitter against will*

*Rejected as true self*

*Confusion, lack of control*

*M.* No, not really, well, you don't want to think you've changed at all, and I don't think about it, you've asked me and I'm trying to think and yeah, I don't want to, but I think I'm not a bad person, perhaps, yeah, it

brings you down, and then you end up spoiling things.

*Int.* How do you mean?

*M.* No one is going to hear this tape, right?

*Int.* Like we agreed, anonymous and confidential, you get the tape after I'm done.

*M.* Right, [pause] the pain makes me mean. I don't want to be, but I get like, mean, I don't care about other people, nothing's funny, and I get mad if they try to be nice, like pity. It's not really me, but it is me I know what I mean, I don't like it but I do it, do you understand, and I end up saying sorry, if I've snapped like, it's the pain it's killing, it does that sometimes.

The emergent themes for this extract were noted in the right-hand margin:

*Rejection of change*  
*Avoidance of implications*  
*Struggle to accept new self*  
*Undesirable, destructive self*  
*Shame*  
*Undesirable behaviour ascribed to pain*  
*Lack of compassion*  
*Conflict of selves, me vs not me*  
*Living with a new 'me'*  
 M. No not really, well, you don't want to think you've changed at all, and I don't think about it, you've asked me and I'm trying to think and yeah, I don't want to, but I think. I'm not a bad person, perhaps, yeah, it

brings you down, and then you end up spoiling things.

*Int.* How do you mean?

M. No one is going to hear this tape, right?

*Int.* Like we agreed, anonymous and confidential, you get the tape after I'm done.

M. Right, [pause] the pain makes me mean. I don't want to be, but I get like, mean, I don't care about other people, nothing's funny, and I get mad if they try to be nice, like pity. It's not really me, but it is me if you know what I mean, I don't like it but I do it, do you understand, and I up saying sorry, if I've snapped like, it's the pain it's killing, it does that sometimes.

At this stage, the entire transcript is treated as data, and no attempt is made to omit or select particular passages for special attention. At the same time, there is no requirement for every turn to generate themes. The number of emerging themes reflects the richness of the particular passage.

## ||| **Connecting the Themes**

The emergent themes are listed on a sheet of paper, and one looks for connections between them. So, in the initial list, the order provided is chronological – it is based on the sequence with which they came up in the transcript. The next stage involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher tries to make sense of the connections between themes which are emerging. Some of the themes will cluster together, and some may emerge as superordinate concepts. Imagine a magnet with some of the themes pulling others in and helping to make sense of them.

The preliminary list of themes that emerged from Martha's transcript and were noted in the right-hand margin are shown in Box 4.5. These were clustered as shown in Box 4.6. In this particular case, it will be seen that all the themes listed were present in the two extracts selected. This is because, in this particular case, we have specifically chosen these two extracts for their richness. They encapsulate each of the important issues in our analysis.

### **Box 4.5 Initial list of themes**

Anger and pain  
 Struggle to accept self and identity – unwanted self  
 Lack of control over self

*(Continued)*

Responsibility, self vs pain  
 Shameful self – struggle with unwanted self  
 Fear of judgement  
 Unwanted self rejected as true self  
 Attribution of unwanted self to the pain  
 Defence of original self  
 Ranking duress, self vs pain  
 Shame of disclosure  
 Rejection of change  
 Avoidance of implications  
 Struggle to accept new self  
 Undesirable, destructive self  
 Shame  
 Undesirable behaviour ascribed to pain  
 Lack of compassion  
 Conflict of selves, me vs not me  
 Living with a new 'me'

### **Box 4.6 Clustering of themes**

Undesirable behaviour ascribed to pain  
 Struggle to accept self and identity – unwanted self  
 Shameful self – struggle with unwanted self, fear of judgement  
 Shame of disclosure  
 Struggle to accept new self  
 Undesirable, destructive self  
 Conflict of selves, me vs not me  
 Living with a new 'me'  
 Unwanted self rejected as true self  
 Attribution of unwanted self to the pain  
 Defence of original self  
 Lack of control over self  
 Rejection of change  
 Avoidance of implications  
 Responsibility, self vs pain  
 Shame  
 Lack of compassion  
 Anger and pain  
 Ranking duress, self vs pain  
 Shame of disclosure

As the clustering of themes emerges, it is checked in the transcript to make sure the connections work for the primary source material – the actual words of the participant. This form of analysis is iterative and involves a close interaction between reader and text. As a researcher one is drawing on one's interpretative resources to make sense of what the person is saying, but at the same time one is constantly checking one's own sense-making against what the person actually said. As an adjunct to the process of clustering, it may help to compile directories of the participant's phrases that support related themes. This can easily be done with the cut and paste functions on a standard word-processing package. The material can be printed to help with the clustering, and as the clustering develops, so the extract material can be moved, condensed and edited.

The next stage is to produce a table of the themes, ordered coherently. Thus, the above process will have identified some clusters of themes which capture most strongly the respondent's concerns on this particular topic. The clusters are themselves given a name and represent the superordinate themes. The table lists the themes which go with each superordinate theme, and an identifier is added to each instance to aid the organization of the analysis and facilitate finding the original source subsequently. The identifier indicates where in the transcript instances of each theme can be found by giving key words from the particular extract plus the page number of the transcript. During this process, certain themes may be dropped: those which neither fit well in the emerging structure nor are very rich in evidence within the transcript. The final table of themes for Martha is presented in Box 4.7. Because most of the themes recur in this transcript, the identifier in this case points to a particularly good example of the relevant theme.

#### Box 4.7 Table of themes from first participant

1. <i>Living with an unwanted self</i>		
– Undesirable behaviour ascribed to pain	1.16	'it's the pain'
– Struggle to accept self and identity – unwanted self	24.11	'who I am'
– Unwanted self rejected as true self	24.24	'hateful bit'
– Struggle to accept new self	1.8	'hard to believe'
– Undesirable, destructive self	5.14	'mean'
– Conflict of selves, me vs not me	7.11	'me not me'
– Living with a new self	9.6	'new me'
2. <i>A self that cannot be understood or controlled</i>		
– Lack of control over self	24.13	'can't help'
– Rejection of change	1.7	'still same'

*(Continued)*

– Avoidance of implications	10.3	'no different'
– Responsibility, self vs pain	25.25	'understand'
<b>3. Undesirable feelings</b>		
– Shame	5.15	'disgusting'
– Anger and pain	24.09	'snappy'
– Lack of compassion	6.29	'don't care'
– Confusion, lack of control	2.17	'no idea'
– Ranking duress, self vs pain	25.01	'cope'
– Shame of disclosure	25.06	'talk'
(1.16 = page 1, line 16)		

### || Continuing the Analysis with Other Cases

A single participant's transcript can be written up as a case study in its own right or, more often, the analysis can move on to incorporate interviews with a number of different individuals. One can either use the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis or put the table of themes for participant 1 aside and work on transcript 2 from scratch. Whichever approach is adopted, one needs to be disciplined to discern repeating patterns but also acknowledge new issues emerging as one works through the transcripts. Thus, one is aiming to respect convergences and divergences in the data – recognizing ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different.

In the study illustrated here, the superordinate list from Martha's account was used to inform the analysis of the other transcripts. By remaining aware of what had come before, it was possible to identify what was new and different in the subsequent transcripts and at the same time find responses which further articulated the extant themes. Evidence of the superordinate themes 'living with an unwanted self' and 'undesirable feelings' emerged in other transcripts in ways which helped to illuminate them further. The first stage of the process with Tony's transcript follows:

*Withdrawal, relief*

*Change in role, putting on an act*

*No people = bliss*

*Miserable but no cost*

*People = duress*

*People = cannot be yourself*

*Front, façade, demands*

*of social role and convention*

*Pain and relationships,*

*kids affected experience*

*T. Yeah, you know that Desert Island Discs?*

*Int. The radio show?*

*T. I'd love that, don't get me wrong I'd miss my kids and I don't mean it, but to be away from people and not have to be something else you're not, that would be bliss.*

*Int. You'd be happier that way?*

*T. Yeah, no, well, no I'd still be a miserable old git but it wouldn't matter, it's only when other people come around that it matters, if you can just be yourself it doesn't matter*

what you do, I'd probably shout and swear all day but it wouldn't matter I wouldn't have to put on that front so it'd be easier.

*Int.* So a lot of how you feel depends on who's around?

*T.* I suppose it does, but not the pain, that just happens. Dealing with the pain, I suppose, is different. You could say if I didn't have kids I wouldn't be like this.

These initial comments were transformed into the following themes.

*Pain and social context*  
*Conflict in identity*  
*Conforming to role despite pain*  
*Self in public domain*  
*Managing the self in public*  
*Destructive social consequences of pain*  
*Self independent of pain*  
*Self/identity and relationships define pain experience*

*T.* Yeah, you know that *Desert Island Discs*?

*Int.* The radio show?

*T.* I'd love that, don't get me wrong I'd miss my kids and I don't mean it, but to be away from people and not have to be something else you're not, that would be bliss.

*Int.* You'd be happier that way?

*T.* Yeah, no, well, no I'd still be a miserable old git but it wouldn't matter, it's only when other people come around that it matters, if you can just be yourself it doesn't what you do, I'd probably shout and swear all day but it wouldn't matter I wouldn't have to put on that front so it'd be easier.

*Int.* So a lot of how you feel depends on who's around?

*T.* I suppose it does, but not the pain, that just happens. Dealing with the pain, I suppose, is different. You could say if I didn't have kids I wouldn't be like this.

One can see here how the analysis of pain and identity is evolving and, as the analytic process in this example continued, the theme of 'living with an unwanted self' and 'undesirable feelings' transmuted to become 'living with an unwanted self in private' and 'living with an unwanted self in public'. As we said earlier, the researcher can choose to either use the table of themes from the first transcript to orient the analysis of the subsequent ones, or start the analysis of each case, as though it was the first. If one is working with a very small number of cases, for example, a sample of three as we are now suggesting for students' first IPA projects, then we would recommend that the latter strategy is adopted. When the number of cases is very small, it is best to start analysis of each from scratch and then look for convergence and divergence once one has done each case separately.

Once each transcript has been analysed by the interpretative process, a final table of superordinate themes is constructed. Deciding upon which themes to focus upon requires the analyst to prioritize the data and begin to reduce them, which is challenging. The themes are not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, including the richness of the particular passages that highlight the themes and how the theme helps

illuminate other aspects of the account, are also taken into account. From the analysis of the cases in this study, four main superordinate themes were articulated. The fourth one, 'a body separate from the self', emerged late in the analysis. Consonant with the iterative process of IPA, as the analysis continued, earlier transcripts were reviewed in the light of this new superordinate theme, and instances from those earlier transcripts were included in the ongoing analysis. Box 4.8 shows the identifiers for the themes for the two participants looked at in the chapter. In practice, each of the seven participants in the study was represented for each superordinate theme. Sometimes students are worried because they cannot find convergences between their individual case tables of themes. In our experience, this can be seen as an intellectual opportunity rather than difficulty. It is often possible to see higher level convergences across seemingly disparate cases, and so this process pushes the analysis to an even higher level. The resulting analysis respects both theoretical convergence but also, within that, individual idiosyncrasy in how that that convergence is manifest.

#### Box 4.8 Master table of themes for the group

<i>Martha</i>	<i>Tony</i>	
<i>1. Living with an unwanted self in private</i>		
Undesirable behaviour ascribed to pain	1.16	3.27
Struggle to accept self and identity – unwanted self	24.11	2.13
Rejected as true self	6.3	7.15
Undesirable, destructive self	5.14	2.17
Conflict of selves	7.11	12.13
Living with a new self	9.6	2.14
<i>2. Living with an unwanted self, in public</i>		
Shame	5.15	10.3
Lack of compassion	6.29	3.7
Destructive social consequences of pain	8.16	10.9
<i>3. A self that cannot be understood</i>		
Lack of control over self	24.13	11.8
Rejection of change	1.7	4.16
Responsibility, self vs pain	25.15	13.22
<i>4. A body separate from the self</i>		
Taken for granted	21.15	15.14
Body excluded from the self	23.5	16.23
Body presence vs absence	18.12	19.1

## || Writing Up

The final section is concerned with moving from the final themes to a write-up and final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the participants' experience. The division between analysis and writing up is, to a certain extent, a false one, in that the analysis will be expanded during the writing phase.

This stage is concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account. Here the analysis becomes expansive again, as the themes are explained, illustrated and nuanced. The table of themes is the basis for the account of the participants' responses, which takes the form of the narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case. Care is taken to distinguish clearly between what the respondent said and the analyst's interpretation or account of it. And when one sees the extracts again within the unfolding narrative, often one is prompted to extend the analytic commentary on them. This is consonant with the processual, creative feature of qualitative psychology.

Two broad presentation strategies are possible. In the first, the 'results' section contains the emergent thematic analysis, and the separate 'discussion' links that analysis to the extant literature. An alternative strategy is to discuss the links to the literature as one presents each superordinate theme in a single 'results and discussion' section. In the back pain study, the themes are presented together in one analysis section while a separate section is devoted to exploring their implications in relation to the existing literature. A brief extract is shown in Box 4.9.

### Box 4.9 Extract from final write-up of the back pain study

Participants were asked to talk as widely as possible about the different ways their pain had affected or influenced their feelings, attitudes or beliefs about themselves. The participants' accounts clustered around four superordinate themes: living with an unwanted self, in private; living with an unwanted self, in public; living with a self that cannot be understood; and living with a body separate from the self.

#### Living with an unwanted self, in private

All of the participants related how, as a consequence of living with their chronic pain, they had experienced a deterioration in their sense of self, and were engaged in a struggle to manage that process. The phrase 'self-concept' was not used by the interviewer; the participants were asked to describe in their own words how they felt living with their chronic pain had affected the way they saw

*(Continued)*

or felt about themselves, 'as a person'. None of the participants reported any problems understanding this concept, referring to it as 'me' and 'who I am'.

Martha's account captured much of the participants' despair in relation to the deterioration in their self-regard, and their struggle to assimilate that aspect of their experience of living with pain into their self-concept. The changes Martha reported were associated with significant distress that, at times, outweighed that caused by the pain sensation, and prompted her to withdraw from social contact for fear of harsh judgement:

*Int.* How long has it been like that?

*Martha* Since it started getting bad, I was always snappy with it but not like this, it's not who I am, it's just who I am if you know what I mean, it's not really me, I get like that and I know like, you're being mean now but I can't help it. It's the pain, it's me, but it is me, me doing it but not me do you understand what I'm saying, if I was to describe myself like you said, I'm a nice person, but then I not am I, and there's other stuff, stuff I haven't told you, if you knew you'd be disgusted I just get so hateful.

*Int.* When you talk about you and then sometimes not you, what do you mean?

*Martha* I'm not me these days, I am sometimes, I am all right, but then I get this mean bit, the hateful bit, that's not me.

*Int.* What's that bit?

*Martha* I dunno, that's the pain bit, I know you're gonna say it's all me, but I can't help it even though I don't like it. It's the mean me, my mean head all sour and horrible, I can't cope with that bit, I cope with the pain better.

*Int.* How do you cope with it?

*Martha* Get out the way, [tearful] sit in my room, just get away, look do you mind if we stop now, I didn't think it would be like this, I don't want to talk any more.

Martha's account emphasized the distress she felt as she struggled to manage or comprehend her situation. Martha referred to behaviours and feelings she had about herself since having pain, of being 'hateful', that she found disturbing and alarming. They gave her feelings of self-disgust, and a fear that if others were aware of them, they, too, would share that disgust:

*M:* There's other stuff, stuff I haven't told you, if you knew, you'd be disgusted I just get so hateful.

Martha was not explicit about what she does that is so 'hateful', but showed that it was sufficiently threatening to warrant its concealment. Her use of the term 'hateful' was not explicit, but implied that she felt that, in being 'mean', she was both full of feelings of hate toward others, and also worthy of hate by others.

She showed a need to see herself in a positive light, as a 'nice person', but struggled to do so. This was reflected in her confusion about her sense of self, and her attempts to separate the undesirable behaviour from her self-concept, and attribute it to the pain:

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

M: It's not who I am it's just who I am if you know what I mean, it's not really me ... It's the pain, it's me, but it is me, me doing it but not me.

Martha appeared to be engaged in an ongoing process of defending her self-concept to retain a sense of self-worth, but she could not reject completely the implication that her 'disgusting' behaviour was not just a function of her pain but also related to herself, 'I know you're gonna say it's all me'. The battle to retain a sense of self-worth in the face of her confusing experience of her deteriorating physical and emotional state, and disability, was more difficult to bear than the sensation of pain itself:

M: It's the mean me, my mean head all sour and horrible, I can't cope with that bit, I cope with the pain better.

## **I| Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to present the reader with an accessible introduction to IPA. We have outlined a series of steps for conducting a research study using the approach. Doing qualitative research may seem daunting at first, but, ultimately, it is extremely rewarding. We hope you may be encouraged by what we have written to attempt a project using IPA yourself.

Box 4.10 presents three examples of IPA in action.

### **Box 4.10 Three good examples of IPA**

#### **Migration and Threat to Identity**

This paper by Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000) explores the impact of migration on identity. Immigrants to the UK from the Former Yugoslavia were interviewed about their perceptions of the countries they had left and the one they had joined and the decision to move. Their accounts point to a rich patterning of identifications. Different people used different category membership strategies in relation to their former home. Some stressed their own ethnic identity at the expense of the greater national Yugoslavian while others identified as Yugoslavian and emphasized their own ethnic group as being an important element in that Yugoslavian identity. Thus the category Yugoslavian was not fixed and could therefore be invoked in different ways as part of the process of asserting ones identity. Their relationship to the UK was similarly complex. The paper neatly captures this multifaceted and dynamic process of identification and relates it to various theories of identity, including identity process theory and social identity theory.

(Continued)

### **Hepatitis C Infection and Well-being**

Dunne and Quayle (2001) conducted focus groups with patients who had iatrogenically acquired Hepatitis C infection – that is they became infected from contaminated blood infusion. The authors make a persuasive case for the use of focus groups here in that they argue the style of group facilitation and the fact that members were connected as members of a patients advocate group meant that the data obtained were still able to tap into personal lived experiences. The paper illustrates how difficult patients find it to make sense of their symptoms before they are given a diagnosis. And when diagnosis comes, their reactions are mixed, partly because with it comes awareness of the seriousness of their condition. The paper also explores the negative impact on their primary social relationships. The authors discuss their results in terms of identity and life career and make links to the extant work of Charmaz and Goffman.

### **Anger and Aggression in Women**

Eatough and Smith (2006b) present a detailed case study of one woman's account of anger and aggression. It is therefore a useful illustration of IPA's commitment to the idiographic. The paper aims to show how the individual attempts to find meaning for events and experiences within the context of their life and how this meaning making can be hard and conflictual. The analysis begins by demonstrating how dominant cultural discourses are used to explain anger and aggression. These include hormones, alcohol, and the influence of past relationships on present action. It then goes onto examine how the participant's meaning making is often ambiguous and confused, and how she variously accepts and challenges meanings available to her. Finally, the analysis shows how meaning making can break down and the consequences of this for the individual's sense of self.

### **Further Reading**

Smith, J.A. (1996) 'Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology', *Psychology and Health*, 11: 261–71.

This paper provides a summary of the theoretical basis for IPA.

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. and Osborn, M. (1997) 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis and health psychology', in L. Yardley (ed.), *Material Discourses and Health*. London: Routledge, pp. 68–91.

This chapter illustrates IPA applied to three different areas in the psychology of health.

Smith, J.A. and Eatough, V. (2006) 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis', in G. Breakwell, C. Fife-Schaw, S. Hammond and J.A. Smith (eds) *Research Methods in Psychology*, (3rd edn). London: Sage.

This chapter gives an alternative discussion of the IPA method illustrated with material from a project on anger and aggression.

Eatough, V. and Smith J.A. (in press) 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis', in C. Willig and W. Stainton Rogers (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Psychology*. London: Sage.

This chapter discusses the theoretical foundations of IPA and considers a range of current issues.