

Position Paper

Qualitative Research in European Health Psychology

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There is growing interest in qualitative research methodology amongst European health psychologists. Here I would like to describe some of what is happening; much of the activity is under the auspices of EHPS. This serves as testimony to the rapid progress that has been made and also offers guidance for those people interested in finding out more.

For the last few years I have been on the scientific committee for the EHPS annual conference. During this time it has been satisfying to watch the growth in numbers of qualitative submissions and also a receptiveness by the committee to think of ways of facilitating this development. In recent conferences there have been qualitative papers within substantive sessions and also additional sessions dedicated to qualitative papers. At this early stage, as EHPS is adjusting to recognizing qualitative research, this strikes me as the best solution. However, things are developing and I would hope in the future we may have an even more synthesized programme where qualitative papers are integrated even more and the methodological approach itself is even less of an issue in selection. However I think there should also always be room for some specialist qualitative (and quantitative) sessions.

Emerging from the conference, there is now a qualitative research interest group facilitated by Irina Todorova. The group has made a commitment to a set of activities for the next five years: the establishment of a qualitative interest network and e-discussion group, a series of workshops on qualitative methods attached to the annual conference, offering qualitative expertise to the conference scientific committee.

- To join the qualitative network please email Maggie Donovan mh699@soton.ac.uk who will send you an electronic form to complete.
- To join the e-discussion group, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EHPS_ORIG/. This is a really useful way for people to communicate with each other, connect with individuals doing similar research projects, suggest collective activities etc.
- This year in Warsaw, I will be running a post conference workshop on interpretative phenomenological analysis http://www.ehps.net/conf2006/Postconference_flyer.pdf. We will announce details of next year's workshop once they are confirmed.

Health psychology journals in Europe have responded well to the growth of qualitative work, so for example, *Psychology and Health*, *Journal of Health Psychology* and *British Journal of Health Psychology* now regularly publish qualitative papers. This strikes me as a healthy and sensible reflection of changing research practice. I can speak from personal experience here. As one of the co-editors of *Psychology and Health*, I handle qualitative submissions. We have an increasing rate of these and they are reviewed in exactly the same way as other papers. The aim is to publish high quality examples of qualitative studies and I am really pleased that we have been able to do that. As a marker of quality control, the acceptance/rejection rate for qualitative papers is exactly in line with that for the journal as a whole.

Increasing numbers of texts are now available for people wanting to learn how to do qualitative research. These include contributions to general methods texts; specialist books on qualitative methods (e.g., Murray & Chamberlain, 1999; Smith, 2003) and books focused on single approaches (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Crossley, 2000). For the newcomer these texts are invaluable in introducing them to the main qualitative approaches now being used in psychology (e.g. discourse analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative psychology) as well as other methodologies which they may find useful.

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I was pleased to read Stan Maes, in his recent position paper in the *European Health Psychologist* (Maes, 2005), state that he believed health psychologists should use more qualitative data in their analyses. However, he goes on to say 'some people who do collect more qualitative data, erroneously think that these data should be analyzed in a qualitative, idiosyncratic and thus uncontrollable way'. Here, as an inveterate pluralist, I disagree with him. I think there is room within psychology for a whole range of research approaches- entirely quantitative and entirely qualitative studies, as well as mixed methods designs. As part of this, I think it is fine for people to collect qualitative data and then analyse it quantitatively. However, I think there is an important place within psychology generally, and health psychology particularly, for studies which collect qualitative data and then analyse it qualitatively. Indeed for many qualitative researchers it is the analysis which makes it qualitative research.

Qualitative research is becoming an established part of health psychology. And this has happened pretty rapidly when set in a historical perspective. More courses are being set up, conference papers given, postgraduate dissertations written, texts and journal papers published. So the tools have been developed, some of the infrastructure is in place, and exemplars and precedents are increasingly available. The future looks promising and it will be interesting to witness how this pans out over the next five years.

References

Charmaz K (2006) *Grounded Theory: Methods for the 21st Century*. London: Sage.

Crossley M (2000) *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma and the Construction of Meaning*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Maes, S. (2005). Health Psychology, back to the future. *European Health Psychologist* 1 (2), 4-5.

Murray M and Chamberlain K (eds) (1999) *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods*. London: Sage.

Smith JA (2003) (ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. London: Sage.

**POST-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

FEW PLACES LEFT!

Facilitator: Jonathan Smith

Saturday September 2nd, 2006 14.00h to Sunday September 3rd, 2006, 13.00 h.

This is an introductory workshop to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is concerned with an in-depth analysis of lived experience and offers a flexible but systematic set of procedures for doing this. This workshop will give a brief introduction to the theoretical background of IPA and will then concentrate on the practicalities involved in using the approach. There will be opportunities for hands-on experience. This is an introductory workshop and no prior experience with IPA is required. Participants must have sufficient knowledge of English language. The participation fee is 50 Euros. Participants from those countries listed on the EHPS 2006 registration website (www.ehps2006.org) and students are eligible for the reduced fee of 40 Euros. The maximum number of participants is 20. In case of too many applicants, participants will be selected on a first-come-first-serve basis.