

Cite as: Charlick, S., Pincombe, J., McKellar, L., & Fielder, A. (2016). Making sense of participant experiences: Interpretative phenomenological analysis in midwifery research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 11, 205-216. Retrieved from <http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3486>

# Making Sense of Participant Experiences: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Midwifery Research

*Samantha Charlick, Jan Pincombe, Lois McKellar, and  
Andrea Fielder*

*University of South Australia, School of Nursing and Midwifery,  
Adelaide, South Australia, Australia*

[Samantha.Charlick@mymail.unisa.edu.au](mailto:Samantha.Charlick@mymail.unisa.edu.au)  
[Jan.Pincombe@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Jan.Pincombe@unisa.edu.au) [Lois.McKellar@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Lois.McKellar@unisa.edu.au)  
[Andrea.Fielder@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Andrea.Fielder@unisa.edu.au)

## Abstract

Selecting the most appropriate methodology for research as a doctoral student is one of the most important yet difficult decisions. Not only should the methodology suit the research question, it is important that it resonates with the philosophy of one's discipline and produces needed results that will contribute to knowledge. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an approach to qualitative enquiry. IPA seeks to explore how individuals make sense of their major life experiences and is committed to the detailed study of each particular case before moving to broader claims. In the field of midwifery, midwives work with women throughout pregnancy, childbirth and the early postnatal period, offering individualized care based on the unique needs of each woman. IPA aligns with this women-centered philosophy as it offers a methodological approach that considers the individual in a local context. By capturing context specific situations, IPA allows broad-based knowledge to be contextualized within a social and cultural context, producing relevant findings. Thus the access to IPA studies will enable midwives to better care for women and their families through understanding the experiences and perceptions of those in their scope of practice.

This paper presents the theoretical framework leading to practical guidelines on how to conduct a doctoral-level IPA study, as experienced by the first author. It also addresses the advantages and challenges around utilizing IPA, illustrated through examples from the doctoral student's study on the journey of exclusive breastfeeding in Australia.

---

Material published as part of this publication, either on-line or in print, is copyrighted by the Informing Science Institute. Permission to make digital or paper copy of part or all of these works for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that the copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage AND that copies 1) bear this notice in full and 2) give the full citation on the first page. It is permissible to abstract these works so long as credit is given. To copy in all other cases or to republish or to post on a server or to redistribute to lists requires specific permission and payment of a fee. Contact [Publisher@InformingScience.org](mailto:Publisher@InformingScience.org) to request redistribution permission.

**Keywords:** Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), doctoral studies, qualitative research, midwifery, individualized care, exclusive breastfeeding.

## Introduction

Selecting an appropriate research methodology, and subsequently the method, is one of the most critical challenges presented to a student researcher. The

**Editor: Michael Jones**

Submitted: October 31, 2015; Revised: May 1, 2016; Accepted: May 2, 2016

type of methodology chosen impacts the depth and breadth of the findings. Yet it is not only the research question and anticipated results that must guide the decision, it is also important to consider the acceptability of the methodology within the field to be researched. For example, in the context of the present doctoral study, midwives work ‘with women’ throughout the continuum of childbirth, which spans from preconception to six weeks postnatal (Pairman & McAra-Couper, 2010), and seek to offer individualized care supported by evidence-based research. The midwife is mindful of the woman’s physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual needs and expectations. The challenge in this field, however, is that many of the midwifery practice guidelines are informed by randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which apply averages, percentages, rates, and risks to a population rather than considering the woman as an individual (Pairman & McAra-Couper, 2010). Consequently, research findings that address individual variation and consider a holistic approach are needed in the field. When research findings of qualitative methods are presented alongside previously discussed RCT findings, future midwifery practice guidelines will be increasingly thorough, accurate, and holistic (Schleiermacher, 1998).

This paper will draw on experiences from the current doctoral study undertaken in the field of midwifery and aims to provide a guide for other doctoral students considering the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in their research. This paper will explore the scope of IPA by presenting the methodological framework and a step-by-step description on how to conduct an IPA study. It will also discuss the advantages and challenges of utilizing IPA during the doctoral years.

## **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of that experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Pioneered by Jonathan Smith (1996), it is a contemporary, yet established, qualitative methodology. Although developed in the field of psychology, IPA is now increasingly being used in the human, social, and health sciences. IPA research can stand alone or in conjunction with other forms of research to bring a deeper understanding regarding the needs and issues of individuals, what is important to them, and how they impose meaning on events in their lives. *Conducting an IPA study was particularly appealing for me as midwife researcher as it provided a way to explore the needs and issues of breastfeeding women.*

### ***The Methodological Foundation of IPA***

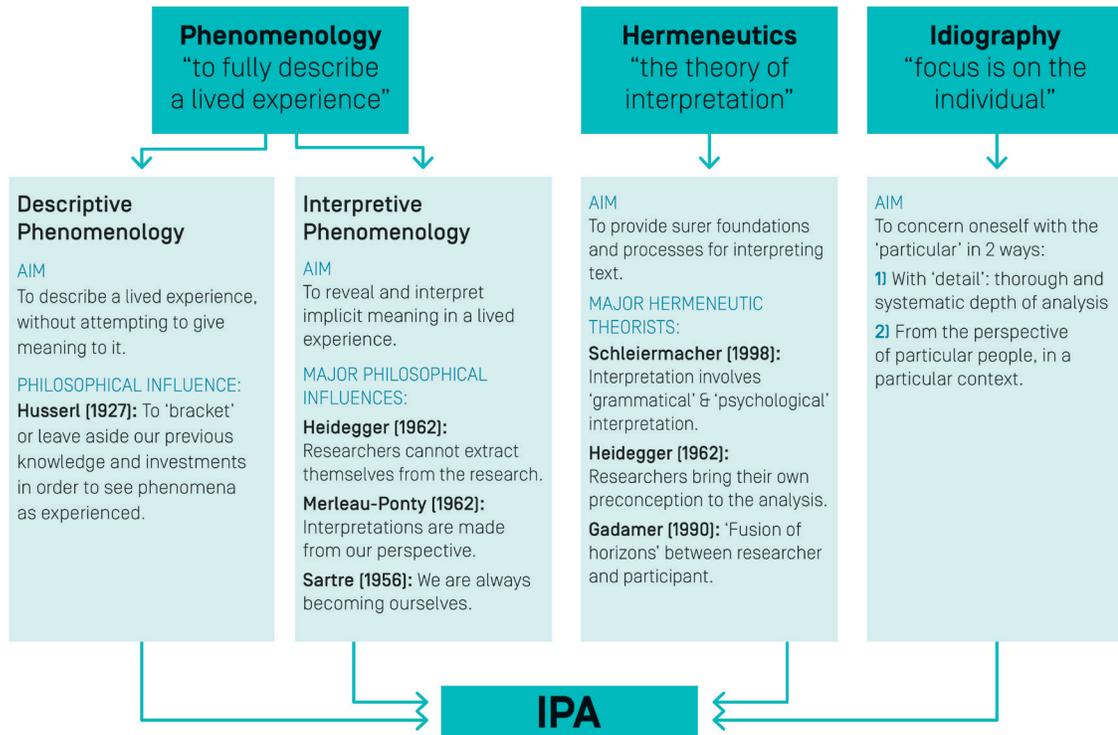
IPA has three methodological influences: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, illustrated in Figure 1. As IPA draws from all three of these areas, it is important to understand the key philosophers and features from each, and how they fit together to shape the development of an IPA study.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience. It guides us to think about what the experience of being human is like, especially in terms of the things that matter to us and that constitute our lived world (Smith et al., 2009). The goal of phenomenology, therefore, is to explore a lived experience. Phenomenological enquiry has two different approaches: descriptive phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology. IPA has its foundations in both.

*Descriptive Phenomenology* aims to purely describe a lived experience without attempting to give meaning to it (Smith et al., 2009). Edmund Husserl (1927), the originator of descriptive phenomenology, suggested that during data collection and analysis the researcher should ‘bracket,’ or leave aside their previous knowledge and investments, and also the taken-for-granted world, in

order to see phenomena as experienced. Husserl’s main influence in IPA is firstly through the process of going back to and reflecting on the phenomenon itself rather than attempting to fix experience in predefined categories. The second main influence is with bracketing, which is done when leaving aside the previous case to look at each new case, as described later in this article (Smith et al., 2009).



**Figure 1. The three influences of IPA (adapted from Smith et al., 2009)**

*Interpretive Phenomenology* aims to reveal and interpret the embedded meaning in a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, there are three major interpretive phenomenological philosophers. Although the three present a different focus, they essentially all hold that there is no knowledge outside of interpretation. Martin Heidegger (1962) suggested that knowledge of the lived world can only happen through interpretation grounded in the world of things, people, relationships, and language. This is because we cannot step ‘outside’ the world, as we are already engaged and involved in the world. Thus in IPA, the interpretation of people’s meaning-making activities is always in relation to the researcher’s perspective at a particular point in time, from them being in the world (Smith et al., 2009).

Second, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that, as humans, we see ourselves as different from everything else in the world. This is because our sense of self is holistic and is engaged in looking at the world, rather than being subsumed within it. Merleau-Ponty thus speaks of a ‘meeting point’ between the self and the world, and that the perception of ‘other’ develops from one’s own embodied perspective. What this means for IPA is that as researchers we can observe and experience empathy for our participants, but ultimately we see phenomenon from our perspective as we can never share entirely the other’s experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) suggested that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project of always becoming ourselves. Hence our engagement with the world is always unfolding, suggesting that meaning-making is likewise unfolding for both the

researcher and the researched; the story is being developed as it is being interpreted by both the participant and the researcher.

## Hermeneutics

The second major theoretical underpinning of IPA comes from hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation (Finlay, 2011). The three most important hermeneutic theorists for IPA are Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Schleiermacher (1998) suggested that interpretation involves both grammatical and psychological interpretation. The former is concerned with exact and objective textual meaning, while the latter refers to the individuality of the author or speaker. For Schleiermacher, interpretation is not a matter of following mechanical rules. Rather it is an art, involving the combination of a range of skills, including intuition. Schleiermacher believed that if one has engaged in a detailed, comprehensive, and holistic analysis, one can offer meaningful insights that potentially exceed and include the explicit claims of our participants.

Heidegger (1962) linked the interpretation of lived experiences with the attempt to make meaning from these experiences. For IPA, analysis always involves interpretation, and Heidegger's notion of *appearing* captures this well, where there is a phenomenon ready to "shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). Making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the listener or reader. Heidegger (1962) suggests that the reader, analyst, or listener brings their preconception to the encounter and cannot help but look at any new stimulus in the light of their own prior experience. Despite this, one will not necessarily be aware of all their preconceptions in advance of the reading, and so reflective practices and a cyclical approach to bracketing, are required in IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, Gadamer (1990), similar to Heidegger (1962), suggested that rather than putting one's preconceptions up front before doing interpretation, one may only really get to know what his or her preconceptions are once the interpretation is underway. Thus the phenomenon, the thing itself, influences the interpretation, which in turn can influence the fore-structure, which can then itself influence the interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). This complex relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted led Gadamer (1990) to suggest that one cannot separate the researcher from the researched. This is because as we engage in the world, the world changes us, something Gadamer (1990) termed a "fusion of horizons" between the researcher and the participant. One can hold a number of conceptions and these are compared, contrasted, and modified as part of the sense-making process. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that during analyses, the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

## Idiography

The third major influence upon IPA is idiography. Idiography is concerned with the particular, and this operates at two levels: firstly, in the sense of detail, with a thorough and systematic depth of analysis; and secondly, with an understanding of how a particular experiential phenomenon (an event, process or relationship) has been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). To achieve this, IPA studies utilize small, reasonably homogenous, purposively selected and carefully situated samples, and may often make very effective use of a single case analysis. A single case is justified in its own right when it describes something intrinsically interesting (Platt, 1988). It also demonstrates existence, not incidence, potentially pointing to flaws in existing theoretical claims for a population, disconfirming our expectations, or revealing things that were not expected (Yin, 2013). Single cases can also be drawn together for further analyses, moving from the single case to more broad claims. IPA

adopts an analytic procedure for doing this, whereby an initial tentative theory is tested against each of one's cases in turn. With each case, one revises the theory to fit the case, allowing one to reflect on and modify one's thinking in the light of the next piece of evidence assessed (Smith et al., 2009). While the ideal of this analytic procedure would be to produce a final theoretical statement which was true of all cases, usually it is not possible to be so definitive, and a successful outcome will be a revised theory which accounts for most of the data, for most of the cases examined. Thus, idiography does not eschew generalizations, but rather prescribes a different way of establishing those generalizations (Smith et al., 2009). It locates them in the particular, and hence develops them more cautiously. Smith et al. (2009) urge us to recognize that the particular and the general are not so distinct. The delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal. Thus we are better positioned to think about how we and other people might deal with the particular situation being explored, because at the deepest level we share a great deal with a person whose personal circumstances may, at face value, seem entirely separate and different from our own. Thus Smith et al. (2009) suggest that in some ways, the detail of the individual also brings us closer to significant aspects of the general.

*Having never utilized IPA before, it took me a considerable amount of time to understand the three separate elements and how they seamlessly fitted together. After immersing myself in the key texts, cited above, I began to understand how the theoretical and philosophical foundations enable a rigorous, systematic, and creative thesis. Although learning this methodology was a challenge, choosing it was easy – the combination of qualitative enquiry with psychological roots (IPA was developed in the field of psychology) meant that my research findings could go beyond describing events to understanding meanings from my participant's life experiences – something which both personally interested me and has the potential to positively affect future research and practice. I liked the fact that 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. Being a midwife myself, choosing a methodology that considers the person as a whole resonated with me. In addition, I liked the philosophical side of having to identify and reflect upon my own experiences, preconceptions, and assumptions. I felt that this was a very 'stretching' time for me as I uncovered my own bias and beliefs. I also liked the fact that IPA is still considered a contemporary methodology, being developed in 1996, and so becoming an 'expert' in this new and innovative methodology during my doctoral years sounded exciting.*

## **What Can IPA Research Look Like in Midwifery?**

The study I undertook explored the lived experiences of first-time mothers in their journey towards exclusive breastfeeding in Australia. The background to this study is that Australia has one of the lowest six-month exclusive breastfeeding rates in the developed world (17.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Most Australian research conducted in this area has been quantitative, resulting in large-scale Government funded interventions, such as paid maternity leave and generalized hospital-based breastfeeding education. Furthermore, focus has been on the early postnatal period (birth to two-months), though the largest decline in exclusive breastfeed rates is seen between two and six months postnatal (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The aim of the current study was to qualitatively explore the major influences and challenges that first-time mothers experience in their journey towards exclusive breastfeeding between two and six months postnatal. The study is comprised of a three-part design consistent with IPA research. Firstly, a case study was conducted with a first-time mother who achieved exclusive breastfeeding for six months. This case study was explorative and played a key part in developing the interview questions for the following two stages. Secondly, five first-time mothers who achieved exclusive breastfeeding for six months were interviewed to further explore the themes from the case study in more depth and detail, while still holding an idiographic focus. Finally, five first-time mothers

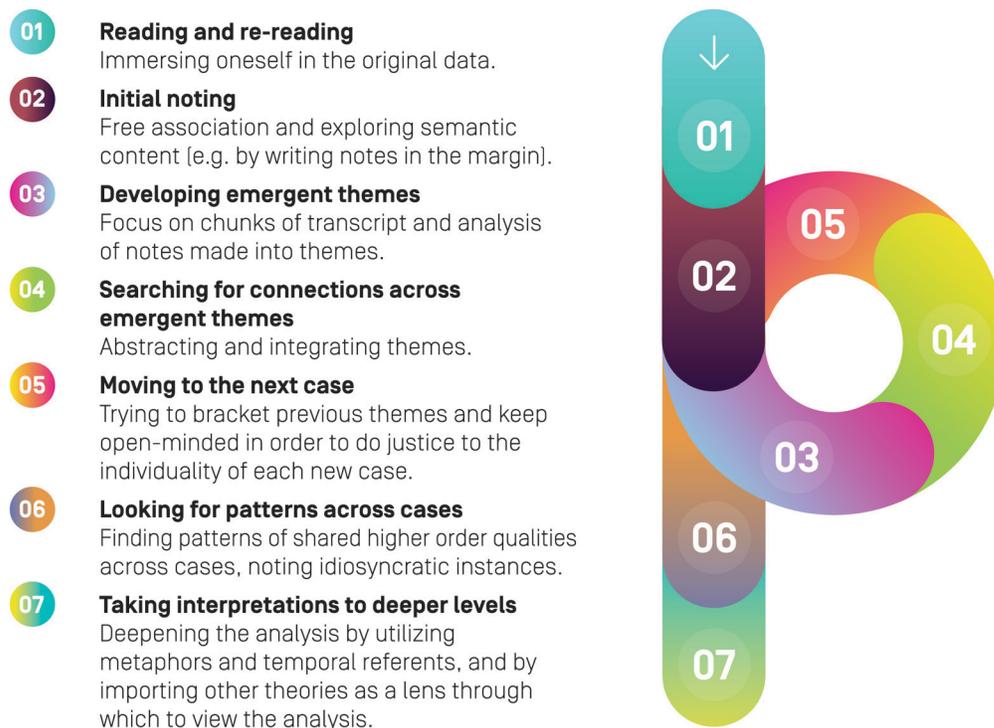
who exclusively breastfed for two months, but ceased exclusive breastfeeding before six months were interviewed to understand their story. While findings from an IPA study are not generalizable they add depth to the growing body of knowledge and provide nuanced understanding on this major life experience.

## ***Constructing a Research Question in IPA***

Research questions in IPA studies are usually framed broadly and openly. There is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis; rather, the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For example, the research question for the case study was simply, ‘What factors influence a woman to exclusively breastfeed for six months?’

## ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data for IPA research is most commonly collected through in-depth or semi-structured interviews. The interviews are often described as “a conversation with a purpose”, and once finished, are transcribed verbatim (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). During data analysis, which is flexible and dynamic, the developers of IPA advocate for researchers to return to the interview data as needed, and to focus on meanings throughout the process of analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Although there is no single, definitive method employed to undertake IPA, the founders of IPA offer a helpful seven-step data analysis guide (Smith et al., 2009). See Figure 2 for a conceptual framework of this seven-step guide.



**Figure 2. The seven-steps of IPA data analysis**  
(Charlick, McKellar, Fielder, & Pincombe, 2015 adapted from Smith et al., 2009)

During data analysis, the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant, who is making sense of his or her experience (Aisbett, 2006). This kind of interpretation involves a combination of empathy and questioning (Smith et al., 2009). Thus the IPA researcher is, in part, wanting to adopt an ‘insider’s perspective’ (Conrad, 1987), to see what it is like from the participant’s view, and stand in his or her shoes. On the other hand, the IPA researcher is standing alongside the participant, to observe the person from a different angle, ask questions, and puzzle over things being said. Hence we are attempting to understand, both in the sense of “trying to see what it is like for someone” and in “analyzing, illuminating, and making sense of something” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 36). To do this, the ‘hermeneutic circle’ provides a useful way of thinking about ‘method’ for IPA researchers. The hermeneutic circle is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at a series of levels (Smith et al., 2009). To understand any given part, you look at the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts. This dynamic, non-linear, style of thinking allows the meaning of a word to become clear when seen in the context of the whole sentence. At the same time, the meaning of the sentence depends upon the cumulative meanings of the individual words. Typically, an analysis will move through different levels of interpretation, deepening the analysis as it progresses. Hence each analysis will become more interpretative but must always be based on a reading from within the text itself, which the participant has produced. This can be seen as we move through the seven steps of data analysis. *In my study, after transcribing the interview with the case study participant, I started the data analysis by listening once more to the recording of the interview while reading the transcript. After reading and re-reading (step-1), I began noting some initial ideas in a wide margin on my printed copy of the transcript (step-2). Themes began to emerge (step-3) especially around the mother’s sense of self, her internal will, decision making around breastfeeding, and what ‘felt right’. Certain themes naturally clustered together while others were separated, leaving me with a theme that I interpreted and consequently titled, ‘Self determination to achieve exclusive breastfeeding’ (step-4).*

The overall analysis from the case study provided an in depth interpretive understanding of the participant’s exclusive breastfeeding journey. At the conclusion of the data analysis, three main themes had been identified, with numerous subthemes. The three main themes were, ‘Self determination to achieve exclusive breastfeeding’, ‘The influence of social norms in Australian culture’, and ‘The impact social supports have on maintaining exclusive breastfeeding’. Some of the supportive quotes from these themes were:

I definitely wanted him to have the breast milk ... I guess I was just determined to give him what I thought was the best thing.

The other night, we were out for a friend’s birthday dinner ... I didn’t feed at the table we were at, only cos I didn’t know some of the people there, and I just thought, I don’t really want to offend, as in you know, cos they were still eating.

He [the doctor] actually told me, “your milk’s really not that good”.

These themes were then used to guide the direction of the interview questions for the two subsequent studies. For example, interview questions included, “What are your general thoughts about breastfeeding?”, “What do you think other people think about breastfeeding”, “Did you have any expectations around breastfeeding?”, “Were there any people that influenced your breastfeeding experiences?” and “Have you got a particular story that might highlight what breastfeeding has been like for you?” Through asking questions based on the results from the case study, the themes were able to be explored in more depth and detail. Similar questions were asked to the mothers who exclusively breastfed for six months and those who ceased before six months. This data is further analyzed, still retaining an idiographic focus on the individual voice and allowing the nuances of each participant to be heard. However, due to the reasonably homogenous sample (for example, they were all first-time mothers who birthed their baby at full-term and intended to ex-

clusively breastfeed), there is also scope to compare and contrast the voices of the women who exclusively breastfed collectively with those who ceased breastfeeding, in an attempt to further understand the influences and issues around exclusive breastfeeding in Australia. With a purposively selected sample, IPA studies can make claims regarding a very specific phenomenon or context or group of people. It is hoped that, in deepening the understanding of individual breastfeeding experiences, more diverse approaches to support mothers in their exclusive breastfeeding journey can be identified and employed (Spencer, 2008). Furthermore that future research will have a different idiographic focus, to add to the knowledge around breastfeeding in a different context.

## **The Challenges and Joys of an IPA Study**

There are a number of challenges to conducting an IPA study, particularly as a doctoral student, including participant recruitment and ensuring a robust interpretation of the data.

### ***The Participants***

The idiographic approach of IPA encourages the study of small, purposively selected and carefully situated samples. Although smaller sample sizes need to be seen as a limitation of IPA studies and are consequently sometimes difficult to publish, Smith et al. (2009) considered that reduced participant numbers allows for a richer depth of analysis that might be inhibited with a larger sample. With regard to the specific selection criteria, recruitment of participants can be difficult, as can the transferability of findings. However, if the research account is rich and transparent enough, and is sufficiently related to current literature, the reader should be able to assess and evaluate its fittingness (Smith et al., 2009). The benefit of having a specific sample is being able to capture detail on certain groups of people who have shared particular experiences, or on a comparative sample, as the findings represent a specific group and are not due to differences in variables such as socio-demographic factors (Roberts, 2013). This may be of particular importance when unusual groups, situations, or means of data collection are being contemplated. It may be of particular relevance in healthcare research, if the views of groups that are difficult to reach are being sought or where beliefs and expectations may be outside the norm or general understanding of healthcare professionals (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). *For example, I sought to understand the journey of the minority group – those who exclusively breastfed for six months (17.6%), and also the experience of the mothers who ceased exclusive breastfeeding, realizing that their story fell outside the general understanding on why mothers cease exclusive breastfeeding.*

*Finding a sample of exclusively breastfeeding mothers who fit my inclusion criteria was difficult, especially considering that I was looking for them from a pool of only 17.6% of the population. Time consuming as it was, it was nice to require only a small sample size. I enjoyed being able to analyze the data thoroughly and in depth rather than only collecting surface data from many participants.*

### ***Levels of Interpretation***

IPA is interpretive and, indeed, Smith et al. (2009) encourage the researchers to ‘go beyond’ immediately apparent content. This deeper and more interpretative analysis could be seen as drawing the researchers away from the original meanings. However, the aim of IPA is to illustrate, inform, and master themes by firmly anchoring findings in direct quotes from participant accounts (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011). As Heidegger (1962) noted, people cannot help but look at any new stimulus in the light of their own preconception, therefore it is important for researchers to be aware of their own biases and be able to illustrate their steps in the data analysis process. This demonstrates that the findings are not based on personal opinion, or

preconceptions, but on a rigorous analytical transparent process (Kindgom, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Steen & Roberts, 2011).

*In this doctoral study, I documented all steps in the data analysis process, so that the chain of evidence that led from initial noting through to the final report could be followed. In addition, my supervisors conducted mini audits of my work by conducting their own analysis and discussing the annotations of my initial codes through to final themes, to check that the interpretations have some validity in relation to the interview transcript being examined. I was also mindful of bracketing my preconceptions and biases through continued and frequent discussions with my supervisors and also by keeping a reflective journal. Being both a mother who exclusive breastfed for six months and a practicing midwife, reflecting on my opinions and values was important during this stage.*

While IPA may be challenging it also provides opportunity to focus on particular areas of need in a particular discipline.

### ***IPA and the Field of Midwifery***

IPA resonates with the values and aims of midwifery. IPA research is able to explore and interpret major life experiences and keep the focus locally, contextualized or on a specific phenomenon. The results from an IPA study are able to do two main things: one, use broad knowledge principals and understand them in a local context highlighting what works in ‘your’ setting, and not what works in ‘most’ settings and, two, explore people in a particular context who have shared a particular experience and make claims at a group level – this is feasible because the results reflect a specific focus. Both of these ‘directions’ are particularly valuable in midwifery research because the most effective policies and practices come from evidence-based research that also considers the individual and local context (Spencer, 2008). In relation to breastfeeding help and support, the current doctoral study aims to understand the influences, needs, and challenges faced by exclusive breastfeeding mothers in an Australian context. That by understanding the individual breastfeeding experience, contextual education and support can be offered to mothers.

### ***Completing an IPA Study in the Doctoral Years***

Smith et al. (2009, p. 206) state that the process of undertaking IPA is “exhilarating, demanding and stimulating”. IPA is considered a contemporary methodology, as it was only developed in 1996. At present, IPA research is not common in midwifery research. Although this can be an exciting experience, having to clarify the differences between *interpretive phenomenology* and *interpretative phenomenological analysis*, as well as justifying areas such as a small sample size and the interpretive nature can be challenging. It is therefore important for the doctoral student to find a good supervisor(s), who is familiar with IPA or who is eager to learn. The doctoral student must also be prepared for the ethics process. As many IPA studies evolve and unfold as the project continues, the student may not initially present the entire research design, research question, or participant inclusion and exclusion criteria for any secondary studies. Submitting and gaining approval for additional ethics applications can be time consuming within the timeline of the study. Data collection can also be time consuming and the data analysis even more so, producing a thorough and systematic depth of analysis. Students often find it difficult to move to the next case due to a feeling of honoring the full story of the participant. Despite these challenges, through IPA we are able to learn about the complexity of individual lived experiences. At times, it can provide us with insights into the lives of people whose voices might not otherwise have been heard, or whose experiences were ignored, or else constructed quite differently, by mainstream theoretical models. The potential to influence policy and practice in this way creates meaningful work.

## Conclusion

IPA is an ideal methodology to use for a doctoral study, particularly in a field such as midwifery. Being a qualitative enquiry that focuses on how individuals make sense of their major life experiences, research findings can help minimize the gap between established broad knowledge principles and in-depth individualized findings from a local context.

The access to IPA studies will enable midwives to appreciate and understand the experiences and perceptions of participants, particularly those who may be in greatest need of their support (Pringle et al., 2011). As a doctoral student, being able to collect, analyze, and disseminate knowledge that can positively impact practice is both personally rewarding and offers better support for breastfeeding women.

With regard to exclusive breastfeeding, it is anticipated that by understanding the journey of the women through interpretative phenomenological analysis, their needs and expectations will be at the center of future policies and practices, enabling midwives and the community to offer better support into the future.

## References

- Aisbett, D. L. (2006). Interpretive phenomenological approaches to rural mental health research. *Rural Social Work and Community Practice*, 11 (December), 52-58.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Australian health survey: Health service usage and health related actions, 2011-12*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved June 1, 2015 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6664B939E49FD9C1CA257B39000F2E4B?opendocument>
- Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 5(3), 214-224.
- Charlick, S. J., McKellar, L., Fielder, A., & Pincombe, J. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Implementing research to influence breastfeeding education. *International Journal of Childbirth Education*, 30(2), 49-54.
- Conrad, P. (1987). The experience of illness: Recent and new directions. *Research in the Sociology of Health Care*, 6, 1-31.
- Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists: Researching the lived world*. USA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gadamer, H. (1990). *Truth and method* (2nd rev. ed.). New York: Crossroad.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Husserl, E. (1927). Phenomenology. From *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (R. Palmer, Trans. And revised). Retrieved October 1, 2015, from <http://www.hfu.edu.tw/~huangkm/phenom/husserl-britanica.htm>
- Kindgom, C. (2005). Reflexivity: Not just a qualitative methodological research tool. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 13(10), 622-627.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.
- Pairman, S., & McAra-Couper, J. (2010). Theoretical frameworks for midwifery practice. In S. Pairman, S. Tracy, C. Thorogood, & J. Pincombe (2010). *Midwifery: Preparation for practice*. Australia: Elsevier.
- Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., & Hendry, C. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: A discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(3), 20-24.
- Platt, J. (1988). What can case studies do? In R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Studies in qualitative methodology: A research annual: Conducting qualitative research, vol. 1*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Roberts, T. (2009). Understanding ethnography. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 17(5), 291-294.

- Roberts, T. (2013). Understanding the research methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 21(3), 15-18.
- Sartre, J-P. (1956). *Being and nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1998). *Hermeneutics and criticism and other writings* (A. Bowie, Trans.). Cambridge: CUP.
- Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health*, 11, 261-271.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Spencer, R. L. (2008). Research methodologies to investigate the experience of breastfeeding: A discussion paper. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 45, 1823-1830.
- Steen, M., & Roberts, T. (2011). *The handbook of midwifery research*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Yin, R. (2013). *Case study research: Design & methods* (5th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

## Biographies



**Samantha Charlick**, BA, BHlthSc(Psych/Hons), BMid, PhD candidate, is a practicing midwife and a casual academic tutor in midwifery. She has an honors degree in psychology and enjoys linking this background with her midwifery teaching and research. Samantha has written articles in peer reviewed journals and presented research findings at national and international conferences. Awarded with the prestigious Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship, Samantha is in the final stages of a PhD, exploring women's experiences of exclusive breastfeeding in Australia.



**Jan Pincombe**, PhD, MAppSc, DipEd, BA, RM, RN, IN, is an Adjunct Professor of Midwifery at the University of South Australia. She has successfully supervised postgraduate students in methods that adopt both quantitative and qualitative approaches. She has expertise in midwifery, child health, women's health, palliative care, management and leadership issues. As well as having been successful in gaining competitive grants in the areas of midwifery and sleep research, Jan has published extensively in international midwifery journals, and is one of the editors of the first textbook written in Australia and New Zealand for practicing and student midwives: *Midwifery; Preparation for Practice*, first published in 2006 with new editions in 2008 and 2015. She is a Fellow of the Australian College of Midwives and has been involved in successful research contracts for the development of Competencies and Standards for Midwives for the Australian Council of Nursing and Midwifery.



**Lois McKellar**, PhD, BNurs(Hons), BMid, is the Program Director, Midwifery in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of South Australia (UniSA). In her role, Lois is responsible for academic leadership of the Bachelor of Midwifery. This role also includes supervision of both Honors' and Masters students as well as PhD candidates. Lois has undertaken a variety of research projects utilizing action research, mixed method, systematic review and qualitative research approaches. Lois is well published and presents regularly at national and international conferences. Lois is a member of the ACM Midwifery

Education Advisory Committee and a Fellow of the Governors Leadership Foundation. She was recently awarded a UniSA teaching and Learning Citation.



**Andrea Fielder**, PhD, BSc(Hons), is a pharmacologist specialising in the area of substance use and pregnancy, with particular interests in opioid maintenance pharmacotherapies. She received her PhD from the University of Adelaide investigating the use of buprenorphine and methadone in pregnancy and their effects on the mother, fetus and neonate. In 2014 she undertook her Fulbright Scholarship at the University of North Carolina Horizons Program in Chapel Hill North Carolina, where she was able to observe the logistics of a comprehensive treatment program to improve outcomes for substance using pregnant and

parenting women and their families. She has published extensively, presented at international and national conferences and provides peer review for select journals. Andrea has also significantly contributed to clinical guidelines in the area of substance use and mental health in pregnant and non-pregnant populations, including guidelines for the World Health Organization, the Colombo Plan and the United States International Narcotics and Law Enforcement.