Strategies to Enhance and Emphasize the Value of your Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Research

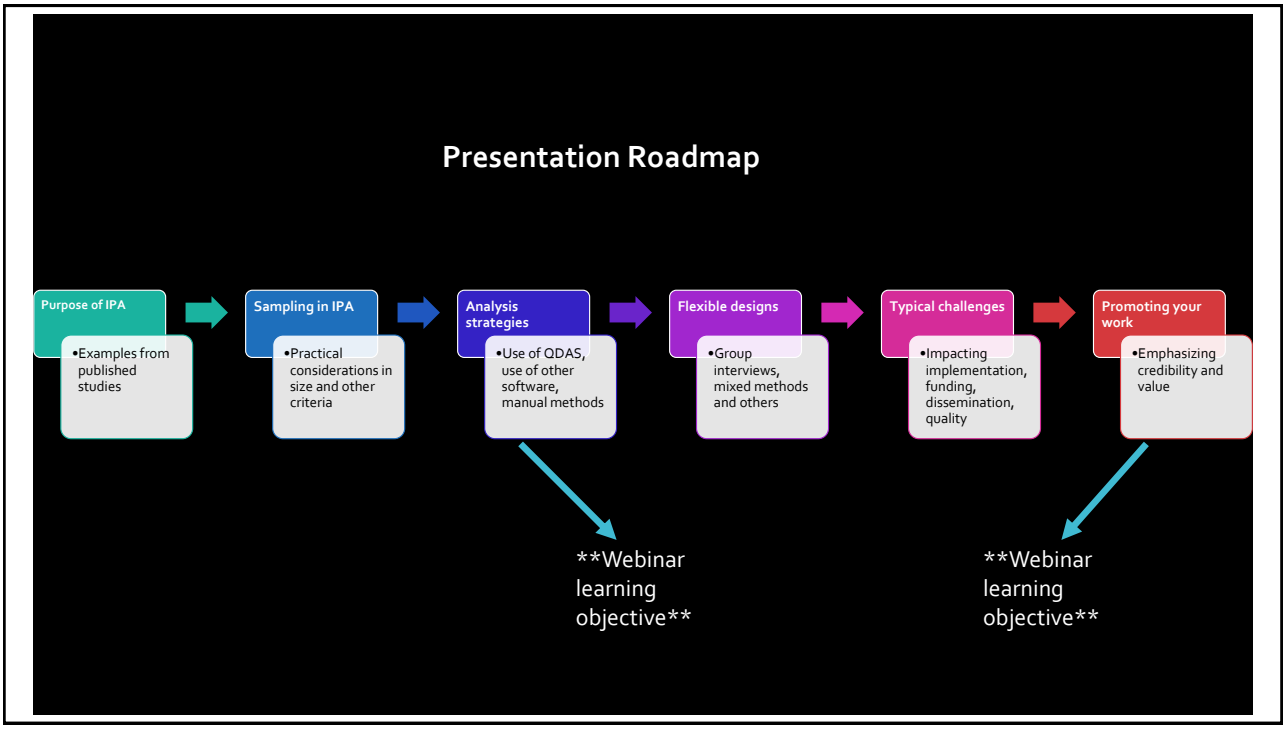
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IPA what is it?

- **Interpretative** Phenomenological Analysis OR **Interpretive** phenomenological Analysis
- A member of the family of **phenomenological approaches to qualitative research**
  - These are methods for applied research, not philosophical explorations
- IPA **focuses** on how people making meaning of key experiences
- IPA researchers engage in **active interpretation**
- IPA outcomes include **group experiential themes** or trends **and variations within themes**
- Findings are supported by **lengthy, often detailed excerpts**

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What is the purpose of IPA research?

- To explore "how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 1)
  - IPA is not psychotherapy or counseling, or meant to substitute for these
- Experiences - range from
  - **acute, current** (short duration, happening now), to
  - **stretched out and retrospective** (long term and remembered)
    - May be acute and retrospective or longer term and current
- Should be of **perceived importance** to participants

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Purpose-related considerations

- "Hot" (per Smith)
  - Salient, meaningful remembered in vivid detail
- Bounded
  - May co-occur with other experiences but can be distinguished or delineated
- Of interest to participants
  - Might have previously spent time reflecting on the meaning of the experience

These are not requirements but can facilitate more comprehensive data, and, in turn, more detailed and useful analysis

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What are examples of typical purposes of IPA studies?

- What is "the immediate experience of depression in terms of core felt features . . . (and) participants' understanding in the context of life events"? (Smith & Rhodes, 2015, p. 2)
- What are the experiences of women with BMI over 25, who "demonstrate positive body esteem and live without dieting" (Holland et al., 2018, p. 26) with respect to developmental experiences and messaging around food, body, health and weight?
- "How do students psychologically experience identity trajectories of becoming engineers?" (Huff et al., 2018, p. 453).

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Sampling in IPA

- Useful samples are *homogenous* – what does this mean?
  - Experience is context dependent
  - Similar participants allow researcher to manage attributes that in quantitative methods might need to be *controlled for*
  - *Sampling criteria should focus on the attributes that may impact the experience of interest or those that define the participants of interest*
- As small as a single case (e.g., Smith and Shinebourne, 2009) and as large as 19 (e.g., Taylor et al., 2021) or more.
- For publication, 12-15 seems to be preferred for any qualitative inquiry
- Highly labor-intensive analysis process – something to bear in mind when deciding how many is enough

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Sampling in IPA

- Value of a single case – engaging, compelling, relatable, empathy building; no cross-case comparison
- Value of a small sample (2-5) – potential to gather very detailed information about patterns; may be limited variation
- Value of a slightly larger sample (6 +) – subthemes may show the points of divergence – for example, show why the message/intervention works with some and not so well with others
- Value of any size of IPA sample – the beginnings of deep, comprehensive understanding of the "why," "how," etc. questions, not necessarily answerable based on readily observable or identifiable attributes

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POLL: use of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS)

To analyze your qualitative data, have you used the following:

a. NVivo
b. Quirkos
c. Dedoose
d. MAXQDA
e. Atlas.ti
f. Something else
g. More than one of these

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Basic steps in IPA analysis

- Make initial notes or comments
- Create experiential statements – refine notes into assertions
- Develop personal experiential themes (PETs) – trends that reflect the commonalities – conceptual, theoretical, semantic, practical, etc. – by clustering experiential statements
- Review and refine the PETs
- Repeat for each participant
- Working with PETs, create group experiential themes (GETs)

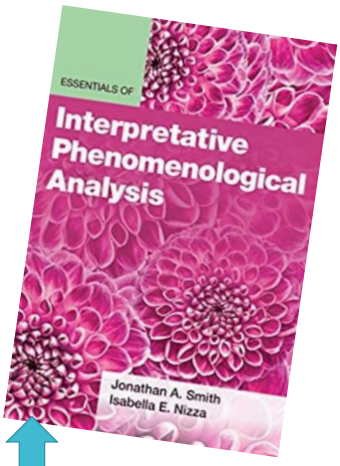
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Aims and outcomes of analysis

- To "highlight the shared and unique features of the experience across the contributing participants . . . (to) understand and explore points of convergence and divergence at the level of the contributing cases" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 100)
- Shown via presentation of GETs and subthemes within GETs (potentially derived from PETs and experiential statements), supported by participant experts.

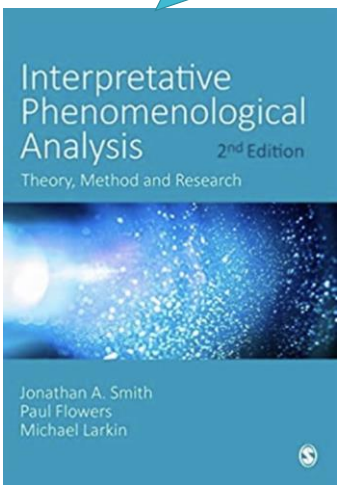
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IPA analysis resources



A great place to start this text has a nice list of example studies!

The seminal work, now in its 2nd edition



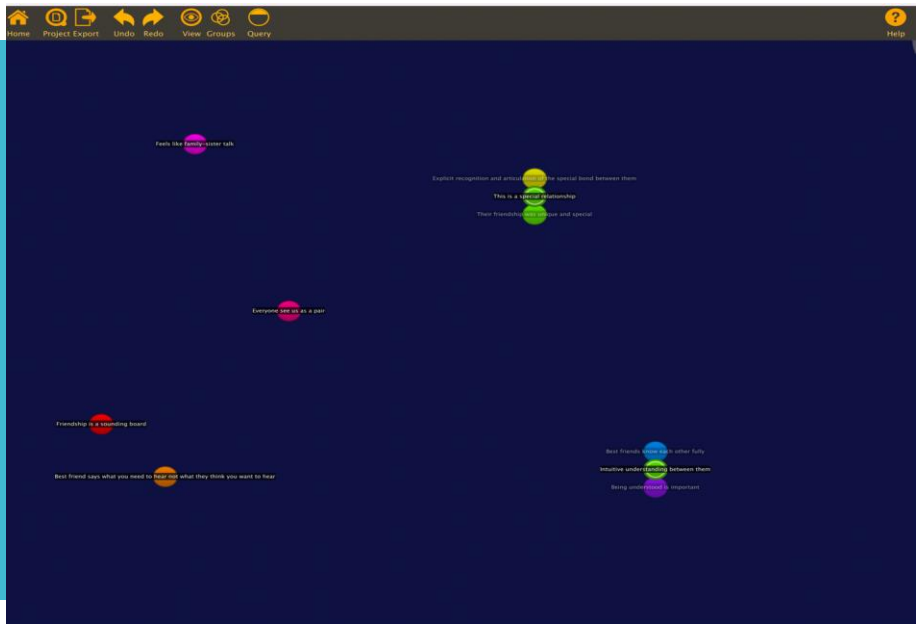
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Analysis and technology considerations

- Manual + / -
  - Analysis and data at hand, visual, accessible (+)
  - No hardware or software needed (+)+
  - Notating as you read is intuitive for many (+)
  - The classic approach as described in texts (+)
  - For collaborative work, sharing data and analysis may be challenging (-)
  - Bad handwriting (or just prefer not to handwrite) (-)
- QDAS Software + / -
  - Expense to buy/rent programs (-)
  - Compatibility with operating systems (less of an issue as time goes by) (-)
  - Data security concerns (-)
  - May be viewed as more credible work by reviewers and editors (+)
  - When set up well, QDAS organizational features can be very beneficial for analysis and presentation (+)
  - Built in ability to create visual displays (+)
  - Typically can export to a simpler format (e.g., Word) (+)

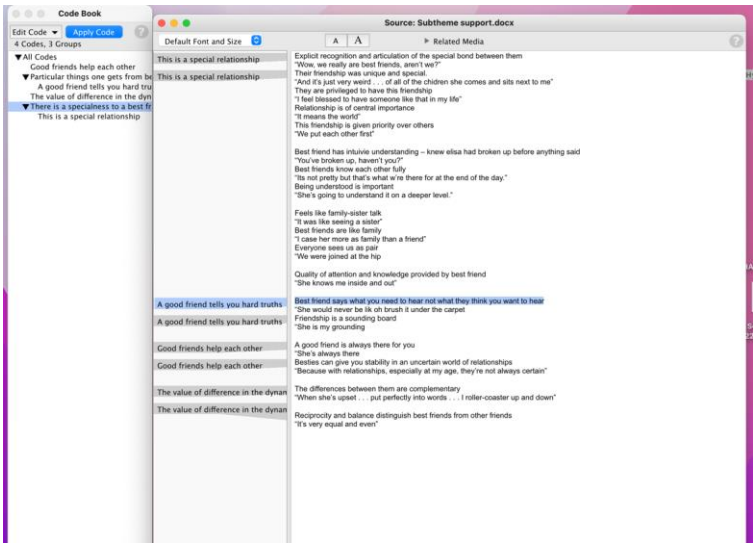
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QDAS example 1 - Quirkos



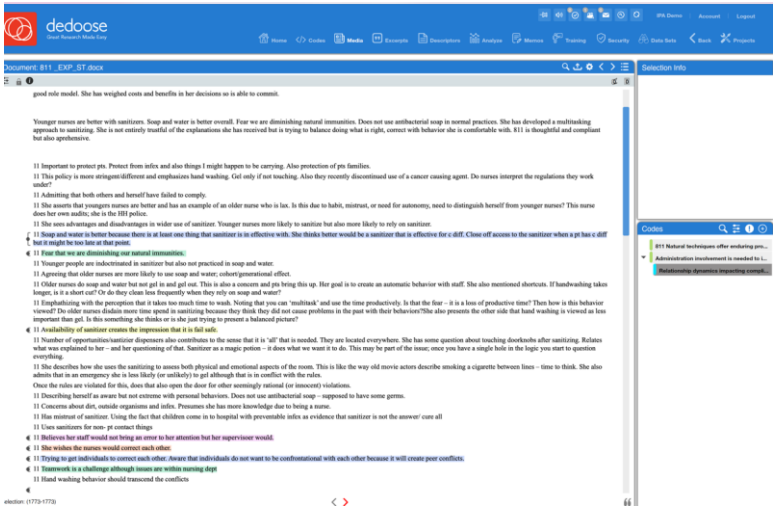
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QDAS example 2 - Hyperresearch



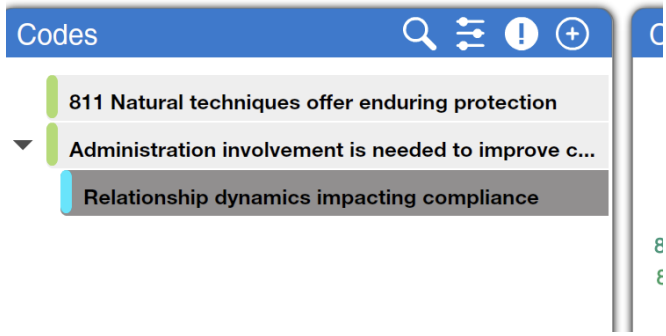
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QDAS example 3 - Dedoose



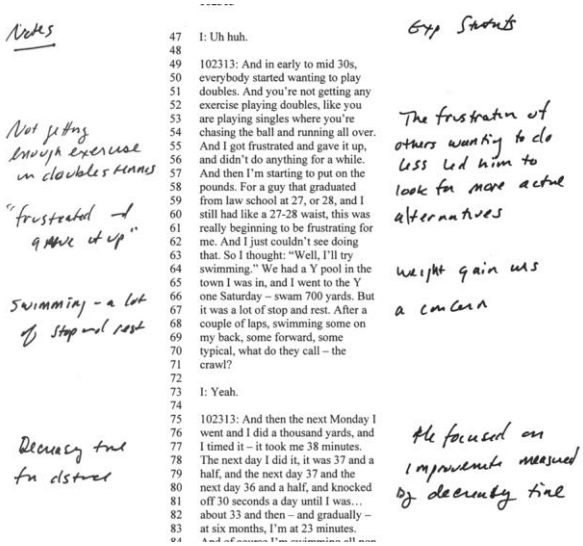
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QDAS example 3 - Dedoose



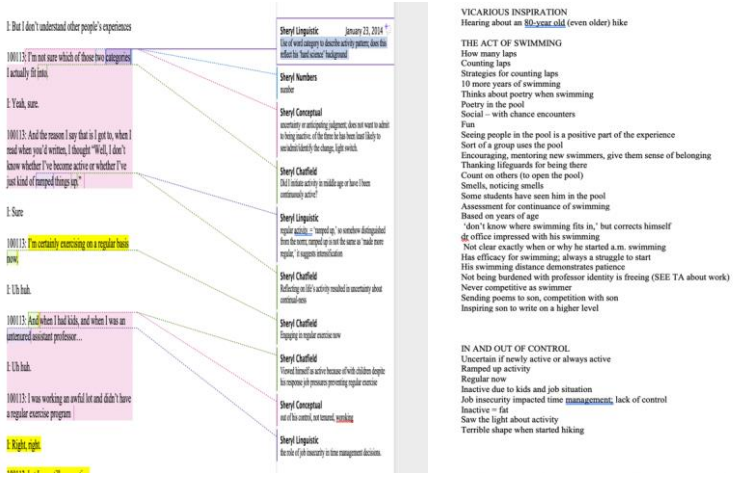
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Manual example



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Other software: MS Word or similar



I: But I don't understand other people's experiences

I00113: I'm not sure which of those two categories I actually fit into.

I: Yeah, sure.

I00113: And the reason I say that is I got to, when I read where you'd written, I thought "Well, I don't know whether I've become active or whether I've just kind of ramped things up" |

I: Sure

I00113: I'm certainly exercising on a regular basis now.

I: Uh huh.

I00113: And when I had kids, and when I was an untenured assistant professor…

I: Uh huh.

I00113: I was working an awful lot and didn't have a regular exercise program

I: Right, right.

Sheryl Linguistic January 23, 2014

Use of word category to describe activity pattern; does this reflect his 'hard science' background.

Sheryl Numbers
number

Sheryl Conceptual
uncertainty or anticipating judgment; does not want to admit to being inactive; of the three he has been least likely to see/admit/identify the change, light switch.

Sheryl Chatfield
Did I initiate activity in middle age or have I been continuously active?

Sheryl Linguistic
regular activity = "ramped up," so somehow distinguished from the norm; ramped up is not the same as "made more regular," it suggests intensification

Sheryl Chatfield
Reflecting on life's activity resulted in uncertainty about continual own

Sheryl Chatfield
Engaging in regular exercise now

Sheryl Chatfield
Viewed himself as active because of/with children despite his response job pressures preventing regular exercise

Sheryl Conceptual
out of his control, not tenured, working

Sheryl Linguistic
the role of job insecurity in time management decisions.

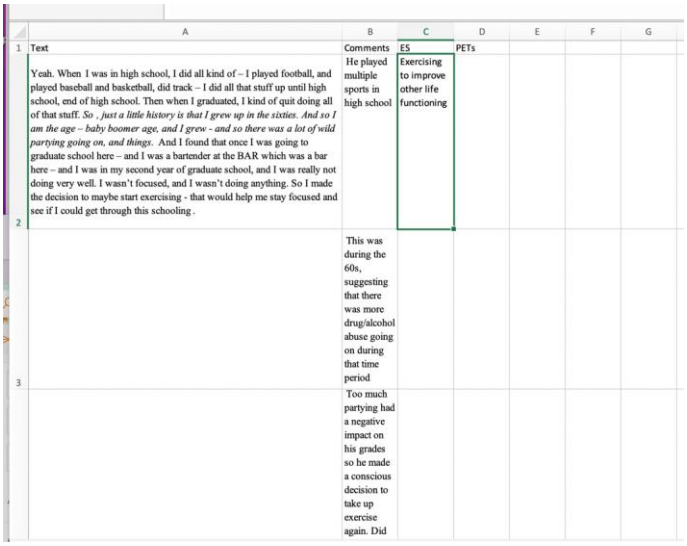
VICARIOUS INSPIRATION
Hearing about an 80-year old (even older) hike

THE ACT OF SWIMMING
How many laps
Counting laps
Strategies for counting laps
10 more years of swimming
Thinks about poetry when swimming
Poetry in the pool
Social – with chance encounters
Fun
Seeing people in the pool is a positive part of the experience
Sort of a group uses the pool
Encouraging, mentoring new swimmers, give them sense of belonging
Thanking lifeguards for being there
Count on others (to open the pool)
Smells, noticing smells
Some students have seen him in the pool
Assessment for continuance of swimming
Based on years of age
'don't know where swimming fits in,' but corrects himself
ok office impressed with his swimming
Not clear exactly when or why he started a.m. swimming
Has efficacy for swimming; always a struggle to start
His swimming distance demonstrates patience
Not being burdened with professor identity is freeing (SEE TA about work)
Never competitive as swimmer
Sending poems to son, competition with son
Inspiring son to write on a higher level

IN AND OUT OF CONTROL
Uncertain if newly active or always active
Ramped up activity
Regular now
Inactive due to kids and job situation
Job insecurity impacted time management; lack of control
Inactive = fat
Saw the light about activity
Terrible shape when started hiking

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Other software: MS Excel or similar



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Text	Comments	ES	PETs			
2	Yeah. When I was in high school, I did all kind of – I played football, and played baseball and basketball, did track – I did all that stuff up until high school, end of high school. Then when I graduated, I kind of quit doing all of that stuff. *So , just a little history is that I grew up in the sixties. And so I am the age – baby boomer age, and I grew - and so there was a lot of wild partying going on, and things.* And I found that once I was going to graduate school here – and I was a bartender at the BAR which was a bar here – and I was in my second year of graduate school, and I was really not doing very well. I wasn't focused, and I wasn't doing anything. So I made the decision to maybe start exercising - that would help me stay focused and see if I could get through this schooling .	He played multiple sports in high school	Exercising to improve other life functioning				
3		This was during the 60s, suggesting that there was more drug/alcohol abuse going on during that time period					
		Too much partying had a negative impact on his grades so he made a conscious decision to take up exercise again. Did					

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How a blended process might work

- Initial commenting OR experiential statements OR PETs done manually or in MS Word (or Excel)
- Import comments, ESs or PETs
- Use software to complete analysis
- Takes advantage of data management and reporting abilities while eliminating some tedious text management
  - Fewer levels of codes
  - Less text to sift through
- It too many work arounds are required to use your method of choice, reconsider the value of this method. The end goal is efficient and complete data analysis, not demonstration of use of a program or method!

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Other novel or flexible approaches

Taylor et al. 2021	Group interviews
Burton et al. 2017	Photo or object elicitation
Dovi et al. 2020	Longitudinal IPA
Taylor 2014	Mixed methods, Secondary analysis

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Typical Challenges

- Critical others
  - People who do not appreciate:
    - Qualitative inquiry
    - Phenomenological methods
    - IPA
  - People who do appreciate qualitative inquiry:
    - but want to apply criteria from other approaches (line-by-line coding; member checking; saturation, etc.)
- Prioritize educating versus exchanging critique (insults)
- Share examples to address specific critique
  - For example, one practitioner described the value of individual case research on the experience of Cochlear Implant, to inform future patient preparation
- Compromise – adding a quantitative component converts many potential no votes
- Some people will not be swayed – try to have a plan B (or C or D, etc.)

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Maximizing the credibility of your work

- Systematic analysis process
  - Audit trail available (subject to data confidentiality requirements) to evidence careful work
- Researcher interpretation presented within findings is based on an intense period of immersion in data, and supported by excerpts from the data
- Establish selection criteria wisely and adhere to it
- Application of IPA-specific quality criteria:
  - Prevalence of themes within sample (Smith, 2011)
  - Constructing a compelling narrative*
  - Developing a vigorous account*
  - Close analytic reading of participants' words*
  - Attending to convergence and divergence*

*Nizza et al., 2021

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Emphasizing the of your work

- Respectful to participants, acknowledging their expertise and the value of the information they provide
  - "brings researchers closer to the real world"*
- Data come from **experts describing actual experience** versus intentions, observations, or preferences
  - "allows the participant to tell it their way – outlining the things they see as important" *
- May offer pathways to **attractive and feasible interventions**
  - "potential interventions, based on issues that were suggested by respondents, not by health psychology researchers"*

*all from Kaptein, 2011

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Enhancing the impact of your work

- What other impacts are possible besides impact factor?
- What are meaningful outcomes that may be derived from the outcomes of the research?
- Disseminating your research to non-researchers:
  - Community members
  - Other people like your participants
  - People who work with people like your participants
  - Programmers and service providers

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Questions or comments?

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References and resources

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  - https://www.quirkos.com
- Dedoose
  - https://www.dedoose.com
- Hyperresearch
  - http://www.researchware.com/products/hyperresearch.html

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