Methodological Considerations for the Use of Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Healthcare Research

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Abstract

Longitudinal Qualitative Research (LQR) aims to chronicle individuals' lives in real-time, offering a "qualitative movie" of their unfolding experiences, focusing on the dynamic interplay of continuity and change. The rising interest in LQR has led to methodological advancements, with LQR being combined with established methodologies. Among these, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has stated to engage with longitudinal design. IPA's unique focus on idiography, phenomenology and hermeneutics can be particularly fruitful when engaging with temporal dimensions. Yet, applying longitudinal design to any qualitative study is complex; it requires thoughtful consideration of how we embed temporal lenses through the whole study cycle and goes beyond collecting data 'more than once'. The literature on the implications of embedding longitudinal design in IPA methodology is still developing. In particular, the considerations related to embedding temporality when approaching data collection have not yet been explored in detail. In this paper, we reflect on key considerations and strategies when conducting data collection as part of longitudinal IPA. We focus on the balance between flexibility and continuity when collecting data across sequential waves of data collection, and on the extent to which researchers explicitly engage with participants in uncovering continuity and change throughout their studies, which we discuss in turn. We do that by drawing on published papers, complemented by our own experience using IPA and LQR to illustrate the methodological dilemmas. By doing this, we hope to provide valuable insights for researchers considering the use of IPA and LQR and to facilitate an understanding of how these features can be integrated effectively throughout the research process.

Keywords

IPA, longitudinal qualitative, LIPA

Longitudinal Qualitative Research

Longitudinal Qualitative Research (LQR) is a rich methodology with an established place in the social sciences landscape. It has a complex history. It is part of the wider longitudinal canon interested in following people over time (Neale, 2016), with the qualitative component having roots in the interpretivist tradition of qualitative enquiry, and engagement with temporal theory. Interest in LQR is trans-disciplinary, with longitudinal qualitative studies being conducted in the fields of anthropology, community studies, education, health studies, and psychology (Holland et al., 2006).

LQR methodology is constantly evolving and its maturity, approach and scope vary across different disciplines (Holland et al., 2006). This diversity is visible in how individual studies

are designed, across foundational planes of time (Neale, 2016, 2021). Thus, it is possible to see studies running across many years as well as a few months; some studies looking mainly at

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how people make sense of their experiences prospectively and others focusing more on reflection and hindsight. Some studies focus on individual biographies and others on macro-level contexts (Neale, 2021).

Despite these diversities, the methodology can be described by its unique universal features. Firstly, the aim of LQR is to follow how individual lives unfold in real time, identifying the change and continuity as it happens. This in turn allows us to move from a snapshot of someone's life to something more akin to a "qualitative movie". Secondly, LQR is preoccupied with temporal processes time is a more powerful lens for understanding this than a cross-sectional examination (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003). Time, process, continuity and change are intertwined in all aspects of the methodology. Thirdly then, the main focus of LQR is to explore the dynamic nature of continuity and change. It is a source of significant insight to be able to explore what grows and diminishes, or what remains constant and what shifts, and to understand the idiosyncrasy and context in people's experiences (Neale, 2021). Finally, as a broad approach, LQR utilises a variety of qualitative methods including case studies, observations, and interviews, with the view to understanding individual and collective accounts (Neale, 2021).

Given its dynamic nature, longitudinal design can make significant contributions to our understandings of experience. One of the fields where LQR has been particularly powerful is healthcare (Wanat, Weller, Borek et al., 2024). LQR can be key to following participants' healthcare and illness experiences over time and identifying their changing needs (Murray et al., 2009; Santillo et al., 2023). Healthcare researchers often wish to capture the process of people going through important transitions, with the aim of understanding how people make sense of, and adjust to, these transitions. They also need to be able to illuminate the process of implementing new practices, interventions or policies (Lewis, 2007; Wanat et al., 2021) with the focus on identifying what it may be like for individuals to adopt them. In order to carry out such research, and to see how individual experiences are shaped by changing macro and meso context (Holland, 2011; Neale, 2021), LQR can be an important tool for health researchers in particular. Through such applications, fuller understanding of the phenomena under study can be achieved (Flowers, 2008; Smith, 1999).

Perhaps due to these important benefits for applied researchers, there has been a growth of interest in using LQR. This has already contributed to its methodological advancement (Neale, 2016). In many fields, a longitudinal qualitative design will be used for data collection, in tandem with other qualitative methodologies - such as grounded theory, narrative psychology or phenomenology - for data analysis. While there are some design and practice issues which will be universal for any qualitative longitudinal study, regardless of the chosen qualitative methodology, it is also important to consider what the unique features for specific methodologies may be. Such a focus can also facilitate the dialogue about different disciplines while moving LQR forward for the wider social sciences.

Bringing together LQR and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

One of the qualitative methodologies which has been developing a distinctive and explicit longitudinal approach is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). While the initial studies adopting IPA have employed mainly cross-sectional design using semi-structured interviews when exploring a particular phenomenon of interest (Smith, 2011), in recent years we have seen the use of more complex designs. This resulted not only in empirical papers adopting these designs, but also methodological papers in relation to these issues, highlighting the opportunities and challenges in the new approaches. These included using IPA for analysis of focus groups (Love et al., 2020), adopting multiperspectival designs (Larkin et al., 2019), using creative methods alongside IPA (Reid et al., 2018), or indeed using longitudinal qualitative design (Farr & Nizza, 2019). This speaks to the maturity of the methodology, allowing for adaptations being made to allow adoption of more complex designs and pushing the boundaries of this methodology. In fact the adaptions which deviate from 'standard' cross-sectional designs are now sufficiently well-developed for the temporal variant to merit its own acronym: Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (LIPA) (Neale, 2021).

The interest in discussing longitudinal design in IPA is not new. Previous papers focused on different aspects of longitudinal design and its suitability for IPA. McCoy provided a useful discussion of philosophical connections between longitudinal traditional and IPA (McCoy, 2017). Snelgrove has highlighted the practical challenges of applying longitudinal design in an IPA study, with the focus on reflexivity (Snelgrove, 2014). Most recently, Farr and Nizza have delivered an overview of IPA studies adopting longitudinal designs the need to consider all stages of study design when combing IPA longitudinal design (Farr & Nizza, 2019).

However, the literature on the implications of embedding longitudinal design in IPA methodology is still developing. In particular, the considerations related to embedding temporality when approaching data *collection* have not yet been explored in detail (Farr & Nizza, 2019).

Applying longitudinal design to any qualitative study is complex; it requires thoughtful consideration of how we embed temporal lenses through the whole study cycle. This goes beyond collecting data 'more than once'. Thus, researchers adopting LQ designs face a number of complex methodological decisions across the whole study cycle. These include considerations regarding the number, frequency and timing of the interviews; the sampling strategies and approach to data collection; as well as ways of analysing data with a temporal lens (Holland et al., 2006; Neale, 2016). These features will also have clear implications for how an *IPA s*tudy will develop. Thus, when adopting a longitudinal design in IPA, researchers may want to consider what the various aspects of their longitudinal design will mean within the ethos of an IPA approach.

`Thus, in this paper, we reflect on key considerations and strategies when conducting data collection as part of longitudinal IPA. We start by providing a brief summary of IPA with the aim of introducing the reader to the key features of IPA. We then make a case for the importance of considering key IPA features when applying them in QLR. We draw on different ways in which temporality is understood by phenomenologists and reflect on how temporality can be an important way in which we engage with the design issues for LIPA. The main body of the paper then focuses on two key considerations related to data collection in LIPA:

i) the balance between flexibility and continuity when collecting data across sequential waves of data collection, and
ii) the extent to which researchers explicitly engage with participants in uncovering continuity and change throughout their studies.

In discussing these issues, we hope to shed light on these two aspects which are critical to ensuring that data collection phase is aligned with key features of LIPA.

We do that by drawing on published papers using LIPA to illustrate the methodological dilemmas. We complement this by drawing on reflections from the second author's experience of conducting longitudinal study using IPA. This work comes from a series of studies completed as part of a PhD programme (Day, 2024). This research sought to understand individuals' experiences of UK health-based welfare systems; state benefits that either aim to support individuals unable to work due to sickness or disability or seek to cover costs incurred due to health conditions. The research attempted to understand how the experience of existing within health-based welfare systems over time, shaped participants' own understandings of their chronic health conditions. As the research questions sought to understand the continuities and discontinuities in participants' sense-making, these studies were shaped by an IPA methodology. Rather than the simply capturing the presence or absence of illness in a one-off setting (e.g. a snapshot of health), the need for a holistic understanding of health was especially needed due to the fluctuating nature of chronic illness entailing a methodology that can consider the relationships between temporality and meaning. Eight individuals who had engaged with UK welfare systems whilst living with chronic health conditions were recruited as participants. In between first and second interviews, participants were invited to take place in a photovoice task: to take photographs that represented their daily experiences of health and welfare. For those who took part, these photographs formed the foci of the second interview as participants shared how they had made sense of the images they had created.

In what follows, we examine what employing LQR in IPA may mean, in relation to the data collection stage.

What is IPA?

IPA is a well-recognised methodology with roots in psychology. It concerns itself with exploring people's experiences in detail and exploring how people make sense of them (Smith, 2004). Its origins can be traced back to a 1996 paper by Smith, who made a case for the need to examine in detail the experiential accounts of individuals going through important events in their lives (Smith, 1996). Smith's point was that applied researchers may often wish to take such accounts as telling us something *meaningful* about the world *as it is lived*, rather than as telling us something about how the world can be constructed and negotiated in talk.

IPA draws on three key traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. IPA's engagement with phenomenological sources emphasises the *perspectival* (e.g. see Ahmed, 2006), and *relational* qualities (Nancy, 2000/1996 2000) of people's experiential accounts, and is underscored by an ethical commitment to recognising, reflecting and making sense of others' experience. For IPA, this commitment is particularly important in the context of events which disrupt the usual flow of life (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2021). Such experiences include major events and transitions, such as getting a new job, deciding to leave a marriage, or adjusting to a new diagnosis. Thus, IPA is particularly interested in capturing the experiential claims and concerns of research participants (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006) in the context of events which are especially salient and significant for them - it tends to be adopted as an approach to understanding foreground (rather than background) phenomena. The second key facet of IPA, its focus on interpretation, is derived from the hermeneutic tradition in phenomenology and emphasises that human experience is accessed and understood via intersubjective sense-making. This underpins IPA's focus on moving beyond the *description* of experience, to identify and interpret patterns of meaning. Such sense-making happens for both participants and researchers, and this is often known as a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborn, 2015). It highlights that the participant is trying to make sense of their world, while the researcher is also trying to make sense of the participant's process of sense-making (Smith et al., 2021). All of this complexity (experience is perspectival and relational; the experiences we are concerned with are contextually-specific; our meaning-making is inter-subjective; and interpretation is inevitable and dialogical) means that IPA work requires in-depth case-by-case analysis. This is reflected in its' third main commitment: idiography. This means that IPA is concerned with what *this* particular sense making means, for *this* particular case, in *this* particular context (Smith et al., 2021). This is motivated by doing justice to the complexity of human experience (Smith et al., 2021). Practically, it means that one completes a detailed analysis of one case before moving to the second one, and that all cases are completed

before cross-case analysis is conducted. This is achieved by working with relatively small, contextually-specified samples (Smith, 2004).

IPA and LQR

IPA's unique features, as described above, namely the focus on idiography, phenomenology and hermeneutics can be particularly fruitful when engaging with temporal dimensions (McCoy, 2017; Snelgrove, Edwards, Liossi, & health, 2013).

Firstly, events such as getting a new job, deciding to leave marriage or being diagnosed with a new condition are often complex processes, potentially changing our relationship with the world and thus likely to have significant impact on an individual (Smith et al., 2021); they also unfold and develop over time. Such events lend themselves to an in-depth exploration of how the flow of everyday life is recharacterised. In phenomenological terms, foreground events (e.g., loss and grief) may bring previously-background phenomena to the fore (e.g. his cup; her chair; our routine) and rewrite their meaning. There is a rich phenomenology to be explored in relation to time and change.

In conducting such explorations together, the researcher and the participant engage in collaborative sense-making, and in longitudinal work, this extends across more interactions than a one-off interview. Thus, with its origins in hermeneutics, IPA's preoccupation with the focus on change and sense making, lends itself to exploration of change which is likely to occur over time (McCoy, 2017; Smith, 2004). This is also visible in the stages of the analysis when the focus on divergence and convergence in making sense across the sample and within individual's trajectories (McCoy, 2017; Smith, 2011). The same experience may unfold in a different way for each individual, allowing the researcher to illuminate divergence and convergence in individual trajectories and across a sample.

While the use of longitudinal design in IPA has still been somewhat sparse, LIPA has been used on a number of topics including experiences of mental health (e.g. Watkins et al., 2014); illness experience (e.g. Shaw et al., 2016; Spiers, Smith, & Drage, 2016); and reproductive health (Caffieri & Margherita, 2023; Smith, 1999). In the field of pain research, combining longitudinal designs with IPA has highlighted the dynamic nature of pain, illustrating that it is not a static phenomenon (e.g. Nizza, Smith, & Kirkham, 2018; Nizza et al., 2022; Snelgrove et al., 2013). For example, Snelgrove, Edward & Lossi conducted three interviews with patients with chronic low-back pain over a two-year period.

Conceptualising Time and Temporality for Qualitative Phenomenological Work

Frequently, phenomenological researchers have highlighted the Heideggerian focus on mortality when considering the importance of temporality as a feature of qualitative designs.

Heidegger emphasised that something shifts in our orientation towards the world when we recognise and accept that our time within the world is limited by the inevitability of death (e.g. see Magid, 2017). For Heidegger, different modes of being can be characterised by either the acceptance or avoidance of this *finitude*. Living authentically, he suggested, begins with recognising that the nature of being is necessarily defined by its ending. In qualitative research in health and illness, we may wish to step back from Heidegger's seeming certainty about the best path. Nevertheless, we may be curious about the ways in which threatened or curtailed futures are navigated in the present, and how research participants trace the origins of those futures in the past. We may be concerned with understanding the ebb and flow of acceptance and avoidance of illness, or the relationship to impending death. We may hope to explore the meaning and function of these shifts, as time passes and as embodied experience changes.

Even if death is the end, it is not the limit of our interests in the phenomena of temporality. Often the challenge of resolving qualitative longitudinal design questions stems from needing to articulate *why* and *how* we should focus upon change over time, in any particular study. One additional conceptual lens may be useful here, by way of Fuchs' work on temporality. This work is well known within the field of psychopathology, but less often cited by qualitative methodologists more generally. Fuchs (2005) develops a distinction between *implicit* and *explicit* temporal experience, and then describes how periods of *desynchronisation* often demarcate important shifts in our modes of being. For Fuchs, an implicit experience of time is one in which we are unaware of time's passing - we are effectively synchronised. We might be entirely focused on solving a technical problem, or absorbed in concentration as we create a piece of art, for example. This flow of implicit experience is punctuated by frequent shifts to explicit experiences of time - when we find ourselves concerned with time or its passing, or with the past or future. This might be due to a relatively simple embodied experience (e.g. hunger, discomfort, or fatigue because we have been engaged with something for so long), or it could be prompted by more existential or emotional phenomena (e.g. a feeling of loss because something is finished, or hope that something will be appreciated, or dread that it will be discovered). In these moments, we are engaged in thinking and feeling about time because we have become desynchronised from its flow. Fuchs points out that there is an intersubjective component to this: sometimes our sense of synchronisation is also a function of being *with* others - think of how time spent in good company may seem to pass unnoticed, or more quickly, for example. The core idea, however - that there are occasions when we are simply being, and other occasions when our reflective capacity is called upon to make sense of some challenge or threat - is not unlike the distinction that Smith has drawn between everyday 'experiences' and 'An Experience' of some significance, where the latter is typically the focus of IPA research (Smith et al., 2021). This can be a helpful way of configuring our interests and design choices - for longitudinal

IPA research, we are often likely to be concerned with choosing occasions and adopting questioning approaches which enable us to sit alongside our participants when they are 'de-synchronised' and reflecting on change and time's passing.

In our empirical example, an unexpected occasion of significance came through the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Occurring between the first and second interviews, the 'rupture' of COVID-19 disrupted the intended timescales of the LQR project. During the periods of lockdowns, there were no face-to-face assessments for health-based welfare claims. New claims were decided on the basis of paper-based assessments (considering the evidence that had been provided within the application forms) or carried out over the phone (McKeever, 2020). Reassessments of current claimants were suspended and end dates of awards were extended. As the longitudinal research of this thesis had begun prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was well positioned to explore the how participants had made sense of the new worlds they found themselves in.

Unsurprisingly, the effects of the pandemic featured dominantly in participants' narrative accounts. Decisions around access to welfare either became extended by default or participants were given an increased choice in whether assessments were done face-to-face or via a telephone appointment. These greater levels of autonomy alongside the 'relief' from the stress and worries associated with engagement with welfare administrators acted as a reprieve for participants. What was more unexpected was the sense of momentum towards homelikeness (e.g. Svenaeus, 2011): of finding belonging in what has become a potentially unhomelike world, an external world thrown into pandemic-created uncertainty. In contrast, the first interviews with participants were imbued with a haunting sense of loss. Futures that were once anticipated, such as careers and independence, had seemed almost tangible. Now these futures were slipping away, forcibly readjusted by chronic illness. In the second interviews, rather than being haunted by how their lives could have been, these lost futures gave rise to acceptance, dignity and peaceful pain relief. Feelings of belonging came, for some, through an intertwining of their lives with loved ones – an intersubjective synchronisation with family or partners. Whilst for other participants, feelings of homelikeness were achieved through an authentic embracing of who there were: not defined by their illness but accepting how their lifeworlds had been inextricably shaped by illness. The mood of growth and potentialities present across participants' second interviews can be understood not only as a causal consequence of the pandemic, but as a 'capturing' of the personal growth that has happened through this time period. It only became possible to capture this growth through the longitudinal design of the research.

Balancing Continuity and Flexibility Across All Waves of Data Collection in LIPA

IPA studies often rely on using semi-structured interviews or diaries as methods of data collection, although as highlighted earlier, we have also witnessed adoption of diverse methods of data collection. Regardless of the method, data collection in IPA studies relies on inviting first-person accounts of one's experience, allowing the elicitation of rich experiential narratives, thoughts and views on the studied phenomena (Smith et al., 2021). In any longitudinal qualitative study, researchers need to consider how to approach the data collection points. This decision will speak to the challenge of achieving a fine balance between the continuity and flexibility of the process. Flexibility and continuity are critical components of LQR. A degree of continuity is crucial to aid integrity and cohesion across waves of data collection and therefore dataset (Pollard, 2007). Equally, the power of LQR lies in its flexibility in multiple aspects including an evolution of thematic focus. Yet, achieving balance between flexibility and continuity can be understood and implemented in different ways.

In practical terms, researchers need to make a decision about whether they will use the same or different interview guide throughout the study (Neale, 2016; Saldaña, 2003). This is an important aspect: the recent review of longitudinal IPA studies highlighted that one in five studies have not provided explicit information about their approach to data collection (Farr & Nizza, 2019). The likeness between the interview schedules at different time points can be understood on a continuum. On one hand, researchers may want to ask the same questions at each wave of data collection, and on the other, each wave may mean that many (or all) interview questions will differ. In IPA, given its need to gather rich data, it is essential that participants are granted opportunities to lead the interview and speak to their experiential concerns at length. Thus, the option of using *all* questions at *all* time points is less aligned with the methodology. However, there are options in-between; such as asking different questions but still about the same topics, or asking some questions which are consistent through all waves and some which are specific to each wave. This flexibility is in part a consequence of IPA's implicit conceptualisation of what an interview is. Some methodologies may conceive of interviews as forms of information-gathering (in which case, one might take the view that the same information should be gathered at each time-point), and others as forms of expressive or performative dialogue (in which case, one might take the view that the participant determines the structure at each time-point). An IPA interview typically invites a blend of description, narration and reflection from participants, with the aim of understanding participants' *relationship to* the topic of concern. If we start from the position that a person's relationship to - for example - a diagnosis, over time, might contain elements of both and change and continuity, it makes sense to adopt a reasonably flexible strategy that can engage with both dimensions.

In formulating this strategy, it is useful to consider the relationship between the data points. Researchers have to anticipate how they want the content of the interviews to relate to each other across different waves (Corden & Millar, 2007).

But they also have to anticipate how much flexibility they want to have, during data collection, to respond to new insights and changing contexts as the study unfolds. A good plan will be one which balances these demands in a way that fits well with the aims of the research, and is attuned to the participants' needs and expectations. This is one of many places where collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders - prior to making key design decisions - can be really helpful in improving the quality and ethical underpinnings of longitudinal research projects.

The benefit of an approach which prioritises some continuity of questions is close(r) mapping of data at each time point. This continuity is helpful to identify how key experiential areas change or remain constant (Smith, 2003). The continuity of these areas being explored across data points helps the researcher to make links between time points, people and processes (Neale, 2021). This can significantly aid analysis as common concepts can become an important anchor across different waves of data.

This draws parallels with homogeneous samples, as they enable the examination of psychological variability by identifying convergences and divergences in perspectives (Smith et al., 2021). Similarly, allowing some continuity in themes, topics, and concepts may facilitate the identification of changes in meaning-making over time. The key underlying principle here is that while, at each time point, questions may remain the same, a researcher would be interested in how participants make sense of these concepts over time. For example, one can assume that the process of making sense of a diagnosis of cancer does not happen once but rather has a processual nature and following participant's views in relation to - for example - the emotional impact of the diagnosis over time can be particularly illuminating. This would also speak in particular to the hermeneutic nature of IPA, which prioritises how participants' view of the world changes rather than how factual events have changed or whether new events occurred. This approach needs to be applied carefully though, as there is still the need for flexibility in allowing the researcher to follow-up on issues, arising through the data collection, as particularly pertinent to the participants. The challenge here is to avoid rigidly following the same interview guide, and instead to explore how people's view of the same topics have changed or remained the same since the last data collection point. A typical example of prioritising the focus on continuity is found in a study by Nizza et al. which explored how the relationship with pain and the sense of self evolved following the participation in a pain management programme (Nizza et al., 2022). While the authors interviewed patients during the programme, and at both one month and six months after the programme, their topic guide remained unchanged. They retained a focus on participants' experiences of pain, how the pain made the participants feel and how they felt about themselves. This consistent and tight focus allows the researchers to see how experiences of pain change (or not) in the context of the programme.

In contrast, an approach which prioritises fluctuation of topics can lend itself to different type of studies. Projects involving multiple events in participants' journeys - for example when going through the diagnosis and then treatment for a particular condition, or "pre and post-studies" - may be more likely to benefit from asking some different questions during different waves. A primary focus on external events will dictate to some extent the need to enquire about these events, their meaning and their context. For an approach like IPA, this carries a risk: of focusing too much on the events themselves, rather than on their meaning to the participant, so questions must be prepared with care. Effective IPA requires an in-depth exploration of the meaning of changes, and so researchers must be wary of prioritising "objective" change instead. A typical example of a study focusing on transition anchored around certain external events was conducted by Caffieri and Margherita (2023), to understand women's transition from pregnancy to the postpartum period. This involved two waves of data collection (Caffieri & Margherita, 2023). Each wave included questions related to each of these specific periods (pregnancy and postpartum); namely, in the first wave participants were asked about their experiences of pregnancy whereas at the second wave they were asked about their experiences of childbirth and postpartum. However, other aspects were a common thread for both waves of data collection including participants' views of what it means to be a mother, which allowed to explore differences in the meaning making evolving over time (Caffieri & Margherita, 2023). Similarly, Shaw et al. used a hybrid approach in their study, exploring older adults' adjustment to living in extra care accommodation (Shaw et al., 2016). They collected data around three time points: within five months of residents moving in; at 12 months after moving in; and at 18 months after moving in. The topic guides for the first and second interviews included questions related to specific events, which triggered data collection, namely the process of moving in, and in the second interview, the process of settling in to the care home. However, during the third (last) interview, the focus was more reflective, discussing previously explored issues with the aim of examining them in more depth and exploring changes over time. From an IPA perspective, this shift in the final wave of data collection makes a lot of sense: IPA researchers *are* interested in the immediate embodied, cognitive and affective meanings of experiences (and these are accessed through the first two time points of Shaw et al.'s design), but they are *also* interested in more reflective 'understandings'. We might think of the latter as the more 'considered' or 'contextualised' interpretations which people arrive at, via reflection, and through their relationships and discourse with others in the world.

Embracing flexibility to a certain extent is also crucial given IPA's idiographic focus. Idiographic commitment in IPA can be understood in two ways (Smith et al., 2021). Firstly, there is a commitment to the particular, through engagement with detail and depth in analysis. Secondly, there is a focus on the individual story within the corpus of interviews for a

particular study. The idiographic focus allows IPA researchers to keep *context* fully in view, whilst maintaining a competing commitment to in-depth analysis. Thus, in a longitudinal study, this commitment to a specific case can be also understood as allowing at least some questions to be asked which may be pertinent only to certain participants and their (changing) situations. This can in turn enhance the in-depth picture of each case allowing a more balanced and fine-grained account of meaning to be obtained. This detail and unique focus can also can shine the light on the contexts in which different kinds of experiences are given different meanings. As highlighted by Larkin et al. a good IPA study lies in achieving a balance between finding similarities between individuals as well as allowing distinctive voices of individuals to come through (Smith et al., 2021). IPA's concern with a nuance and variation may call for some flexibility as well as continuity in the way of asking questions to ensure that methodological approaches are congruent with the theoretical foundations of IPA.

The focus on flexibility can also be useful in studies with longer timeframes, where researchers may need to allow for capturing unexpected biographical changes which may affect the focus as well. While this may mean that certain concepts may be explored only to a lesser extent, this can offer powerful insights by responding dynamically to the events which otherwise would not be captured.

Finally, Smith have highlighted the importance of considering the balance between flexibility and continuity in the context of the volume of data generated by the longitudinal study (Smith, 2003). He noted that while the first wave of interviews will likely be most exploratory in nature, the remaining phases need to 'zoom' in on particular set of concepts which might be of interest (Smith, 2003). The question remains how much "zooming in" on a particular we decide to do, and what the implications might be. However, given IPA focus on participant's experience, the guiding principle should be to design data collection methods which elicit detailed stories, feelings and thoughts from the participants which matter to them. Moving from discussing topics in general to specific accounts and also meaning making can be especially powerful in being able to get to experiential concerns as expressed by participants (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2021). This was nicely exemplified in a study by Murray et al. who interviewed participants living with Parkinson's during and beyond COVID-19 restrictions. When conducting interviews across all subsequent data points, they have used both questions from their topics guides as well as personalised additions derived from previous interviews for each participant, thus allowing interviews being guided by participants' previous responses (Murray et al., 2024).

In practical terms, incorporating creative methods into an LQR design can help foster flexible approaches. Creative methods which are compatible and complementary with an interpretivist phenomenological methodology (e.g. artistic creations, photovoice, relational mapping, written descriptions; see Day et al., 2023) can help keep participants engaged with longitudinal research projects. Committing to flexibility in how data can be collected can also have positive implications for the dynamics between the research team and participants.

In our example of LIPA study, the second interview was intended to be less structured than the semi-structured approach taken in the earlier interviews. The photovoice element offered an opportunity to create a shift in power dynamics between the researcher and the interviewees. By enabling participants to shape the focus of their second interview, to choose which photographs and topics were discussed, our hope was that participants would feel an enhanced sense of control over the research process and that this, in turn, would enable greater levels of self-reflection, self-awareness and empowerment (as has been noted in other photovoice studies; Foster-Fishman et al., 2005). As such, a less structured approach to interview preparation was adopted. The transcripts of participants' first interviews were reread to enable a 'refamiliarisation' with participants' lives. Any photographs shared prior to the second interviews were also viewed. However, in a commitment to the potential of a more equally balanced interview, no specific questions or an interview schedule was created. This approach, coupled with the relational connections created through the LQR design, engendered interviews which were rich in detail, as participants explored a wide range of unexpected sources of meaning. This approach was ultimately guided by the aim of the study which was to explore how the experiences, of existing within health-based welfare systems over time, shape participants' own understandings of their chronic health conditions.

Overall, the focus on continuity and change is likely to be intertwined, with IPA studies likely to use a combination of these approaches, guided by the study aim and research question, as demonstrated by the published studies. Ultimately, researchers will need to make decisions for each study where they sit on the continuum.

Extent of Engaging with Participants in Uncovering Continuity and Change in LIPA

As described earlier, one of the key features of LQR is the exploration of change and continuity. While methodological literature has engaged with how the researchers can go about exploring patterns of continuity and change when analysing data (Lewis, 2007; Neale, 2021; Saldaña, 2003), it seems the issue of uncovering the change also needs to be considered earlier on in the research process, namely when collecting the data.

When considering the exploration of continuity and change, it is important to engage with one of the key planes of time, the prospective-retrospective orientation, as described by Neale (Neale, 2016). When designing any qualitative longitudinal study, one needs to consider how past, present and future will be intertwined in a study. This is evident in the

choice of designs: research may be prospective allowing the researcher to follow people's lives in real time over time and it can be retrospective when the focus is on the how lives unfold through hindsight, taking the present day as an anchor (Neale, 2021). Equally, both 'looking forward' and 'looking back' perspectives can be incorporated in the same study when thinking about continuity and change.

Lewis has provided a useful distinction of types of changes one can focus on: narrative change, re-interpretation of the participant and re-interpretation by the researcher (Lewis, 2007). The narrative change speaks to analysing how the participant's story unfolds over time; this incorporates both the events, interactions as well as views and experiences related to these events. The second type of change may arise when the participant's interpretation of events changes over time. Going further, Lewis also highlighted that some participants may notice these changes in their sense making themselves and reflect on these, while others may attribute a different meaning without making reference to their previous way of seeing their experiences as being "different". Finally, she also proposes the third type of change as a "researcher's re-interpretation" - when a researcher see subsequent interviews in a different light through a lens of time.

Thinking specifically about IPA, the link between participant and researcher interpretations being closely linked is evident in the concept of double hermeneutic used in the IPA as described by Smith and Osborn (2015, as also highlighted earlier.

Going further, Smith highlighted the similarities and differences between participants and researchers (Smith, 2004). On one hand, participants and researcher are alike as they both are engaged in the human activity of sense making. Conversely, they are not alike, because a researcher only has access to a participant's interpretation, which is second order. Thus, researchers need to seek the meaning based on the participant's account. It is important to consider what this may mean when engaging with temporality. In longitudinal studies, the researchers are tasked with exploring whether participant's accounts change or remain constant over time. In doing so, they actively prompt participants to do the same, simply through the design of the approach.

Completed part-time over six (plus) years, this stretching temporality created plenty of opportunities for the second author to meaningfully engage with reflexivity. Undertaking a body of work over a significant period of time, working with the same group of participants as we navigated our changing relations to the phenomenon of chronic illness and welfare, I found myself thoroughly and authentically transformed by the process. From engaging with the literature on health-based welfare, I anticipated the types of responses I would receive. These preconceptions shaped an understanding of the topic under investigation. Starting from a position of bridling these preconceptions, as the longitudinal element of the project continued, I found these notions being both affirmed and challenged. Through participants' accounts I began to *know*

how health-based welfare systems were experienced. This knowledge was shaped by participants' dynamic experiential accounts that changed over time. I was witness to the pain that could be caused and the shadows that were cast across peoples' lived experiences of illness, but also the surprising potentials for joy and escape. As the longitudinal aspects of my research continued, I felt an increased sense of responsibility and diligence towards 'my' participants and their stories. This intensified during COVID-19; many of the second wave interviews taking place in the strange and un-canny times of the first lockdown. I often found myself in awe of how participants were dealing with their ill-health; their demonstrations of resolve and self-knowledge feeling unobtainable to me. Yet I was able to capture my developing identity as a researcher and my shifting feelings towards my participants in my writing; sharing these insights in my thesis while considering the impact these responses may have had on the analytical insights produced. This highlights the importance of, whenever possible, making space within published works of LIPA to share these temporality-informed reflexive considerations and focus on the how the researcher changes between the waves of data collection.

In terms of data collection, there is a choice to make about whether the sense-making about the future, present and past should be mainly a domain of the researcher, or whether the participant will be part of that (over and above what they contribute through explicit reflection in the data). It is worth considering this point in relation to another way IPA operates, via a double hermeneutic (Larkin et al., 2021), drawing on Ricœur's two interpretative positions (the hermeneutic of empathy and the hermeneutic of suspicion; (Ricoeur, 1970). Hermeneutics of empathy place the focus on reconstructing the experience close to how it has been told, while hermeneutics of suspicion use an external perspective to shed light on the meaning (Smith et al., 2021). Ricœur highlighted the need for both positions to be used, with IPA taking a similar stand (Langdridge, 2004). Thus, in an IPA study, there is an attempt to understand what it is like for someone to experience the phenomena but this should be combined with the interpretation, which can move the analysis towards insights not obvious to all participants, or not shared by all participants. When thinking about detecting change or continuity, it is important to consider how this work can be done and where engaging participants in describing the change may be useful.

In practical terms, this consideration will often come to the forefront when framing the first interview, and then throughout the subsequent interviews with each participant. Specifically, when researchers come back to conduct subsequent interviews, they need to consider how these additional interviews are introduced and how exploration of past, present and future can or will be discussed.

At the most basic level, each subsequent interview may introduce the previous wave of data collection by reminding people of contextual details, such as dates or events related to

the previous interviews. In most healthcare research, participants may be dealing with multiple issues (such as medical appointments, test, and interventions) and thus reminding people where the last interview left off can be useful for them. This may also facilitate rapport building via the signal of a researcher bringing a sense of continuity to the series of research encounters (Flowers, 2008). Then, it is also possible to move beyond the dates and clinical details, and remind participants of the topics that have been discussed at previous interviews, such as treatment, impact of the diagnosis or relationship with a family. However, any extension of that - such as providing a summary of what has been discussed or what the participant had felt was important to them - moves the conversation into the explicit exploration of *change* with the participant. Thus, it is important to consider whether and how we invite these discussions.

In this context it is useful to consider the method of recursive interviewing often used in the LQR. Recursive interviewing is a technique, which involves actively going back between past and present, through revisiting the past and updating previous understandings of phenomena by participants. This is underpinned by the idea that our lives are always already being constantly constructed and re-constructed (McLeod, 2003). Neale has suggested a spectrum of approaches in implementing recursive interviewing; at one end of this, we may ask participants whether their views have changed in relation to the present, while also highlighting that some participants may then ask researchers to remind them what they said before (Neale, 2021). A more intense approach could involve presenting participants with extracts from previous interviews, or showing the researcher's analysis and inviting their comments. Alternatively, we might actively engage participants in the co-analysis of change. For example, Lewis proposed asking participants to reflect on the "inconsistencies" in their accounts (Lewis, 2007). All these approaches need to be carefully considered, particularly reflecting on the impact of this on the participant, including the extent to which the participant is prepared to hear that interpretation, which in a one-off interview is likely to be absent. Presenting people with the researcher's interpretations of the previous data points can identify misalignment between participant and researcher perspectives but it can also forcibly confront participants with the previous meanings which they held. Thus, the extent of bringing participants alongside the researchers, on the journey of detecting change, will need to be considered on an individual basis, taking into account the focus of the study, the participants' characteristics, and aspects of the study lending themselves to this exploration.

In previously published longitudinal IPA studies there is little discussion of these considerations. A good exception is a study by Nizza et al., who explored participants' experiences of pain over time across three waves of data collection (Nizza et al., 2022). At each of the wave of data collection participants were invited to "draw a picture of what your pain feels like to you" and to "draw a picture of what your pain feels like to you". At the second and third interviews, participants were also presented with previous drawings. The authors highlighted that longitudinal visual methodology enabled both prospective and retrospective reflection on the part of the participant (Nizza et al., 2022). Past images seemed to enable deeper reflection from the participants about their evolving understanding of pain, reminding them what it was like for them at the previous interviews. In fact, the authors noted the positive, almost therapeutic impact of this explicit engagement with prospective-retrospective plane of time through providing "evidence" that the participants have been doing well. However, it is still important to highlight that in some instances the impact might have been the reverse. For example, if the participants' experiences or ability to cope with pain deteriorated over time highlighting that moving between past, present, and future needs to be done with ethical sensitivity. Similarly, in a study by Rachman & Keenan, researchers who explored the experiences of rural palliative care patients of accessing psychosocial support over time, have added additional prompts in the second and third interviews to ask participants explicitly about their possible change in their experience in relation to phenomena of interest (Rahman et al., 2020).

Similar insights were gained in the second author's LIPA research. The temporal distance between when participants created images and when they shared them in an interview setting led to an almost triple hermeneutic: the researcher making sense of a participant making sense of how they had previously represented an experience. This is best illustrated by a participant's photograph of a new treatment they had started half a year before the interview. The treatment was time-intensive, requiring them to attend hospital for an infusion. When taken, the photograph (which showed the participant's arm as the first infusion began) aimed to capture the feelings of hope associated with the treatment: that it would be able to halt the progression of his Multiple Sclerosis, and decrease the impact that symptoms were having on his daily life. However, on the day of the second interview, these hopes for the future were revealed as dashed: the infusions hadn't worked as they should have done; what might have been a respite was now understood as a failed venture. The meaning of the image had changed.

These unique, reflexive, insights were made possible through the flexibly designed study and the LQR design. Taking photographs over a period of time created multiple hermeneutic circles in which participants remade sense of photographs they had shared at an earlier stage of the research process. These convergences and divergences of meaning within, and across, participant accounts were attended to in the resulting analysis. Doing so enabled a further capturing of the changing meanings of participant experiences, as also highlighted by Farr and Nizza (2019), whilst also providing participants with an unexpected reflexive insight into their own journey.

Finally, the concept of the hermeneutic circle in the context of Heidegger's and Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics can be useful here (Smith et al., 2021). Heidegger described

Table 1. Summary of key considerations discussed in the paper.

Methodological choices	Key considerations
Balancing continuity and flexibility across all waves of data collection in LIPA	• Using the same or different topic guide: Considering the likeness of topic guide at each wave of data collection • Aligning likeness of the topic guide with the research focus: Some continuity of questions allowing close(r) mapping of data at each time point • Aligning likeness of the topic guide with the research focus: "Pre and post-studies" lending themselves to asking different questions at different time points
Extent of engaging with participants in uncovering continuity and change in LIPA	• Reflecting on types of change we hope to identify: Narrative change, re-interpretation of the participant and re-interpretation by the researcher • Applying hermeneutic of empathy versus hermeneutic of suspicion in guiding the study focus on uncovering change and continuity in participants accounts • Framing subsequent interviews: Making choices in how past, future, and present are discussed with participants • The value of hermeneutic circle: Ensuring that interpretations of participants' accounts consider previous interpretations, maintaining a dynamic understanding of their narratives

that the interpretation will always involve bringing our pre-conceptions (fore-understanding) to the object of interpretation; this object must then be understood in the light of our fore-understanding (Smith et al., 2021). In response to this, IPA researchers have noted the importance of prioritising attention to the participant's accounts, rather than that attempting to 'bracket' off their fore-understanding. McCoy highlighted the challenge of doing this in the context of the longitudinal design noting that previous encounters with the participants will affect how we may approach subsequent ones (McCoy, 2017). Thus, researchers may be bringing their own preconceptions to subsequent interviews further magnified by unfolding narrative of a participant's lives. However, as described by Smith, when entering the hermeneutic circle, in the encounter with the participant one should attend most to the new object, rather to our pre-conceptions. Thus, perhaps one should proceed with certain caution when bringing previous understandings and interviews to a new encounter (Smith, 2004).

Overall, IPA researchers will need to decide how they will engage with the retrospective and prospective plane of time and the balance how a researcher and a participant will take a role in detecting change and continuity (Table 1).

Summary

Longitudinal design can be successfully used within IPA but they require careful methodological consideration. This paper contributes to advancing our understanding of how longitudinal design can be embedded within IPA, specifically in relation to data collection. It highlights how temporality can be understood in relation to IPA's three traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography and discusses the importance of achieving a delicate equilibrium between flexibility and continuity across successive waves of data collection and the extent to which researchers can actively engage participants in unravelling the

nuances of continuity and change throughout the duration of their studies. As IPA is a methodology, other aspects including sampling and analysis will be important to consider and thus more work is needed to explore how temporality can be embedded throughout these aspects as well. Thus, while the acronym has been already coined (LIPA), further work is essential to unpack the methodological intricacies associated with integrating temporality for each study as a whole. This will aid utilisation of longitudinal design within the IPA, but will also contributes to the broader canon of longitudinal tradition in social sciences, allowing the power of temporal lens to be more widely utilised.

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