Interpretative Phenomenological/*Phronesis* Analyses: Using Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs) to Position Research Participant Experiential Narratives

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IPA is now a widely recognised qualitative approach within psychology. Drawing on its hermeneutic underwriting, enabled by hermeneutic philosophers (Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur), this paper proposes eight Hermeneutic Themes ubiquitous within presentation of these philosophers' writing. Research participant experiential narrative, accounts of understanding-in-practice, can be allocated structurally to these Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs). For Gadamer, a hermeneutic consideration of practices was initiated by Aristotle's early writing on phronesis or a situated understanding-in-practice. The present thematic analysis recognises such a Greek source. Exemplars of potential participants' experiential narratives are provided within their respective HUTs prior to positioning Malaysian women viewers' ethical 'watching competencies'.

Keywords: ethics, *hermeneutic ubiquitous themes*, Malaysia, phenomenolgy, *phronesis*

IPA is a widely recognised qualitative approach in psychology, now with over two thousand members within its online discussion group. An author of this paper is most grateful for its guiding initiative. Here, to systematically assist in its thematic analyses, we seek to extend its philosophical understanding of practices as *phronesis* drawing on the latter's origins in Aristotelian Greek thought. Accounts of being-in-time are ubiquitous within hermeneutic philosophers from Aristotle onwards. Analysis can align participant experiental accounts with their widely applicable themes in a research presentation.

Introduction

IPA is hermeneutically shaped. Further enabled by the hermeneutic philosophers Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur who sought to make wide ranging claims about human 'being-in-time', the present paper presents a case for seeking the instantiation of these claims as Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs). Research participant experiential statements emerging from discussing their understanding-in-practice can be located as participant experiential themes with these HUTs.

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Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs), theses widely evident in philosophers' accounts of living, can generate a set of thematic questions asked of already achieved research participants' experiental narrrative, providing answers. These answers can promote structured thematic analysis where response can be allocated to a hermeneutic ubiquitous theme. If a similarity obtains between the experiential thematic responses within the HUT, HUGS as the 'horizon of understanding' group shared, can be identified. For Gadamer, in whose scholarship hermeneutic thought upon a culturally situated practice was initiated by Aristotle's earlier Greek writing on *phronesis,* that can be viewed as ethical understanding-in-practice. Thematic analysis here recognises this early resource.

Aristotle's concept of someone who exercises *phronesis* or practical wisdom, who 'makes the best of present circumstances' (Warrington 1963, p. 19) is foundational in a hermeneutical analysis. In dualist philosophies body and mind are detached, but they are integrated in *phronesis*.

Hermeneutic theory guides this research analysis from the outset. A Hermeneutic Thematic Question initiates this process with respondent answers, previously recorded within research, to be considered as allocated to these Hermeneutic Themes of understanding-in-practice. In this way, the participant's iterative narrative is analysed as a conjunction of themes.

Questions Focussed on Participant Recorded Responses:
Answers to be Located in Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs)
- Schemata Enabled by Philosophers Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur

Hermeneutic presentation of 'understanding-in-practice' continues an Aristotelian origin. Establishing hermeneutic philosophy, Heidegger argued (1927) that the primary structure of our human existence is implicitly 'being and time'. Within such a temporal template, we exercise an experiential understanding-in-practice as is signified linguistically by using a gerund (ing ending).[1]

Giddens (a former head of the London School of Economics), influenced by Heidegger in establishing his own work, anticipates subsequent practices theory. He distinguishes between tacit or unreflective pursuit of equipped goal-oriented routines as 'practical consciousness' and enlarging, contextualising awareness such as is found in IPA. The latter discursively reflects upon interpretative 'horizons' of our routine understanding-in-use (a distinction between 'ready-to-hand' and 'presented-at-hand' within Heidegger's scholarship):

'The theory of the subject I outline involves what I call a "stratification model" of personality, organised in terms of three sets of relations: the unconscious, practical consciousness, and discursive consciousness.' (Giddens 1979, p. 2)

Taking Heidegger's account of human living further, Gadamer (1975) places a culturally and historically located practical understanding as - in his spatio-

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[1]We owe this linguistic signifier to Associate Professor Sheryl Chatfield at Kent State University.

temporal metaphorical conceptualising - being positioned along a 'horizon of understanding'. Signifying the 'framework of our experience, it is both limit and condition of possibility' (Evink 2013, p. 298) That is, horizons circle all around us, before us and behind: as the latter, cultural ethnic, gendered and generational perspectives generate an identification of people and places, a representational foundation for IPA psychological analyses.

With Ricoeur's (1981b) narrative of 'distanciated' or critical response to powerful ideology located on horizons of understanding, a political placing of thematic analysis is reached, furthered by seeing 'horizon' as agreed or contested 'boundary object' (Star 2010),'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer 1975, p. 301).

In IPA psychology, a hermeneutic discussion of a practice with its responses as 'discursive consciousness', takes place. Further philosophical questioning, directed at the results of discursive consciousnes, can locate the latter across the range of Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs).

Drawing upon IPA's hermeneutic of human behaviour, enabled by hermeneutic philosophers (Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur), Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes can be established. In empirical research, interviewing participants appropriately or analysing their existing data, these Themes can guide the questions asked, shaping an extended interviewee discussion by researchers as well as enabling responses to be thematically organised for presentation of the research. Further academic discussion doubtless will occur over the relationship involving a hermeneutic philosophy and Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (HUTs). But a connecting remains, that a hermeneutic IPA is informed by hermeneutic philosophers with their core concerns or themes. Naturally, reading these philosophers - or mediating commentators - may further analyses.

As indicated, the early hermeneutic consideration of our practices was initiated by Aristotle writing on '*phronesis*', a person's understanding-in-practice. Consequently hermeneutic insight into interviewee understanding-in-practice can be organised by asking during research in progress, or of research already conducted, eight Themed Questions. Of course, these can be linguistically adapted to suit the particular qualitative circumstances of the respondents and (in)formality of research interviewing.

Placing Research Respondent Experiential Narratives with HUTs (I)

Drawing upon this brief considering of hermeneutic philosophers Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, discussion of participant understanding-in-practice is structured within Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes (*Theme (i)* to *Theme (viii)*) by asking how participants are:-

> *Theme (i).* **E**ngaged in *phronesis* (Aristotle) understanding-in-practice?
> *Exemplar Answer*: 'I am seeking to heighten ethical social awareness with my programme.'

Theme (ii). **E**mbodied, seeking to further goals (Heidegger's *Sorge*)?
Exemplar Answer. 'I care about my television programme's international circulation.'

Theme (iii). **E**quipped (Heidegger's *Zeug*) in achieving their goals?
Exemplar Answer. 'I am pleased to say I have the necessary production facilities.'

Theme (iv). **E**mplacing participant interpretative 'horizons of understanding' (Gadamer)?
Exemplar Answer. 'I believe television programmes have immense social influence.'

Theme (v). **Af**fective in generic, care-directed involvement, exercising 'being and time'? (Heidegger's *Selbstsorge*, care towards self)?
Exemplar Answer. 'I have a deep caring commitment towards programme directing.'

Theme (vi). **A**rticulating, 'refiguring' (Ricoeur 1988) personal identity in experiential account?
Exemplar Answer. 'I believe my status as television director will be much enhanced.'

Theme (vii). **A**ligned or Alienated ('distanciated' (Ricoeur 1981b) in embodied understanding?
Exemplar Answer. 'I'm much alienated by television programmes with superficial content.'

Theme (viii). **A**ttaining a secure, albeit sometimes contested, 'boundary object' (Star 2010)?
Exemplar Answer. 'I believe my programme will advance televion schedules beyond superficial.'

Enabled by Gadamer's (1975) *Truth and Method*, a Hermeneutic Theme could be termed a HOUP, a 'horizon of understanding participants' presented in a hermeneutic circle of understanding. As indicated, should two or more research participants supply similar answers to a Thematic Question, or within existing research data be seen to do, then they can be viewed as occupying HUGS or a 'horizon of understanding group shared' in a HUT. 'Horizon of understanding' is a core hermeneutic concept, employed across multi-disciplinary qualitative research.

Hermeneutic IPA

IPA Psychology seeks knowledge of interviewees and as such it also has a necessary basis in epistemology - or defining what constitutes people knowing. Broadly speaking, there are three such defining epistemologies: Cartesian, Empiricism and Hermeneutic Analysis.

Descartes' conceptualising of our knowing was famously formulated as: - 'I think therefore I am'. However, this separates knowing from embodied practices, a central concern for IPA.

Empiricism (for many years a dominant Western view) was formulated by Hume, Locke or more recently, Ayer. Here 'sense-data', representations of an external world (e.g., 'patches exhibiting colours and shapes', *Stanford*

Encyclopaedia of Philosophy) which human beings passively receive were held to be fundamental, as a secure basis for knowledge. However, resourced in a hermeneutic philosophy is a basic rejecting of passive perception as privileged source of sense-data representing an external world. Instead active understanding in practices, culturally inflected modes of *knowing how*, constitute the fundamental engaging with the world which IPA discusses in research.

For hermeneutic philosophy, our practices of knowing how (*phronesis*) are interpreted from people's culturally informed perspective, 'horizon of understanding' (Gadamer). The focus of IPA is their PET or GET, a personal experiential theme or group experiential theme. Alternatively a horizon of understanding participants can be a HOUP, with horizonal understanding of a group denoted as being a HUG.

This hermeneutic theorising as initiated from Aristotle onwards provides the theoretical base from which asking a structured series of questions of participant data is possible, regarding people's engaging in practices, or *phronesis*, their embodiment, equipment, and emplacing. Involved within practices, they will be affectively engaging, articulating identities as aligned with or alienated from practices, attaining secure (albeit potentially alternatively perceived) boundary objects. Together these ubiquitous themes enable a structuring of responses, constituting the focus of Interpretative Phenomenological/ *Phronesis* Analyses.

A Cross-Cultural IPA

Published research interviewing within this paper is cross-cultural, exhibiting Malaysian women viewers' 'watching competencies' and resulting discourse on local ethical judgement. This augmenting IPA narrative offers an intercultural focus on *phronesis,* understanding-in-practice, Malaysian audience 'watching competencies', offering a tabulated analysis, detailed below.

Psychological narratives frequently have political dimensions, not least within Malaysia. Interviewing the research participants took place during the Malaysian Government's 'Look East' policy, intended to detract from a perceived Western decadence. However, such 'looking' was not consistent in furthering strategy in maintaining Malay feminine modesty and familial mindfulness.

'The Look East policy has influenced the flow of cultural products in the country. The major aim of this policy is to counter Western television content that has been deemed inappropriate for family and clear contradiction to the moral system of the Malay society'. But in redirecting the audience gaze towards a SE Asian television, 'the popularity of K-pop has often been criticised by the Malay patriarchal authorities who considered its influence as threat to the moral system of the Malay society in particular to maintain family values' (Syed, Md A. Md, 2019).

More specifically, the present interpretative psychology paper seeks to draw cross-culturally in illustration on a Malaysian account of ethical responses to television narrative. In this discussion, integrating concepts of 'watching competencies' and 'understanding-in-practice' is employed. This analysis is informed by signalling culturally positioned *phronesis*, practical wisdom, as central to analyses:

'As a Muslim, we are not supposed to touch or hug any non-related or un-marriageable kin. If we are too obsessed toward some popular idols, please control yourself… I think, if we obsess with any or certain idols, we just need to idolise them from afar. And please, no physical contact' (female, Malay) (Cited in Syed, Md A. Md, 2019).

In this brief extract exhibiting 'cultural competencies', a viewer exercises ethical judgement, a culturally informed element, tool or equipment in their generic, recurring practical understanding. There is a declared embodied perception of knowing how, Aristotle's *phronesi*s, 'making the best of present circumstances'. Here affective knowing how has been exercised thematically not only in her 'competencies', judging of appropriate behaviour for 'us', but also within her assembling narratives as a ludic, 'to-and-fro' anticipating and realising meaning in a 'horizon of expectation' (Jauss 1982) of a coherent content constituting 'unacceptable' television soap opera.

Syed, Md A. Md, and C. Runnel (2014) examine 'watching competencies' where within the understanding of television contents, a cultural distance between the Malaysian female audience and foreign soap opera encourages these viewers to engage from an alienated perspective with a disparate ethic.

'I know that Korean and Filipino soaps show many habits of urbanised western lifestyle such as drinking, clubbing and pre-marital sexual relationships. I guess all of these things that we consider unacceptable are part of their lifestyle' (female, Malay).

Celebrating a locational self-identity, a Malay viewer's affective 'horizon of understanding' (Gadamer 1975) is perceived to 'emerge hierarchically, signifying ethically, personally, or socially elevated greater vision with wider insight, as empowering authenticity' (Wilson 2022, p. 122). She is 'refiguring' (Ricoeur 1988) herself, articulating in responding an ethical cultural superiority. 'Our' recurrent behaviour, equipped and informed by its ethical statement, is presented as a goal-shaped practice constraining the unworthy, as 'distanciated' (Ricoeur 1991) from the Korean and Filipino.

This viewer focusses on purpose, 'an experience which is lived through the body' (Eatough and Smith 2006, p. 494). Should the researcher integrate these emerging themes, this would achieve a thematic HOUP, a horizon of understanding positioning the research interviewee. Moreover, as 'we (together) consider unacceptable' this behaviour, such embodied thematic horizon of understanding constitutes a HUG, or a horizon of understanding occupied by groups of Malay women viewers in their readings of media.

Culturally imbricated moral competency critique of Korean and Filipino ethical habituated practice here 'rests on the moment of *distanciatio*n' (emphasis in original) (Ricoeur 1991, p. 35), the conspicuous discursive separating away from the 'interpretation that a social group offers of itself by means of collective representations' (Ricoeur 1981a, p. 38) on television. Within these 'soaps', a tacit embodied self-understanding exposes overseas participants to 'unacceptable' practices from which they avow an ethical distance.

Hermeneutic Engaging:
Placing Published Research Respondent Experiential Narratives with HUTs
(II)

(i) *Engaged*   Ethical dismissing of Korean/ Filipino 'unacceptable' 'lifestyle'
(ii) *Embodied*   'Drinking, clubbing and pre-marital sexual relationship' activity
(iii) *Equipped*   *Phronesi*s, practical understanding equipped by Malay ethics
(iv) *Emplacing*   'Part of their lifestyle' within 'what we consider 'unacceptable'
 (v) *Affective*   Caring as judging 'many habits of urbanised western lifestyle'
(vi) *Articulating*   Ethical superiority rejecting 'part of (Korean/Filipino) lifestyle'
(vii) *Alienated*   Distanciated respondent response to element of 'western lifestyle'
(viii) *Attaining*   'Boundary object', rejecting behaviour as 'western lifestyle' and 'unacceptable'

Hermeneutic Engaging: Placing Published Research Respondent Experiential Narratives with HUTs (III)

'Although we live in the modern world, our fans create the negative effect through various social misconducts. Girls should stick with Islamic ways and values. We must find a way how to balance secular and Islamic education. I don't have any problem to manage my children at home especially my daughter. I monitor her circle of friends and make sure she makes friends only with someone who has positive values and attitude. I don't want her to mix around or associate with immoral person or event. I will constantly check her surrounding especially in school and neighbourhood. In the case of Kpop (Korean popular music), someone might think a live show will create negative impact. However, I beg to differ. Live show brings entertainment but the fans create the negative effect through various social misconducts. They actually tarnish the image of this Kpop live show' (female, Malay)' (Cited in Syed, Md A. Md, 2019).

(i) *Engaged*   Ethical personal dismissal of Kpop. fans' behaviour as 'negative'
(ii) *Embodied*   'Social misconducts', 'I don't want my (daughter) to mix around'
(iii) *Equipped*   'Someone might think live show will create negative impact'
(iv) *Emplacing*   Cultural horizon, 'girls should stick with Islamic ways and values'
(v) *Affective*   Caring that the fans 'tarnish the image of this (Kpop) live show'
(vi) *Articulating*   Identity, 'I don't have any problem to manage my children at home'
(vii) *Alienated*   Distancing from fans' 'negative effect' but aligned with 'live show'
(viii) *Attaining*   'Boundary', 'a way how to balance secular and Islamic education'

Hermeneutics of Making Sense in Media: Contextual Comment

In hermeneutic terms, making sense of a media programme, people extend their 'horizon of understanding' (Gadamer 1975) to include (but certainly not necessarily to agree or align with) the perspectives on a screen. Vessey writes upon the concept of 'horizon', 'horizons might function as a limit at a particular time, but they are always also gateways to something beyond' (Vessey 2009, p. 533).

Extending a perspective or 'horizon of understanding' (but not necessarily in agreement) is spoken of hermeneutically as being a 'fusion of horizons', augmenting an understanding. Gadamer employs his core spatio-temporal metaphors in obtaining conceptual purchase upon the practice of such understanding: - 'understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves' (Gadamer 1975, p. 306). Malaysian viewers here remark upon an extending 'fusion of horizons' in their responses.

Media text discourse and viewer 'understanding emerges (with) the fusion of these horizons as the two are brought together in dialogue' (Gimbel 2016, p. 79). A perspective can be thus extended, horizons of understanding 'fused', yet one rejected. Understanding as a cognitive process 'requires and perpetuates a mode of differentiation' (Davey 2006, p. 5) between distinct idiographic practices. 'Horizons change for a person who is moving' (Gadamer 1975, p. 304). Visitors to a mall, for whom their shared emplacing behaviour is fundamentally framed by recognition, can be seen (with their own words) to be 'finding a home-from-home'. People affectively embrace material horizons.

Conclusion: Hermeneutic Thematic Analysis of Research Participant Narrative

Informed by an Aristotelian initiated hermeneutics, this brief paper endeavoured to establish Hermeneutic Ubiquitous Themes can contain or inform discussion with research participants. In this way, philosophy can underwrite empirical qualitative research, not least across cultures.

In regard to ethical *phronesis*, with respect to the Malay women, morality as understanding-in-practice emplaces an affective horizon of self-understanding (iv Gadamer) wherein identity is a subject of celebrating (as ethically elevated) and distanciation (vi and vii Ricoeur) from the viewed. Differentiated moralities are here a thematic focus of participant narrative, albeit culturally bound.

Ethics create significant ways of managing issues in life. Morality forms an institutionally consensual, even necessary, 'boundary object' (viii Star) of political, ideological response here regarding 'distanciated' (Ricoeur 1981b), 'unacceptable' practices. *Phronesis* (Aristotle) operates as embodied understanding-in-practice, supporting generic, care-directed judgement (ii, iii, and v Heidegger), emerging (i) in thematic HOUPS and HUGS analyses of viewer 'competencies'.

Hermeneutic Extended Reading

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