

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PEOPLE WITHOUT HOMES AND THEIR LABOUR

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Having a home, a place that you feel safe in, that provides shelter and warmth, is denied to thousands of people across the UK. It is estimated that somewhere near 185,000 individuals find themselves in this situation every year in the UK (Guardian, 2013), but for many of us this population remains hidden, only experienced by chance meeting on the streets of our cities or in media headlines.

Much of the research into homelessness is focussed on discovering the numbers, demographic make up or the causes and consequences of being without a home. This research differs from this by approaching homelessness from a phenomenological perspective, meaning it looks to understand, capture and describe the real lived experience of people without a home. It focuses on the kind of work or labour that these individuals undertake to support their lives, be this in terms of their relationships, their safety, well-being or more typical forms of paid and un-paid activities.

Furthermore, through the use of metabletics it strives to situate homelessness in a historical context.

RESEARCH AIMS

This objectives for this research include:

- Situating homelessness in a historical context, understanding how it has changed and evolved over the centuries in the UK
- Exploring the lives of people without
- Exploring the role of labour and work in the lives of people without homes
- That phenomenological psychology is a great method for exploring social issues

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a psychological study based on the methods of phenomenology, a tradition developed by Edmund Husserl in the 19th century. Phenomenology looks to understand the real lived experience or lifeworld of others, delivering a narrative of these experiences that is rich in description and insight, allowing the reader to enter into the world of the person described.

Central to phenomenological study is the use of qualitative interviews to unravel, explore and provide the data necessary for descriptions and interpretations of the lifeworld of others. In this research between 8-12 individuals without homes or individuals who have experienced being without homes will be interviewed a number of times over 18 months about their real lived experiences. These interviews will focus on building up a biographical picture of their day to day lives, with particular focus on labour, by which we mean not just paid work, but all the activities requiring some kind of sustained effort, such as maintaining relationships, safety and shelter provision.

All these interviews will be undertaken one-on-one, in a safe and non-threatening environment in the Birmingham area. They will be recorded, transcribed and then analysed using phenomenological principles, including those from Metabletics (the historical phenomenology of Jan Hendrick van den Berg).

RESEARCH IMPORTANCE

This research is import by potentially providing the following:

- A picture of homelessness that may challenge the stereotypes typically applied to people without homes
- Situating homelessness in a historical context that provides a clearer understanding of what it is today and how it has change as a concept over the centuries
- A better understanding of the kind and meaning of labour to people who are without homes
- A revised method for the use of 'metabletics' phenomenology

