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Regular Article

Producing Locally Causal Explanations in Qualitative Research by Using a Realist Phenomenological Methodology

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John Land[1]

Abstract

This article argues that qualitative researchers should focus more attention on producing locally causal explanations for social phenomena. To enable qualitative researchers to achieve this goal, this paper introduces a novel, step-by-step methodology for analysing qualitative data called the 'Realist Phenomenological Method'. The Realist Phenomenological Method does not represent a novel philosophical insight because several studies have already adopted a realistic phenomenological approach in a philosophical context. Rather, this article's novelty lies in its *methodological contribution*. The introduction of the Realist Phenomenological Method marks an advancement in qualitative research because it is the first formalized analytical *methodology* to merge methods inspired by critical realism and descriptive phenomenology. Furthermore, this method represents an advancement in qualitative research due to it enabling qualitative researchers to produce causal explanations for social phenomena. This advancement has important implications for qualitative researchers who aim to influence public policy, as any public policymaker who wants to suggest how a social problem can be addressed must first possess an awareness of *what is causing* the problem. This article begins by introducing the need for a new outlook on causality in qualitative research and outlining how inspiration has been taken from critical realism and descriptive phenomenology in designing the Realist Phenomenological Method. The step-by-step methodology of the Realist Phenomenological Method is then introduced, and an account is provided of how this novel methodology can advance understandings around causal explanations in qualitative research and social science. Interview extracts taken from the author's doctoral dissertation are then used to frame each stage of the Realist Phenomenological Method and demonstrate how the method can be implemented effectively. The paper concludes that the Realist Phenomenological Method can be useful to both qualitative researchers and policymakers who aim to address social issues through effectively identifying the causes of such problems.

Keywords

critical realism, philosophy of science, Husserlian phenomenology, realist phenomenology, methods in qualitative inquiry

Introduction

Causality is a concept which informs most statements about phenomena (Maxwell, 2004). In the social and natural worlds, events are observed, and researchers are tasked with explaining how and why they manifest in the ways they do (Bhaskar, 1979). Despite this, most qualitative researchers resist providing causal explanations for social phenomena (Ekström, 1992). This point has important practical implications. For instance, how can researchers suggest ways to remedy social problems if they cannot identify *what is causing* these problems? Causality, then, represents a crucial connection between researchers and the world they aim to understand and improve. Recognising the role that causality should play in social research, this article proposes a novel method for analysing qualitative data which is

[1]Department of Landscape Architecture, The University of Sheffield, UK

Corresponding Author:
John Land, Department of Landscape Architecture, The University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK.
Email: jland1@sheffield.ac.uk

geared toward identifying causalities that produce social phenomena.

This methodology is the product of synthesizing elements of two previously utilised methodologies which are informed by critical realism ('CR' hereafter) and descriptive phenomenology ('DP' hereafter). The possibility of synthesizing critical realism with phenomenology to yield a fused *philosophical approach* has been discussed by authors such as Coole (2005). Previous studies, however, have not considered the advancement that a formalized analytical methodology informed by these philosophies could bring for qualitative research and social science. This article aims to convey how such a methodology can allow qualitative researchers to produce causal explanations for social phenomena and in turn make recommendations for tackling social problems.

This article begins by outlining the benefits of combining Fletcher's (2017) CR-informed methodology with elements of Colaizzi's (1978) Descriptive Phenomenological Method ('DPM' hereafter) to create a novel methodology named the *'Realist Phenomenological Method'* ('RPM' hereafter). Following this, the opportunity that applying the RPM brings for identifying local causalities which produce social phenomena are summarised. A step-by-step guide of how to use this new methodology is then unveiled. In turn, interview extracts drawn from the author's doctoral study are analysed to demonstrate how the RPM can be implemented effectively. The paper concludes by explaining how, through applying the RPM, qualitative researchers can focus on producing *locally causal* explanations for social phenomena.

Designing the RPM

Central to CR is the proposition that reality is stratified into three layers: the empirical (what is known through the senses), the actual (all events which occur, including those which are not experienced), and the real (the causal mechanisms which generate events) (Bhaskar, 1979). The goal of Fletcher's (2017; pp. 185–191) three-stage CR-informed method is to produce theories which explain events by identifying the causal mechanisms which generate them (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Underpinning CR-informed methodologies is an understanding that, in the social world, causes can be established in single cases *(locally)* through identifying the processes that resulted in an outcome in a specific context (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 656–657). The need to study (social) causes within their contexts justifies synthesizing Fletcher's (2017) method with Colaizzi's (1978) DPM. This is because the DPM explores the lifeworld, or the shared world of lived experiences and the contexts within which they occur (Farrell, 2020, p. 2; Moran, 1999).

To this end, the following section introduces the RPM, a ten-stage method for analysing interview and focus group data that is the result of synthesizing elements of Fletcher (2017) and Colaizzi's (1978) respective methods. This new analytical methodology is needed because, although much progress has been made in producing a realistic phenomenological philosophical approach, a corresponding formalized methodology has not been proposed. This is important because it is the methodological branch of realistic phenomenology that will allow social scientists to produce causal explanations for social phenomena and in turn actualize the method's underlying philosophical tenets.

The Realist Phenomenological Method

Stage 1. Familiarization

The researcher reads and rereads the accounts of participants to gain familiarity with their experiences of the phenomenon.

Stage 2. Identifying Significant Statements

The researcher identifies all statements within the accounts of participants which pertain to the phenomenon under investigation (Morrow et al., 2015).

Stage 3. First Cycle Coding

The researcher begins coding with a provisional list of at least 10 codes which have been drawn from their theoretical understanding of the topic. At least 10 codes are advised because fewer than this gives the researcher little to add to and rework later in the analysis process. Provisional codes are added to and reworked to capture unexpected patterns within the data. As the data adds to the researcher's understanding, first-cycle codes expand to between 25 and 100 codes (Fletcher, 2017).

Stage 4. Second Cycle Coding

Combine first cycle codes which are similar in their presuppositions to create parent codes.

Stage 5. Produce Themes

Cluster parent codes into themes that are common across all accounts.

Stage 6. Develop an Exhaustive Description of People's Experiences

Incorporating all themes produced in Stage 5, the researcher writes an inclusive description of participants' *experiences* of the phenomenon (Morrow et al., 2015).

Stage 7. Abduction

The researcher redescribes participants' observations using theoretical concepts to identify plausible mechanisms which produce the phenomenon (Peirce, 1960).

Stage 8. Test for Overcoded Abduction

After conducting abduction, the researcher tests for 'overcoded abduction', which is a form of abduction made from a position of bias. The test involves the researcher assessing whether their abduction has been made *purely* from a place of ideological bias and has any empirical grounding. If the abduction is deemed to be overcoded, then Stage 7 must be repeated (Eco, 1984).

Stage 9. Retroduction

Retroduction describes a process whereby the researcher identifies the relations between objects which necessitate a phenomenon (Mukumbang et al., 2021, p. 4). This entails the researcher asking a series of *counterfactual questions* to identify the relations which are necessary for the phenomenon under study to be what it is (Danermark et al., 2002). Through combining the researcher's knowledge of social reality with their ability to abstract, counterfactual questions enable the researcher to "distinguish between what can be the case and what must be the case, given certain preconditions' (Sayer, 2000, p. 16). In practical terms, counterfactual questions take the form of 'What if?' or 'How would it be if?' questions and can identify the following types of relations (Stigendal & Novy, 2018, p. 213).

Relations that Counterfactual Questions can Identify

Formal Relations. These relations involve objects sharing a characteristic, and as such they are coincidental (classificational).

Substantial Relations. This means that real connections exist between objects, and as such these relations are *influential and effectual*. There are two sub-categories of substantial relations: internal and external relations.

External Relations. These relations are the conditioning context within which an object's generative causes are triggered. External relations are the product of an object's environment or context rather than being a part of the object's structure.

Internal Relations. A relation is internal if an object "would not be what it essentially is" unless another object is related to it in the way that it is (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 42). These relations are a feature of the object's structure and are the generative causes that can effect change.

There are two types of internal relation: asymmetrical and symmetrical.

Asymmetrically Internal. Object A *would not* be what it essentially is unless Object B is related to it. Object B *would be* what it is if it was not related to Object A. B constitutes A; but A does not constitute B, and hence the relationship is asymmetrical.

Symmetrically Internal. Object A *would not* be what it essentially is unless Object B is related to it. Object B *would not* be what it essentially is unless Object A is related to it. A constitutes B, and B constitutes A, and hence the relationship is symmetrical.

Counterfactual Questions to Ask to Identify These Relations. To identify these relations, the researcher can ask as sequence of counterfactual questions. These questions can proceed in the following way.

Q1: Could A be what it essentially is if B was not related to it?

If the answer to Q1 is No, then an *internal relation* has been identified.

An example of an *internal relation* is that landlordism (A) could not be what it is without the private ownership of property (B).

To determine whether the *internal relation* is part of a *symmetrical or asymmetrical* relationship, the researcher asks.

Q2: Do A and B condition one another mutually?

If the answer is Yes, then the *internal relation* is *symmetrical*; if the answer is No, then the relation is *asymmetrical*.

An example of a *symmetric relation* is that between landlord (A) and tenant (B). Landlords cannot exist without tenants, and tenants cannot exist without landlords.

An example of an *asymmetric relation* is landlordism (A) and built shelter (houses, apartments, etc.) (B). Built shelter can exist without landlordism, but landlordism cannot exist without built shelter.

Once an *internal relation* has been identified, the researcher can consider how that relation conditions the phenomenon under study. For example, if the *symmetrically internal* relationship between landlord and tenant were to disappear, then the broader social phenomenon of the 'housing market' would also disappear.

If the answer to Q1 is Yes, then the researcher has identified either an *external relation* or a *formal relation*.

To determine whether the relation identified is an *external relation* or a *formal relation*, the researcher asks *an alternative Q2*.

Alternative Q2: Does A (an object that *potentially* relates to the phenomenon under study) have a *real connection* with B (an object that *does* relate to the phenomenon under study)?

As per the definition of *substantial relations* above, a *real connection* means that two objects can interact with each other in a way that is *influential or effectual* (can effect change). This is distinct from two objects merely sharing a characteristic, which represents a coincidental or classificational, rather than real, connection.

If the answer is to the Alternative Q2 is Yes, then an *external relation* has been identified.

An example of this is a landlord being generous toward their tenant. This involves an object (the landlord's generosity) of the phenomenon (landlordism) interacting with, and hence

having a real connection with, another object (the tenant) of the phenomenon.

If the answer to Q2 is No, then a *formal relation* has been identified.

An example of this would be the landlord and the tenant being the exact same age. The landlord and tenant being born on the same day does not entail an interaction between two objects of the phenomenon. Rather, it is a coincidence that exists *between* two objects (the landlord and the tenant) (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 101).

Stage 10. Produce the Fundamental Structure

A fundamental structure is defined as a set of *internally related objects* (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 47). By condensing the internal relations identified during Stage 9 down into a short statement, the researcher captures those parts of the phenomenon which are fundamental to its existence (Fletcher, 2017).

Towards Locally Causal Explanations of Social Phenomena

The RPM's utility relies on its provision of a means to infer causalities which shape *the social world*. The incorporation of issues of causality into a qualitative methodology is an important shift, for it represents *a break* with the accepted view of who can make causal statements about the world (Maxwell, 2012).

The Current Problem: Empiricist Causality

The specification of causality that pervades most scientific inquiry, and which the RPM *opposes*, is the empiricist variation. In this variation, cause and effect are regarded as independent of each other, and because of this, empiricists make the claim that, when all other variables are removed, a specific cause will *always* have a specific effect (Maxwell, 2004). This logic underpins the procedure of the experiment, in which the researcher creates controlled conditions through removing external variables to discover whether a cause has a predicted effect (Danermark et al., 2002). When the cause is repeatedly observed to bring about a specific effect, the (empiricist) researcher makes a *law-like statement* like 'whenever x then y' (Light et al., 1990, pp. 5–6). The problem with the empiricist variation of causality is that it is inapplicable to the social world, which is evidenced by how "in the social sciences, efforts to establish laws, in anything like the sense of Newton's laws, have been a striking failure" (Maxwell, 2020, p. 180).

Why is this the case? In a word, *hermeneutics*, which means 'to interpret' (Moules, 2002, p. 2; Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). The social sciences are characterised by multiple hermeneutics because the 'objects' of social science are conscious subjects, who interpret the researcher and each other (Husserl, 2001). Because of this, in the social world, what is regarded as the 'effect' can interpret what has 'caused' it and *act on this interpretation* to exert influence *over* what has 'caused' it. Consequently, in the social world, cause and effect cannot be regarded as discrete objects and generalizable laws cannot be produced (Ekström, 1992). But if generalized causality of the empiricist type is not applicable to the social world, how should qualitative researchers understand causality? In short, qualitative researchers should understand causality as *local causality.*

The RPM as a Guide for Producing Locally Causal Explanations

A term coined by Miles and Huberman (1984), 'local causality' means developing explanations through understanding the processes that led to a specific outcome (Maxwell, 2004, p. 245). Underpinning local causality is the critical realist notion that causality, in the social world, does not consist of regularities as the empiricist view states, but rather of real causal mechanisms. Rather than focusing on producing 'whenever x then y' statements, locally causal explanations address *'how did x cause y?'*. Since social phenomena are concept dependent, the researcher should answer this question by consulting concept dependent features of participants' lifeworld (Bhaskar, 1997). Stages 1–6 of the RPM enable the researcher to do this through allowing the relations, themes and concepts which inform participants' experiences of a phenomenon to be identified and summarised. Subsequently, stages 7–10 of the RPM allow the researcher, with logical rigour, to identify which of these relations are fundamental to the phenomenon being studied. It is these fundamental relations that represent the causal mechanisms, or *'local causalities'*, which produce the phenomenon under investigation.

Implementing the RPM

As part of the researcher's doctoral study, the RPM was used to analyse 28 interview transcripts obtained from individuals who had organised memorial events. This was part of a broader aim to build an understanding of the roles that war and coal-mining memorials play for communities in Barnsley, England. Barnsley is a post-industrial town which has hosted memorial events to commemorate its war and coal-mining heritage.

Ethical approval was provided by the University Research Ethics Committee of the relevant institution. Purposive and snowball sampling guided the selection of participants. The initial participation criterion was experience of organising a memorial event around coal mining and/or war history in Barnsley. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted and recorded over the telephone or Zoom. Each participant provided written (signed) informed consent before their interview was scheduled and conducted. Interviews were semi-structured, and an interview guide was used to prompt insights from participants about the roles that memorials have for communities in Barnsley.

The following section presents how a range of interview extracts were analysed using the 10 stages of the RPM. As such, the interview extracts are used to frame, and demonstrate how to implement, each stage of the RPM. This 10-stage process of analysis yielded a fundamental structure of memorialisation-shared awareness-which is presented below.

Framing the RPM Using Interview Extracts

Stages 1 & 2. Familiarization and Identifying Significant Statements. Each interview transcript was read and re-read carefully (Stage 1). Following this, significant statements, or those which pertain to the phenomenon of memorialization, were identified (Stage 2). What follows are extracts from two participants which were deemed significant.

> Participant 1. "I think memorials to me have several sorts of meanings really. One is this sort of opportunity to remember our past, and to learn from that and I think there's an educational meaning to memorials and that's a really sort of stronghold for me, you know to sort of look back and say, 'why do conflicts happen?'. You know, what are the human stories, relationships related to them? And how do we educate people about them today?"

> Participant 2 provided a similar response. "It's [a memorial is] really about recognizing the importance of the past to current time(s) and not wanting to forget anybody who gave up their life or was, I suppose, hurt in any way as a result of participating in say, a war. So, it's just, I suppose it's a memory, hence memorial, of something that's happened in the past but also something that can influence us in the future".

These extracts were deemed significant because they, firstly, pertained to memorialisation and, secondly, provided insight into what participants understood memorials to be and the meanings that they draw from them. Participant 1, for example, believes that memorials represent educational opportunities to learn about the past, while Participant 2 views memorials as communicating the importance of a specific past to future generations.

Stage 3. First Cycle Coding. A provisional list of codes drawn from the author's theoretical understanding of memorialisation were used to code each interview transcript. Key provisional codes included the following.

Abstract History. Pasts that are outside of living memory or events which have not occurred within the lifetime of the person relating to it.

Evidence of participants drawing on pasts which reside outside of their living memory was provided by Participant 3 in the following extract.

> "There's a link to [the] Huskar [Disaster] inside the museum at Barnsley. We [the museum team] created a [mine] you might crawl inside. And basically, you can crawl inside it, it's dark but you get to a roadway, and you can stick your head through some timbers, and it's basically what we describe to be a never-ending coal mine because it's got mirrors at both ends of it. We went to local schools around Barnsley, and we used the Commission Reports after the Huskar disaster and got school kids to record the words told by the Barnsley kids back in 1840. So basically, people can crawl into that coal mine and hear the words of what it was like for Barnsley kids to work underground around Huskar".

In this interview extract, Participant 3 details how a simulated mining environment was created in Barnsley Museum to enable visitors to relate to those children who worked in the Huskar Pit, the site of the 1838 Huskar Disaster in which 26 children died following severe flooding of the mine (The Penistone History Archive, 2018). Participant 3 in turn describes a process whereby an interactive (simulated) memorial structure was created to allow visitors the understand and appreciate a history which is abstract (outside of lived memory).

Nostalgia. Pasts which are yearned or longed for in a sentimental way.

The presence of this code was substantiated by Participant 4.

> "There can be an element… I'm thinking more about my kind of experiences of mining memorials in Barnsley. I think there's a kind of a nostalgia and a yearning to go back to something that could be a barrier to people kind of moving on. I think nostalgia's quite a dangerous thing really. You know that longing for the past and, you know, you're looking back on it with rose tinted glasses thirty years on".

In this extract, Participant 4 refers to how he conceives of commemorative mining events which take place in Barnsley as being driven by nostalgia. In this conceptualisation, memorialisers are attempting to recapture experiences around mining which people cannot understand or relate to in Barnsley today due to the decline of the industry over thirty years ago.

Family Connections. When a memorialiser feels compelled to engage in a particular form of memorialisation due to being related to (or knowing intimately) an individual who is deceased.

Participant 5 conveyed the importance of family connections in inspiring engagement with memorials, and communities surrounding memorials, in the following extract.

> "My connection to Elsecar church was that, when I was a child living in Elsecar, I lived on Church Street, and I was in the choir at Elsecar church. I used to teach Sunday School down there. I got back to Elsecar when they did a big memorial for the anniversary of the First World War. I had a personal interest

down there (because) I had an uncle who was killed in the First World War".

In this extract, Participant 5 explains how they became drawn to Elsecar village and its associated memorial events due to having an uncle from the village who was killed during World War I. In this case, the mixture of growing up in the village, having experience of the church (where memorial events take place), and having a deceased relative who fought in the war and was from the village, influenced the participant's engagement with the village and its war memorials.

These provisional codes of Abstract History, Nostalgia, and Family Connections were expanded to capture unexpected patterns within the data. The new codes which were created went as follows.

Shared History. When two or more individuals share an experience of an event, and this shared experience provides a platform for these individuals to connect when they become aware of the connection through engagement with a memorial.

Participant 6 referred to the relationship between memorials and one's awareness of shared history in the following extract.

"I've met people at the memorial in Barnsley [the Barnsley War Memorial], who I haven't seen for years, and they come together of course on the 11th of November for the, you know, the big memorial [event]… and I don't see them from one year to the next. And it's that chance of catching up with friends as well as with people that I don't even know, and they come up because I wear my Light Infantry tie and badge…you know, they automatically, you know, come up and say, 'Oh, I was in 2LI [Light Infantry] or in 1LI or in the Green Jackets', and it's that connection with the wider community".

Participant 6 makes it clear that engagement with memorials, in this case the Barnsley War Memorial, provides individuals who share history an opportunity to realise their underlying connections and thus strengthen their social bonds. In Participant 6's case, engagement with the Barnsley War Memorial on Remembrance Day allows them to become reacquainted with fellow ex-servicemen and women and friends who the participant shares a service connection with.

Shared Values. When two or more individuals share similar (moral, social, political, or religious) principles or judgements.

Participant 7 alluded to how a memorial service performed by someone who was born outside of the local community allowed those in attendance to realise the values they shared with the speaker and each other.

"When we were planning this memorial service in 2018, I just thought to myself, 'I wonder if we ought to ask Alice [pseudonymised name- a resident of Elsecar village originally from Germany] if she'd like to say the Lord's prayer in German as well', because everyone had said, we'd all said, 'We must remember, and we want to remember also, the German soldiers' (…). And they suffered as much as our lads, and she was a link of friendship, of healing, somehow".

In this extract, Participant 7 elucidates the connection between memorial ceremonies and the communication of shared values. As an outsider to the community, Alice communicated the values (of forgiveness and peace) that she shares with those attending the ceremony and the rest of the community. The communication of these shared values enabled Alice to be accepted as a friend within the community.

Working Class History. History, or historical narratives, which relate to a class of people who have only their labour to sell.

Participant 8 spoke of how class relations between the working class and the upper (government) class influenced the clearing of symbols of the coal mining industry in Barnsley.

"The plan really that the Tories had was a punitive one. They were going to hit the mining communities so hard that there was never going to be a chance of another resurgence. They [the Tories] took down all the headstocks, they didn't for a long time invest in any museums or anything like that. They were basically clearing the sites. And the attack was an attack on people's memories and what people's future memories were going to be. We have these things to remind people of certain dimensions of their history. [So] there was another deeper, darker cultural agenda that was running there and is still running and has not finished yet".

In this extract, Participant 8 implies that the clearing of memorials to the mining industry, an industry associated with the working class, in Barnsley was influenced by the will of the government (the Conservatives or 'Tories') to alienate the working class from their own history. The desired outcome of this attack, presumably, would be reduced local and national investment in the collective identity built around mining since the Conservatives were bringing an end to mining in Britain at the time.

Stage 4. Second Cycle Coding. First cycle codes (from Stage 3) which shared presuppositions were combined to create parent codes. The first cycle codes of Abstract History, Nostalgia, and Shared History, were combined to create:

Shared Understandings. Understandings that individuals share around *what the roles* of memorials are and *what it means* to memorialise.

Participant 9 demonstrated how these shared understandings can manifest during memorial ceremonies which contain an element of ritual or worship.

"And for me it's usually about some still point, even in a memorial service, and even in a sort of corporate worship space there will always be a moment, maybe a moment of, 'we're going to stop

> and just listen to some music' or a one-minute silence or a two-minute silence. I find it really moving to have that moment of… that's just to stop and remember and give thanks. So, it helps me to connect to that story that's being told, actually, that's being shared".

In this extract, Participant 9 speaks of how memorial ceremonies facilitate people's realisation of their shared understandings. Specifically, it is the ritualistic elements of memorial ceremonies, such as counterpoint silences, which encourage a collective reflection amongst participants of memorial ceremonies. Furthermore, it is these elements of memorial ceremonies that allows Participant 9, and fellow memorialisers, to contemplate the stories that are being told about the past and to connect to the historical narratives that are being collectively shared amongst the group.

The first cycle codes of Family Connections, Shared Values, and Working-class history were combined to create:

Shared Drivers. The shared reasons that people have for memorialising.

Participant 10 gave some insight into these shared reasons that communities have for congregating around memorials.

> "Memorials are not just to events or individuals; they're saying something about the communities themselves. The process of remembering and trying to recollect the past of the community, they're actually trying to discover something about their own identity in the present".

Participant 10 conveys a point that was shared amongst several participants, which is that memorials are more than physical structures which represent the past. More than this, memorials are structures that enable discovery; they facilitate the memorialisers' journey of discovery of the identities and histories of both them and the community around them. All memorialisers share such a drive toward discovery; it instils them with the desire to memorialise and allows them to relate to other memorialisers who are engaged in the same process.

Stage 5. Produce Themes. The parent codes of Shared Understandings and Shared Drivers were clustered into a theme that was common across participant accounts. This clustering process resulted in the creation of the following theme:

Shared Conceptualisations. The common concepts which underpin people's memorialisation practices.

Participant 11 communicated two concepts which underpinned a range of participant responses, which was an understanding of memorials as a focus for grief and a fixed point which can be returned to.

> "I think they're [memorials are] a historic record of an event. Obviously, a memorial means it was in memory of someone who was lost, and I think they play an important role in, if you like, sort of focusing collective grief, if that's the right term. And, you know, they are lasting memorials. So, I mean, they can be revisited again as we've been doing with the World War I memorials a hundred years later. And then, the current generation [is] being reminded about what happened and what caused a memorial to be erected in the first place".

Participant 11's claim that memorials represent a focus for collective grief was reiterated across participant accounts and can be seen to be a key concept which underpins people's experiences of memorials. Indeed, memorial spaces are where people's experiences of grief are shared and affirmed by other memorialisers, and this process is not readily undertaken in other areas of public space or life. The other concept that Participant 11 communicated which underpinned participants' experiences of memorialisation is that of a fixed point of return. Their embeddedness within place means that memorials can communicate stories and historical narratives to multiple generations and thus they represent a key part of people's experiences of a tradition of remembering.

Stage 6. Description of Participants' Experiences. With the 'Shared Conceptualisations' theme now generated, an inclusive description of participants' experiences was produced, which read as follows.

> For participants in this study, sharing concepts of what it means to memorialise with others is fundamental to their experience of memorialisation.

Stage 7. Abduction. Participants' observations around 'Shared Conceptualisations' were redescribed using theoretical concepts to identify a plausible mechanism which produces memorialization *as a phenomenon.* Informing this abduction was Jungian discourse around archetypes, or fundamental patterns of meaning which appear across societies regardless of cultural differences. Using Jung's (1969) theoretical framework, it is possible to posit that people draw on shared patterns of meaning, like those around mortality and grief, to understand memorialization. Participant 12 alluded to a fundamental pattern of meaning which unites people on Remembrance Day, an annual ritual which marks the day that World War I ended and pays homage to those who died in this conflict and conflicts that followed.

> "As much as it [Remembrance Day] is about Britishness or patriotism or, you know, standing up for your country and fighting for it, and all that, of course it brings to mind those ideas, it is actually, you know, a collective experience across Europe and the world".

In speaking about the collective experiences which underpin Remembrance Day, Participant 12 implies that the loss and suffering which the ritual refers to represents a

fundamental pattern of meaning which cuts across different cultures and can be understood and related to across the world.

Stage 8. Test for Overcoded Abduction. Jung's (1969) discourse around archetypes needed to be tested for overcoded abduction. This involved assessing Jung's (1969) ideas for bias and empirical grounding. Certain biases were simple to eliminate because archetypes, if real, are immune to individual differences in values. What needed to be addressed was the scientific validity of Jung's (1969) ideas. On this, Jung's (1969) ideas around the archetypes are unfalsifiable, representing a philosophy of mind rather than a scientifically verifiable hypothesis (Neher, 1996).

Stage 9. Retroduction. Since archetypes are not an empirically grounded phenomenon, the phrase 'Shared awareness' was instead used for Retroduction. This was because individuals undoubtedly share memories of events, experiences of people, and understandings of historical events, which form a 'Shared awareness'.

In line with the 'Sequence of counterfactual questions', the first question asked as part of Stage 9 went as follows.

Q1: Could memorialization be what it essentially is if shared awareness was not related to it?

The answer to this question is No, meaning that shared awareness has an internal relationship with, and is fundamental to, memorialization. Because memorialization refers to the preservation of memories of people or events, if someone's awareness of that person or event is not shared, then no person would remain to preserve the memory. The next question that needed to be asked is listed below.

Q2: Do memorialization and shared awareness condition one another mutually?

This question is more subtle. If a hypothetical event is within living memory, memorialization is not needed for people to have a shared awareness of the event. This is because their shared awareness is derived from their direct lived experience of the event. However, once an event slips out of lived memory, memorialization must take place for the shared awareness to survive. There are two ways that shared awareness can propagate beyond lived memory: through (oral) intergenerational storytelling or the (physical) preservation of information. Crucially, both physical and oral methods of transmission are forms of memorialization, as they involve the purposeful preservation of information about the past. The answer to Q2, then, is Yes, memorialization and shared awareness condition one another mutually, for they have a fundamental, symmetrical relationship.

Stage 10. Fundamental Structure Statement. Upon completing Retroduction, the following fundamental structure statement was produced.

Shared awareness is fundamental to memorialization, and memorialization is fundamental to shared awareness.

With the fundamental structure statement produced, shared awareness could be confirmed as a local causality that produces memorialization as a phenomenon. The stages associated with the RPM demonstrate that through putting the philosophical tenets of realistic phenomenology into methodological practice, locally causal explanations for social phenomena can be produced. The stages of the methodology that are inspired by phenomenology enable the production of descriptions which capture the core themes that inform participants' experiences of phenomena. The critical realist part of the methodology informed the logical inferences of abduction and retroduction to relate these experiences to the broader phenomenon under investigation and interrogate the concepts (local causalities) on which the phenomenon depends. Utilizing the RPM thus enables the researcher to build up a detailed and sensitive picture of participants' experiences while also relating these experiences to the bigger picture of the local causalities which produce the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The RPM is designed to identify the local causalities which condition social phenomena (Maxwell, 2004). This is achieved, firstly, through undertaking a comprehensive analysis of participants' experiences (Stages 1–6). In developing an exhaustive description of the ways participants experience a phenomenon (Stage 6), the researcher builds an understanding of the concepts which could *potentially* condition the phenomenon (Morrow et al., 2015). Then, through a process of abduction and retroduction, the researcher interrogates these concepts to judge whether they are fundamental to the phenomenon (Stage 7–10) (Danermark et al., 2002). By allowing the researcher to do this, the RPM proves its utility in two ways. The first is in a scholarly sense. For too long, qualitative researchers have resigned themselves to describing, rather than explaining, the world.

Defying this norm, this paper has demonstrated how, in the social world, causes are *local* (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The RPM centres around this axiom, and in doing so provides qualitative researchers with a means of generating explanations for social phenomena (Maxwell, 2012). This leads onto the second way that the RPM proves useful, which is how it can aid in the creation of recommendations for solutions to social problems. As Fletcher (2017, p. 191) claims, "critical realists seek to explain and critique social conditions. This makes it is possible – indeed, desirable – to produce concrete policy recommendations and definitive claims for action on social problems". This paper's contention is that critical realists should not be the only scholars who produce policy critiques and recommendations to address social problems. Qualitative researchers and indeed social scientists more

broadly should perform this role. As the RPM integrates part of Fletcher's (2017) CR-inspired method, it lays the foundation for qualitative researchers and social scientists to make more "definitive claims" around the suitable courses of action to take to address social problems (p. 191).

It is the scholarly and social duty of qualitative researchers to produce these explanations and recommendations, and to avoid doing so is to neglect the part of being a social scientist that benefits those outside of academia (the public) most keenly. Making and implementing such policy recommendations represents the synthesis of understanding and action between the social sciences, governments, and the public, and should be the aim of any social science researcher or practitioner (Niederdeppe et al., 2014). Any researcher who aims to influence social policy, and in turn shape the ways that authorities address social issues, needs to possess an awareness of *what is causing and producing* these issues. With its rigorous treatment of causality, the RPM can grant researchers such awareness and in turn provide them with a means of shaping social policy and influencing actions taken to address social problems (Fletcher, 2017, p. 182, p. 191). Therefore, the RPM's marks an advancement for qualitative researchers who aim to better understand, explain, and make recommendations for, the world around them.

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Ethical Statement

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Sheffield Hallam University with Converts number ER20897730. After data collection was completed, the study was transferred from Sheffield Hallam University to the University of Sheffield. The study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Sheffield with Alternative Ethics Application number 898.

ORCID iD

John Land https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2205-4846

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in figshare at https://figshare.shef.ac.uk/articles/dataset/Anonymised_interview_extracts_for_Producing_locally_causal_explanations_in_qualitative_research_by_using_a_realist_phenomenological_methodology_/23592243.

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