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Arkadiusz Barczak
Poznan University of Technology

QUALITY OF LIFE – SUBJECTIVE AND INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACHES*

Abstract: The concept of the quality of life (QoL) concerns evaluative judgment of people's life. In the current literature this issue is treated with epistemological, mainly quantitative approach using subjective interpretation of the QoL assessment. In this article, it is argued that the innovative approach based on phenomenological and qualitative methodology is better suited to deal with. The application of the concept of intersubjectivity was presented as a mean to assess the complexity of the QoL.

Keywords: Quality of life, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, qualitative methods.

1. Introduction

Quality of life (QoL) has become nowadays a focus of attention of scientists coming from many different fields. It is studied by emphasizing the complexity of research objects and researchers study different areas of this domain. The purpose is to define and measure not only health-related quality of life or health condition of an individual but also to determine the quality of life from political, economic, and social points of view, as well as individual life satisfaction.

This paper describes the proposal of the innovative approach to the study of the quality of life based on the phenomenological and qualitative methodology. Also the application of intersubjectivity concept is demonstrated while dealing with the complexity of the QoL.

The rest of the paper has the following structure. In section 2, the overview on QoL modeling issues are presented. The description of qualitative approach to QoL is provided in section 3, while section 4 shows subjectivity and intersubjectivity aspects in QoL. In section 5, the interview methods are presented which are based on first- and second-person perspectives. The application of the intersubjectivity in the QoL research is shown in section 6, followed by the conclusions.

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2. QoL modelling issues

There are several models and methods one can use to study QoL. A comprehensive list of main models of quality of life was reviewed by European Forum on Population Aging Research/European Group on Quality of Life [Brown et al. 2004].

For example, the methodology of objective indicators has included standard of living, health and longevity, housing and neighbourhood characteristics. These characteristics are typically measured using indicators of cost of living, mortality rates, health service provision, education levels, neighbourhood structure and density, socio-economic structure and indicators of inequality and crime in the neighbourhood or other aspects of the study. Based on various studies new factors are systematically added to this list, for example the individualization of society was included as it was found that more individualized nations enjoyed their lives more. Individuality is usually represented by the indicators of people's capability to choose, opportunities for freedom of political choice, freedom of economic choice and freedom of personal choices.

Another methodology used in the quality of life realm is the application of subjective indicators. They include life satisfaction and psychological well-being, morale, individual fulfilment and happiness, which are usually measured using indicators of life satisfaction, morale, balance of affect and self-worth esteem.

Satisfaction of human needs is also employed. It comprises the measures of objective circumstances (such as housing, security, food, warmth) and opportunities for self-actualization based on theory of human need (physiological, safety, security, social and belonging, ego, status, self-esteem). It is quantified by indicators of the individual's subjective satisfaction with the extent to which these have been met. This model and measurement approach is also common in mental health research.

Furthermore, researchers make use of psychological models, including influencing and mediating variables which emphasize personal growth, cognitive competence, efficiency and adaptability, level of dignity, perceived independence; social competence, control, autonomy, self-efficacy or self-mastery; as well as optimism-pessimism. They may also include social comparisons-gap relativity models of past experience, present circumstances and aspirations for the future – the individual's achievement of their expectations, hopes and aspirations, particularly in relation to social comparisons with others. This kind of measurement is still relatively crude.

Another example are health and functioning models which are typically based on measures of broader health status (often wrongly referred to as health related quality of life), depression scales and scales of physical functioning (activities of daily living and instrumental daily living in general negatively referred to as scales of disability) as patient/client-based outcome indicators of health and social care interventions.

Also social health models are used which are measured with indicators of social networks, support and activities, integration within local community.

Models of social cohesion and social capital include societal, environmental and neighbourhood resources (including those which facilitate reciprocity and trustworthiness arising from social connections between people), fostered by the availability and type of community facilities and resources. Measures incorporate objective indices of crime, pollution, cost of living, shopping facilities, access to areas of scenic quality, cost of owner occupied housing, education facilities, policing, employment levels, wage levels, unemployment levels, climate, access to indoor/outdoor sports, travel to work time, access to leisure facilities, quality of council housing, access to council housing cost of private rented accommodation (to perceive order of importance to people's quality of life). Other indicators incorporate access to convenient and affordable transport and the general characteristics of neighbourhoods. Subjective indicators include public values, perceptions and levels of satisfaction with the area of residence, its facilities, transport, time travel to work, and perceptions of neighbourliness and safety from crime.

Core quality of life domains together with commonly used indicators and descriptors are gathered in Table 1.

Table 1. Core indicators and descriptors per core quality of life

Core quality of life domain	Indicators and descriptors
Emotional well-being	Contentment (satisfaction, moods, enjoyment) Self-concept (identity, self-worth, self-esteem) Lack of stress (predictability, control)
Interpersonal relations	Interactions (social networks, social contacts) Relationships (family, friends, peers) Supports (emotional, physical, financial, feedback)
Material well-being	Financial status (income, benefits) Employment (work status, work environment) Housing (type of residence, ownership)
Personal development	Education (achievements, status) Personal competence (cognitive, social, practical) Performance (success, achievement, productivity)
Physical well-being	Health (functioning, symptoms, fitness, nutrition) Daily activities (self-care skills, mobility) Leisure (recreation, hobbies)
Self-determination	Autonomy/personal control (independence) Goals and personal values (desires, expectations) Choices (opportunities, options, preferences)
Social inclusion	Community integration and participation Community roles (contributor, volunteer) Social supports (support network, services)
Rights	Human (respect, dignity, equality) Legal (citizenship, access, due process)

Source: [Schalock 2004, pp. 203–216].

Environmental models [Phillips 2011, pp. 71–89] are concerned with the studying one's aging in the place of someone's residence and the importance of the design enabling internal and external environments in order to promote the independence and active social participation of older people. The area of environmental gerontology spans psychology, geography, architecture, health and social care, and related disciplines. While largely descriptive to date, these models are receiving increasing attention with the current societal and policy focus on maintaining independence and activity in older age.

Last but not least, ideographic or individualized, hermeneutic approaches are put in place, based on the individual's values, interpretations and perceptions, satisfaction with their position, circumstances and priorities in life.

Historical roots of subjective measures of well-being, that is: measures designed to represent happiness, satisfaction or other desirable mental states, were introduced by E. Angner [2011, pp. 4–41].

In theoretical model for measurement of quality of life, external environment of quality of life encompasses four groups of factors [Pukeline, Starkauskiene 2011, pp. 147–156]: natural environment (climate conditions, quality of natural environment), political environment (political stability, political rights and civil liberties, corruption), social environment (healthcare system, accessibility of education, social security, social inequality), and economic environment (macro--economic environment and economic growth).

Usually, the quantitative approach is used in the research conducted in the domain of quality of life. However, the nature of issues in the domain of quality of life requires rather the usage of the qualitative approach, which is explored using semi-structured and individualized interviews.

3. Qualitative approach to quality of life

In the quantitative approach, the researcher tests a theory by specifying narrow hypothesis and the collection of data to support or refute this hypothesis. The experimental design is used in which attitudes are assessed both before and after experimental treatment. The data is collected on an instrument that measures attitude and the information is analysed using statistical procedures and hypothesis testing (post-positivist world-view, experimental strategy of inquiry and pre- and post-test measures of attitude).

In qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants. This means identifying culture-sharing group and studying how it develops shared patterns of behaviour over time. One of the key elements of collecting data in this way is to observe and identify participants' behaviours by engaging in their activities (constructivist world-view, phenomenology).

Self-report measures are commonly used to assess subjective well-being or quality of life. They require responders to indicate either a global evaluation, such as life satisfaction, or how much they experience certain feelings. These measures may differ on the response scale, on the time frame and on whether they are online or on retrospective reports. But they are all routed in subjective standpoint of the responders.

These evaluations of life situations can be made in many different ways. There are distinct dimensions of variation [Gasper 2010, pp. 351–360] in making these evaluations:

(A) Variation with reference to which aspects of being, of life; questions arise thus of scope and focus.

(B) Which values underpin an interpretation of well-being and/or quality of life?

(C) Research instruments: Which methods of observation and/or measurement and which methods of interpretation are employed?

(D) With respect to which purposes, for these affects what sort of valuation is done: for purposes of understanding, or of praising/condemning, or of choosing/acting.

(E) The evaluation can be undertaken by different persons, from different standpoints: for oneself, for others, for and in groups.

(F) The evaluation can use different theoretical frameworks. This is connected to but not reducible to the preceding issues, and one key question concerns what conception is used of the nature of being a person.

Table 2. Comparison between theoretical perspectives

Theoretical perspective	Post-positivist	Interpretivist (hermeneutics and phenomenology)
View on reality	Single falsifiable reality	Multiple subjective realities
Purpose	To find relationships among variable, to define cause-and effect	To describe the situation experience of phenomenon
Methods	Methods and variables defined in advanced, hypothesis driven	Methods and approaches immerge and are to be adjusted during study
The role of researcher	Researcher is detached	Researcher and participants are partners
Outcome or research product	Context-free generalization	Situation descriptions

Source: [Borrego et al. 2009].

Phenomenological designs and methodologies are qualitative models that guide human science research. They attempt to establish what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced. Qualitative researchers, and by extension phenomenological researchers, have a different world view, paradigm and research tradition from their natural science quantitative colleagues. A phenomenological approach, which seeks

to unveil the description, meaning and essence of the experience, is the opposite to a quantitative, scientific (positivist) research perspective, which uses statistical analysis. Comparison between theoretical perspectives is summarized in Table 2.

The quantitative and qualitative approaches differ inherently. In quantitative research the main issues are:

(a) validity: project and instruments measure what is intended to be measured,

(b) generalizability: results are applicable to other settings, achieved through representative sampling,

(c) reliability: findings are replicable or repeatable,

(d) objectivity: researcher limits bias and interaction with participants,

whereas in qualitative research, the main criteria are the following:

(a) credibility: establishing that the results are credible or believable,

(b) transferability: applicability of research findings to other settings, achieved through thick description,

(c) dependability: researchers account for the ever-changing context within which the research occurs,

(d) reflexivity: researchers examine their own biases and make them known.

4. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity in quality of life

We categorize various aspects of quality of life as follows:

– quality of life for people (third-person perspective),
– quality of life with people (second-person perspective),
– quality of life by people (first-person perspective).

Inner experience – thoughts, feelings, sensations, and so on – is at the very heart of what is important about people, and always has been. Inner experience was at the heart of the beginning of psychology, which devoted much of its new energy to refining introspective methods designed to reveal inner characteristics. Inner experience is at the heart of everyday interactions; we want to know how people think and feel because it provides us with an intimate glimpse of the inner, personal, raw, real, unfiltered human being. If it seems strange to have to remind ourselves that inner experience is important, it is because the science of psychology has banned inner experience from scientific discourse so thoroughly that for the last half-century the term ”introspection” has not even appeared in textbooks of psychological method. However, things are changing. There has recently been a widespread resurgence of interest in obtaining introspective reports and studying inner experience.

After more than a century of neglect, the last two decades have seen a significant amount of progress in the science of consciousness. This resurgence of interest has been largely driven by the availability of increasingly sophisticated social cognition research methods. However, as the field is maturing it is becoming evident that further scientific progress will not depend on improvements in brain measurement technology alone. Additionally, there are two major outstanding challenges that need

to be addressed. We still need a better theory of consciousness that could inform the design and interpretation of experimental studies. And we also need a more systematic way of accessing and measuring the phenomenology of consciousness, i.e. our lived experience.

Over the last couple of decades, most social cognition research has been dominated by a third-person approach in which participating subjects are not actively engaging with other agents but merely observe them. Recently this approach has been challenged by researchers who promote a second-person approach to social cognition [Petitmengin 2006], and emphasize the importance of dynamic, real-time interactions with others.

One of the main challenges for contemporary social cognition research has been to uncover the neural correlates of social cognition. Research in this area has been dominated by two main theories [de Bruin et al. 2012]: the Theory Theory and the Simulation Theory. According to the Theory Theory, social cognition depends on a "Theory of Mind" – a psychological theory about how beliefs, desires, and intentions are interrelated and inform actions. Simulation Theory claims that social cognition involves "putting ourselves in the shoes of others" by simulating the mental states we would have in their situation.

Despite the fact that they are often portrayed as rivals, most versions of the Theory Theory and the Simulation Theory share an important assumption. They take it for granted that social understanding (usually) involves "mindreading," i.e., the capacity to attribute mental states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions to others in order to predict or explain their behaviour. Mindreading does not require us to interact with other people: we may simply speculate about their mental states while standing at the margins of the situation. As a result, proponents of the Theory Theory and the Simulation Theory have primarily investigated the neural correlates of social cognition by means of a "third-person" approach in which participating subjects are not actively engaging with other agents but merely observe them. This lack of interaction is also characteristic of neuroimaging research conducted in the Simulation Theory framework. Studies of the Mirror Neuron System (MNS), for instance, typically involve a condition in which subjects observe another agent who performs an action, and a condition in which they perform the same action themselves. However, there is no interaction between the subjects and the agent in either condition.

The rise of social neuroscience has brought the second-person perspective back into the focus of philosophy. Although this is not a new topic, it is certainly less well understood than the first-person and third-person perspectives, and it is even unclear whether it can be reduced to one of these perspectives. The paper [de Bruin et al. 2012] argues that no such reduction is possible because the second-person perspective provides a unique kind of access to certain facts, namely other persons' mental states, particularly, but not only, in social contexts. It starts with the idea that perspectives are ways of epistemic access that determine an epistemic subject's recognition

of a certain object. While the first-person perspective is subjective because it is based on, and directed at, the epistemic subject's experiences, the third-person perspective, which is based on objective evidence and gives access to all kinds of entities, is objective. The second-person perspective, by contrast, is intersubjective because it is a relation between an epistemic subject and another sentient being's mental states. It involves the epistemic subject's replication of those states, a basic self/other distinction and a basic awareness of the relevant situational differences between the epistemic subject and the other being. This is why the second-person perspective is a perspective on a perspective, which involves a basic awareness of perspectives, even if second-person perspective taking may be subpersonal to a large extent.

The third-person perspective includes non-privileged access to all kinds of objects, typically (but not exclusively) to objects outside one's own body. Scientific research is a paradigmatic example for this perspective. Empirical, experimental evidence is based on public observation which is normally gathered in some methodologically restricted way. So scientific evidence is third-person evidence, but it does not exhaust it.

It has already been said that having a first-person perspective, even if it implies being epistemically related to oneself, is not exhausted by this epistemic relation [Pauen 2012, pp. 33–49]. Of course, looking at our own limbs gives us, in a certain way, epistemic access to facts about ourselves. But this kind of access does not set the first-person perspective apart from the second or third-person perspective. Looking at one's own limbs does not differ in any principled way from looking at another person's limbs. Even if there is some difference, one might doubt that this justifies the distinction between the first-person perspective on the one hand and the second- or third-person perspective on the other.

The difference between the first-person and the third-person perspective is accepted by many researchers. But why should one add a second-person perspective to this picture? The reason is that there is a specific kind of epistemic access which is quite different both from first-person and third-person perspective taking. This access plays an important role in social contexts, when epistemic subjects use their own mental experiences, either explicitly or implicitly, in order to understand other subjects and their mental experiences. These epistemic acts differ from third-person perspective, because it is neither theories nor empirical evidence that they are based upon. Rather, it is one's own experiences that are used to understand other persons' beliefs, desires, and emotions. The second-person perspective differs also from first-person perspective because the experiences one draws upon are not the experiences one tries to understand.

So, it is possible to distinguish at least three basically different kinds of perspectives, namely the first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. Ideally, the third-person perspective is objective, because it is not restricted to a specific subject, it can be taken regarding all kinds of objects, and it does not require reflective awareness. The second-person perspective, by contrast, is intersubjective. It is

restricted to beings that are able to enter into intersubjective relations. The second-person perspective is a second-order perspective which requires a certain amount of reflective awareness regarding perspectivalness. Finally, the first-person perspective is subjective, it is restricted to the mental and bodily states of the epistemic subject him- or herself.

Differences in the perceiver's experience of subjective versus intersubjective social cognition are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesized differences in the perceiver's experience of subjective versus intersubjective social cognition

Subjective social cognition	Intersubjective social cognition
More independent and detached	More interdependent and involved
More egocentric and attuned to one's own subjective reality (i.e., more solipsistic)	More altercentric and attuned to the intersubjective reality
Views others in a relatively simplified, stereotypic, and abstract way	Views others in a relatively complex, particularistic, and concrete way
Views others as being compelled by their own "nature" and attributes to think and act the way that they do	Views others as capable of greater self-determination, transcending their own "nature" and attributes to think and act in novel and unexpected ways
More susceptible to fantasy and projective bias	Less susceptible to fantasy and projective bias
Deals with others more as cognitive representations of persons whose own subjectivity can be "constructed" but is not experienced co-actively through the intersubjective exchange	Deals with others more as flesh-and-blood persons whose own subjectivity is experienced co-actively though the inter-subjective exchange

Source: [Ickes et al. 2002].

5. Interview methods based on first- and second-person perspectives

As well as establishing whether phenomenological methods can provide unique scientific insights, it is also important to examine whether one specialized phenomenological method is better than another. The most common second-person measurement methods in the science of social cognition (consciousness) are Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) [Hurlburt, Akhter 2006, pp. 271–301] and Explicitation Interview (EI) [Froese et al. 2011, pp. 38–64].

The DES method was developed by the psychologist in order to investigate the naturally occurring experience of a person as objectively as possible. The standard DES procedure is to fit a participant with a small electronic device (a "beeper"), which emits a "beep" through a headphone at random intervals during the day (usually 5 or 6 times) while the participant is occupied by his usual activities. This ensures that the experience is captured in a natural setting.

The participant is given a small notepad and instructed to immediately take notes about what was going on in their experience at the time just before the beep was heard. This is followed by an "expositional interview," typically within 24 hours of collecting the samples, by an interviewer who is skilled at bracketing presuppositions about the nature of experience, and then the process is repeated over a number of days. The aim of the expositional interviews is not only to collect accurate phenomenological data, but also to train participants to become better aware of their experience so that they can report it more adequately after the next iteration. The DES method seeks out, explores, and describes the very phenomena experienced by actual people doing everyday things in natural environments. It tries to encounter those phenomena faithfully, exactly as they present themselves, as free from distortions as possible; it is therefore an uncomplicated intention: just describe the experiences that were occurring at the moments of the beeps. DES is pure phenomenology in a simple, straightforward sense to the phenomena themselves.

The EI method was developed as a mean to minimize the limitations of scientific analysis based purely on behavioural data and by training individuals to become better aware of their professional practice. It draws on insights from a number of related methods, ranging from the original work of the introspectionists, to therapeutic and mindfulness practices. The main goal of the EI method is to facilitate the re-living of a specific past experience in greater details by helping the participant to enter a so-called "evocation state". In this state the past experience is re-evoked by the participant so that it becomes lived once more as-if in present; the interviewer is then tasked with guiding the participant's attention to previously unnoticed (forgotten) aspects of that moment. To guide the interviewee towards a concrete evocation of a past situation or a situation that has just occurred, the interviewer helps him to rediscover the spatio-temporal context of the experience (where, when, with whom?), and then with precision the visual, tactile, auditive and kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory sensations associated with the experience, until the past situation is "re-lived".

6. Application of intersubjectivity in the quality of life research

The concept of intersubjectivity is used with varying meanings. It may refer to the variety of possible relations between people's perspectives. If one takes social life to be founded on interactions then intersubjectivity should be a core concept for the social sciences in general and understanding social behaviour in particular. Perhaps because of this broad relevancy research has been fragmented and several definitions are in circulation. Basically, intersubjectivity has been used to refer to agreement in the sense of having a shared definition of an object. Going beyond simple sharing, it has been defined in terms of the mutual awareness of agreement or disagreement and even the realization of such understanding or misunderstanding. Cognitive approaches have used the term to refer to the attribution of intentionality, feelings

and beliefs to others. Yet other approaches emphasize the embodied nature of intersubjectivity, conceptualizing intersubjectivity as implicit and often automatic behavioural orientations towards others.

Intersubjectivity can be most generally defined as the sharing and/or understanding of the experiences of others. A common methodology for studying intersubjectivity is comparative self-report questionnaires. This approach was developed to examine the extent to which people are able to accurately take the perspectives of each other.

Comparative self-report methodology [Gillespie, Cornish 2009, pp. 19–46] was adapted and used to address the question of whether Self's self-perception corresponds to how Self is seen by. Again the theoretical impetus for this research was symbolic interactionism and the idea that one's self-image emerges through seeing oneself as one is seen by Other. In this line of research self-report questionnaires are used to examine what Self thinks about Self, what Self thinks Other thinks about Self, and what Other actually thinks about Self.

The concern is not with the results of the research but with the methodology used. The basic principle is to compare what person A indicates on a questionnaire with what Person B thinks person A will indicate on the questionnaire. This enables the measurement of the degree of convergence or the divergence of perspective between Person A and B on the given topic. Although most of this research uses questionnaires, Q-sort methodologies have also been used. One could also imagine a more inductive methodology where all participants would be asked to write a description of the other person's attitudes, and then the other person or group would rate that description for accuracy.

It is assumed that there exist three levels of intersubjectivity interpretation, which is presented in Table 4. The first level is called the level of "direct perspectives," and concerns both Self's (S) and Other's (O) perspectives on a given phenomenon X. This is the level of attitude, opinion and direct representation. The second level is termed "meta-perspectives" and pertains to Self's and Other's ideas about each other's perspectives on the given phenomenon. The third level is called "meta-meta perspectives" which refers to Self's perspective on Other's perspective on Self's perspective on the object and vice versa.

Table 4. Three levels of intersubjectivity between Self and Other in relation to X

Level	Self (person/group)	Other (person/group)
Direct perspectives	Self 's perspective on X (S→X)	Other's perspective on X (O→X)
Metaperspectives	Self 's perspective on Other's perspective on X (S→O→X)	Other's perspective on Self's perspective on X (O→S→X)
Meta-metaperspectives	Self 's perspective on Other's perspective on Self's perspective on X (S→O→S→X)	Other's perspective on Self's perspective on Other's perspective on X (O→S→O→X)

Source: [Gillespie, Cornish 2009].

7. Conclusions

In this article, the innovative approach based on phenomenological and qualitative methodology was presented. The issue of the quality of life was represented in the form of triad as: quality of life for people, quality of life with people and quality of life by people, using a notion of first-person, second-person and third-person perspectives. This representation is equivalent to objective, intersubjective and subjective approach, respectively.

The concept of intersubjectivity opened new possibilities in the research of quality of life, especially as a support in the conceptualization of interview (qualitative approach). Intersubjectivity enables the formalization of models and measures used in the QoL domain, where examples are Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) and Explicitation Interview (EI) methods.

Currently, the studies are conducted in order to apply intersubjectivity together with empathy notion and game theory in the modeling of the quality of life problems.

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JAKOŚĆ ŻYCIA – PODEJŚCIA SUBIEKTYWNE I INTERSUBIEKTYWNE

Streszczenie: Jakość życia (*quality of life* – QoL) człowieka, a także grup społecznych, jest modelowana i oceniana za pomocą tak zwanych wskaźników jakości życia. W literaturze dotyczącej badania jakości życia dominuje podejście w ujęciu epistemologicznym z wykorzystaniem metod ilościowych przy subiektywnym zaangażowaniu człowieka. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie innowacyjnego podejścia w ujęciu fenomenologicznym, z wykorzystaniem metod jakościowych przy subiektywnym oraz intersubiektywnym zaangażowaniu człowieka. Wskazano, że intersubiektywne zaangażowanie człowieka może być skutecznie zastosowane do modelowania złożonych aspektów oceny jakości życia.

Słowa kluczowe: jakość życia, subiektywność, intersubiektywność, metody jakościowe.