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# Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Education

**Method and Practice**

Norm Friesen, Carina Henriksson  
and Tone Saevi (Eds.)

*SensePublishers*

## HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY IN EDUCATION

# PRACTICE OF RESEARCH METHOD

Volume 4

## *Series Editor*

**Wolff-Michael Roth**, *University of Victoria, Canada*

## **Scope**

Research methods and research methodology are at the heart of the human endeavors that produce knowledge. Research methods and research methodology are central aspects of the distinction between folk knowledge and the disciplined way in which disciplinary forms of knowledge are produced. However, in the teaching of research methods and methodology, there traditionally has been an abyss between descriptions of how to do research, descriptions of research practices, and the actual lived research praxis.

The purpose of this series is to encourage the publication of books that take a very practical and pragmatic approach to research methods. For any action in research, there are potentially many different alternative ways of how to go about *enacting* it. Experienced practitioners bring to these decisions a sort of scientific *feel for the game* that allows them to do what they do all the while expressing expertise. To transmit such a feel for the game requires teaching methods that are more like those in high-level sports or the arts. Teaching occurs not through first principles and general precepts but by means of practical suggestions in actual cases. The teacher of method thereby looks more like a coach. This series aims at publishing contributions that teach methods much in the way a coach would tell an athlete what to do next. That is, the books in this series aim at *praxis of method*, that is, teaching the feel of the game of social science research.

# Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Education

*Method and Practice*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Understanding hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method requires the definition and discussion of terms that may initially appear daunting – beginning with the phrase “hermeneutic phenomenology” itself. *Phenomenology* is the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness. “Experience” in this context refers not so much to accumulated evidence or knowledge as something that we “undergo.” It is something that happens *to* us, and not something accumulated and mastered *by* us. Phenomenology asks that we be open to experience in this sense. *Hermeneutics*, for its part, is the art and science of interpretation and thus also of meaning. Meaning in this context is not a thing that is final and stable, but something that is continuously open to new insight and interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology is consequently the study of *experience* together with its *meanings*. Like hermeneutics, this type of phenomenology is open to revision and reinterpretation: it is about an openness to meaning and to possible experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology, in short, is as much a disposition and attitude as it is a distinct method or program for inquiry. As Max van Manen, one of the principle proponents of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method, puts it: This approach represents an “attitude or disposition of sensitivity and openness: it is a matter of openness to everyday, experienced meanings as opposed to theoretical ones” (2002a, n.p.).

As it is considered in this collection, namely as a qualitative research method in educational (and related) research, hermeneutic phenomenology is clearly distinct from other qualitative research methods, and also from other phenomenological approaches. It rejects the claim of some phenomenological methods that ideal “essences” of experience or consciousness can be isolated outside of the researcher’s cultural and historical location. In its emphasis on the interpretation and reinterpretation of meaning, it rejects any “transcendental” claim to meaning or any research conclusions that are fixed once and for all. It does not study objects or phenomena as (potentially) objective, but as necessarily meaningful. As Emmanuel Levinas says, it does not seek to “understand the object, but its *meaning*” (1987, p. 110, *italics added*). Also, unlike many other phenomenological and qualitative research approaches, hermeneutic phenomenology is particularly open to literary and poetic qualities of language, and encourages aesthetically sensitized writing as both a *process* and *product* of research.

\* \* \*

In this introduction, we describe these and other characteristics of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method primarily in education and secondarily, in



related fields such as healthcare and social work. We show how these qualities are both discussed explicitly and illustrated implicitly in the various chapters of this collection. We begin with an overview of the history and philosophy associated with hermeneutic phenomenology, and we describe some of the presuppositions underlying it. We then provide an overview of the chapters gathered together in this collection, and subsequently, we conclude by drawing out a number of themes prevalent in these individual texts.

Phenomenology has its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl, who framed it primarily in philosophical terms – specifically as study of “essences,” of transcendental, ideal structures of consciousness. Since Husserl’s time, phenomenology as both a philosophy and method of inquiry has developed in a number of different directions, often reflecting distinct philosophical orientations. One of the key occurrences in this history is its movement from the idealist or “transcendental” realm of essences to the “immanent” world of everyday objects and concerns. This development, as well as others in the history of hermeneutic phenomenology, is marked through the contributions of key philosophical figures. Some of the most celebrated are Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Paul Sartre, who have both widened and deepened its philosophical features. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, played a particularly important (and at times problematic) role in emphasizing the phenomenology’s concern with “immanence,” and in connecting it with hermeneutics. Heidegger articulated these emphases or shifts in the program of phenomenology by placing priority on the study of “being,” on how we find ourselves or simply “are” in the world. This is a type of study otherwise known as “ontology.”

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger explains that our ontology or being in the world, presents us with a fundamentally “hermeneutical Situation” (sic; p. 275). This is a situation, as he describes it, in which we are compelled to ask questions about ourselves, about the nature of the (hermeneutic) situation itself, and about who we should be and become in it. As Nelson (2001) puts it, this situation is one “in which I always find myself ... to be a question for me and [which] places me into question.” Heidegger, for his part, puts this somewhat more abstractly:

such an Interpretation obliges us first to give a phenomenal characterization of the entity we have taken as our theme, and thus to bring it into the scope of our fore-having [*Vorhaben*; plan/intention], with which all the subsequent steps of our analysis are to conform. (p. 275)

Hermeneutics as the art and science of interpretation is understood here as necessitated by our ontology; it is required by our situation in the world. This situation places us in question and is a question for us. And the phenomenal characterization of these themes forms the basis “with which all the subsequent steps of our analysis are to conform.”

Hermeneutician Paul Ricoeur (1991) explains the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics as follows:

beyond the simple opposition there exists, between phenomenology and hermeneutics, a mutual belonging which it is important to make explicit ... On the one hand,

hermeneutics is erected on the basis of phenomenology and thus preserves something of the philosophy from which it nevertheless differs: *phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics*. On the other hand, phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a *hermeneutical presupposition*. (pp. 25-26)

In other words, it is impossible to study experience without simultaneously inquiring into its meaning, and it is impossible to study meaning without experiential grounding. Ricoeur goes further by explaining that language is also inextricably involved in this mutual dependency of meaning and experience:

Experience [not only] *can* be said, it *demands* to be said. To bring it to language is not to change it into something else but, in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself. (p. 39)

Experience and language, for both Ricoeur and for the hermeneutic phenomenology he is describing, are co-emergent, with language having not merely a descriptive function, but one that is expressive, and “co-constitutive” of experience. As Lye (1996, n.p.) explains, “Our symbolic world is not separate from our beings, especially in regard to language: we ‘are’ language.” Experience becomes what it is when it is put into language, particularly when this language has figurative, rhythmic, alliterative or related qualities that connect it with sounds, rhythms, and figures as they are (or can be) experienced. It is in this sense or for this reason that phenomenology encourages aesthetically sensitized writing as both part of the research process and in the completed research product.

In the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, research in education has seen an increasing interest in qualitative methods like hermeneutic phenomenology. This has been accompanied by a shift from exclusively deductive research and explanation to an acknowledgement of the value of inductive research and understanding – approaches that derive their findings by beginning with concrete particulars. The awakening of interest in phenomenology can be explained by an accompanying emphasis on everyday concerns in the domain of public and professional practices like education. Phenomenological research in these fields is frequently undertaken by scholars who have strong roots in their own disciplines. As a result, phenomenology can be said to have evolved into a relatively mature empirical science, capable of being attuned to the methodological needs associated with each specific discipline in question. These individual disciplinary domains provide fertile soil for methodological variations associated with phenomenology and hermeneutics – methods sometimes collectively known as the “human sciences.”

Seen as a research method, phenomenology in general (rather than hermeneutic phenomenology in particular) has in the last thirty of forty years been developed as a method for undertaking research in fields such as education, nursing, psychology, and social work. A wide range of phenomenological methods or pathways have developed, and these can be described briefly by characterizing scholars and methodological innovators as falling into two generations. The first might start with van Kaam (1966) in psychology, whose broadly descriptive approach was developed further in the context of what has come to be known as

the Duquesne school of phenomenological psychology. Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 1985), one of the most prominent members of this school, formalized descriptive phenomenology into what is known as an “empirical-structural” method – an approach characterized as “classically Husserlian.” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 55). Also coming from psychology, Donald Polkinghorne (1983) has developed an approach that gives particular emphasis to the role of narrative. Colaizzi (1973) and Moustakas (1990, 1994) have made contributions that underscore dialogue, as well as the researcher’s own of self-discovery, in the research process. In this context, van Manen (1990) stands out as having developed a type of phenomenology that is explicitly and emphatically hermeneutic, and also as having a focus which is primarily educational.

A second generation of practice-oriented phenomenological scholars have continued this tradition of intradisciplinary and transdisciplinary methodological experimentation and innovation. These phenomenological researchers, who have written on phenomenology as method is a more or less closely knit group, and have published on their own or together in various constellations – with some having contributions in this collection. Some of the orientations build on Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, but also include significant reference to subsequent developments in the phenomenological tradition. At Bournemouth University, Les Todres (2007) has developed a phenomenology, building on the works of Giorgi, which shows how poetic dimensions help researchers in health and social care and in psychology flesh out and understand lived experiences. Closely linked to the work of Todres is the Swedish researcher Karin Dahlberg (2008), whose reflective lifeworld method is widely used even outside Sweden. Writing from the disciplinary perspective of psychology, and from the UK, are Finlay (2011; see also in this volume) and Langridge (2007), who have published extensively on phenomenology as method. Among the UK based researchers, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stand out with their Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The orientation is described as hermeneutic, but the theoretical foundation seems to rely more on the works of contemporary colleagues than on the philosophical works of Heidegger, Gadamer, or Ricoeur. At Seattle University, Steen Halling (2008) has developed what he calls “Dialogical Phenomenology,” which puts emphasis on the researchers’ participation and their dialectical co-operation, like the methods of Colaizzi and Moustakas before him. Like Todres, Halling appreciates and sees literature and poetry as important features of description and understanding.

This book provides an overview, or perhaps more accurately, a sampling of hermeneutic phenomenological research and methods from some of the many perspectives identified briefly here. Whether these methods are considered “pure” and methodologically “rigorous,” or whether they are viewed as hybrids giving the researcher freedom to improvise, the focus in this volume is to show how and why phenomenological research can promote different knowledge and deeper understanding of pedagogical practice.

## PART I: INTRODUCING HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

The first perspective from which this method is explored is the methodological and philosophical: How does hermeneutic phenomenology differ methodologically from other phenomenological orientations in research? What is the epistemology and ontology underpinning hermeneutic phenomenology? How widely do these methodological foundational understandings of method converge or diverge in the literature and in practice? Questions of these kinds form the focus of the first part of the book, “Introducing Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” which explores the method in terms of the metaphorical aspects of sound, voice and aurality. The vocabulary of the “ear” is perhaps better suited to a discussion of presence, disposition and ontology, than in the terms of vision and the eye. This visual vocabulary, with its emphasis on distance, observation and analysis – rather than the rhythm, feeling and ambience associated with the ear – is all too familiar from positivistic philosophical and natural-scientific traditions.

There are today a number of phenomenological research methods, towards which educational researchers can lean; hermeneutic phenomenology is only one. But what counts as phenomenology overall or in general? Are there certain boundaries which we need to keep within in order to claim that we are doing phenomenological research? If so, who decides on and guards these boundaries?

In Chapter 2, *Debating phenomenological methods*, Linda Finlay goes much further in inquiring into and differentiating between different types of orientations in phenomenological research than we have been able in this introduction. She asks: What counts as phenomenology? How do the various orientations differ from one another and what might they have in common? In a personal manner, Finlay offers a mapping of some of the most widely used methods today. Six particular questions are raised and contested: (1) How tightly or loosely should we define what counts as phenomenology? (2) Should we always aim to produce a general (normative) description of the phenomenon or is idiographic analysis a legitimate aim? (3) To what extent should interpretation be involved in our descriptions? (4) Should we attempt to set aside or to foreground researcher subjectivity? (5) Should phenomenology be more science than art? (6) Is phenomenology a modernist or post-modernist project or is it neither? Finlay discusses these six questions by referring to some of the most knowledgeable contemporary phenomenological researchers, tracing their standpoints back to their respective philosophical roots. Finlay also expresses her own position on the question: What counts as phenomenology? Phenomenological research, she insists, needs to involve rich descriptions of the life-world or lived experience. Finlay emphasizes that the researcher needs to adopt a phenomenological attitude in which judgements about the phenomenon in question are suspended. Finlay’s chapter offers an excellent starting point for beginners in the field of phenomenological research. For more experienced researchers, Finlay’s text serves as a reminder of the importance of methodical and methodological awareness.

In Chapter 3, *The phenomenological voice: It, I, we and you*, Norm Friesen provides an approach that is similarly amenable to the needs of beginners and the expectations of more advanced researchers. He explores the relation between lived experience, its voice, and ethics. By identifying and describing four different voices or perspectives – “I,” “you,” “it,” and “we” – Friesen shows the interconnection of different kinds of knowledge, whether natural scientific, subjective, intersubjective or ethical. Lived experiences are initially figured by Friesen as constitutive of subjective knowledge, which only be described by an “I,” but this “I” is not just a unique person: the “I” is first and foremost a human being among other human beings. The “I,” Friesen goes on to show, is always already defined in terms of the “we,” which he identifies as the perspective of intersubjectivity.

The “we,” however, presents a challenge, since it is “sometimes associated with the suppression of difference and even with acts of hate.” By showing how lived time, space, body and relation are intimately interconnected and how our life-world is expressed through language, Friesen arrives at the conclusion that the pronoun “we,” in phenomenological writing, invites the reader to affirm or differ with what is being said. Phenomenological texts could be described as “open conversations into the future” (Cooley, 1902, p. 9). Or as Friesen puts it perhaps more phenomenologically: “[a text] invites the reader to breathe his or her own life into its descriptions and meanings.” This, in itself, is an ethical act, involving practices and knowledge that are normative, or can be judged – at least to some degree – in terms of “right” or wrong” Friesen holds.

The theme of language and ethics continues in Chapter 4, “*An event in sound*” – *Considerations on the ethical-aesthetic traits of the hermeneutic phenomenological text*, but is treated from a slightly different angle. Bringing up a variation on what will become a familiar theme in this collection, Henriksson and Saevi’s focus is the voice of the text and its aesthetic-ethical dimensions. How can a text remain true to descriptions and interpretations of any lived experience, given that they contain possibilities which are prereflective, and in this sense, also prelinguistic? This challenge can be illustrated by citing a work of fiction:

In ancient times, in certain dry areas, there lived a feline called largodil with long neck and short legs. It is said that the scribes of a certain tribe, who passed through the Sinai desert, used the shape of the animal as a basis for a sign, which in course of time and through the Phoenicians, became the letter L. Barely had they started to scribble the sign on the first cave walls before the largodil disappeared from the face of the earth. (Kjaerstad, 2002, p. 17)

Intrigued by Kjaerstad’s text and challenged by van Manen’s (2002b) postulate that “every word kills and becomes the death of the object it tries to represent” (p. 244). Henriksson and Saevi undertake a careful examination of the relationship between poetry, poetic writing, literature, traditional academic writing, and lived experiences. The authors hold that lived experiences can be understood metaphorically, as “events in sound” which have the ethical and aesthetic virtues of both truth and beauty. Henriksson and Saevi argue that, as hermeneutic

phenomenological writers, we dwell in the borderland between a “poetic attitude” and a utilitarian writing style.

In Chapter 5, *Cognitive Phenomenology: Tracking the microtonality in/of learning*, education research methodologist and science education researcher, Wolff-Michael Roth undertakes what he refers to as “cognitive phenomenological” investigation. Phenomenological research, Roth implies, is the study of “micro-tonality” and “micro-emotionality” of experiences of a “fraction of a second” in an attempt to uncover the “pre-noetic,” experience as it arises before interpretation or reflection. Roth emphasizes that the study of this pre-reflective experience must begin with a recognition of *passivity* in human engagements. Such a passivity, Roth explains, that is “not the counterpart of will”; it is not voluntary, but rather, is part of a way of engaging, an orientation or attitude. With his focus on the pre-intentional, prereflective and passive, Roth puts his finger on a tension that underlies hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation: Namely, its attempt to use reflection and description – which are both active and guided by intention – to get closer to that which is prereflective and not intentional and in this sense, sometimes passive. Van Manen (2007) refers to this as the “pathic,” Waldenfels (2006) uses the phrase “that which is not willed,” and Roth characterizes it enigmatically as “passibility” – a term he defines elsewhere simply as “our capacity to be affected” (2011, p. 18).

As Friesen does in Chapter 3, Roth refers to both “first” and “third person perspectives” to identify ways of looking at the world that are relevant to phenomenological research. However, Roth’s intended meaning is markedly different: It is phenomenological descriptions in Roth’s chapter that are told from the perspectives of the first and third person, in a literal, grammatical sense, as either the author’s own experience or as that of someone else. These “perspectives” do not correspond to knowledge that is either singularly subjective, or that makes the claim to an impersonal objectivity, as Friesen discusses. After taking the reader through a series of descriptions and examples, in both the first and third person grammatical perspectives, Roth comes to a conclusion that highlights the affinity of his approach with hermeneutic phenomenology as it is represented in much of the rest of this book: Both are concerned with the avoidance of “the third” – of laws, rules and order, whether theoretical or methodological in origin – which “interferes with and contaminates the foreign or strange.” All hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with avoiding the labels and “laws” of theory, which – as Henriksson and Saevi have pointed out – can all too easily “kill” the phenomenon under investigation. Attempts to negotiate this difficult and in some ways impossible avoidance of the orders of theory and of methodological prescription are, in different ways, discussed and demonstrated in the papers that follow these three introductory chapters.

## PART II: HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY: REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

The second part of the book follows by sounding out the relationship between method, theory, reflection and practice, showing these interrelationships to be both

intricate and integral. Hermeneutic phenomenology uses concrete examples and descriptive, reflective writing to take scholarly discourse out of the realm of explicit, theoretical generality and bring it closer to the particularities of engaged practice. It does this in the hope of fostering a kind of pathic, non-cognitive forms of awareness – the attitude or disposition that is fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenological investigation itself. The language of theory and generality, and the competencies and capabilities associated with it, can draw researchers and practitioners away from this type of awareness.

Chapter 6, *The creativity of ‘unspecialization’: A contemplative direction for integrative scholarly practice*, by Kate Galvin and Les Todres starts with an exploration into forms of knowledge that since the beginning of the modern era, have guided scholarship in relation to practice. What was once seen as modernity’s great dignity – the differentiation of science, art, and morality – has become postmodernity’s great disaster, the dis-integration of knowing, valuing and doing.

Drawing on Aristotle and his concept of *phronesis* in which knowing, doing and valuing are inseparably intertwined, Galvin and Todres connect it to Heidegger on *Denken* and Gendlin on the “entry into the implicit.” Based on this, the authors promote ways of knowing and acting that are “unspecialized,” since they involve ways of integrating the knowledge of head, heart and hand. Such an integrated form of knowledge would see scholarship as a “seamless” way of being. But what is this way of being?

Galvin and Todres identify this as essentially an *embodied* way of being, and they offer an experiential account of an artist who is struggling to find an expression for “more than words can say.” The meaning at the core of this experiential account is easily translatable to other professional practices such as nursing, counselling, and pedagogy. Teachers, nurses, and psychologists are often in a position in which they struggle to find ways of seeing their pupils, patients, and clients holistically through their lived experiences.

Throughout the chapter, Galvin and Todres show how forms of applied knowledge, which integrate knowing and being, and include the ethical dimension of the ‘good,’ are constitutive of the creativity of “unspecialization.” In this way, the authors point us to a different view on what scholarship can be, in its integration with practice, and how integrated, applied knowledge can present a path to a more profound and reflective involvement in human existence.

In Chapter 7, *Hermeneutic phenomenology and pedagogical practice*, Carina Henriksson explores the connection between educational research and pedagogical practice. In doing so, she takes as a starting point Merleau-Ponty’s suggestion that phenomenology “has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. viii). But: What is it that teachers have been waiting for? In answering this question Henriksson shows us how pedagogical practice is often at odds with research and theory, since the latter do not address questions in their concrete situatedness: What do I say to my class at *this* moment? What can I do for *this* child? Through lived-experience descriptions and narratives, Henriksson illuminates some of the aspects

of pedagogical practice which are often overlooked in research, but deeply felt by teachers. The experiential accounts and Henriksson's understanding of them shows how hermeneutic phenomenology can give teachers a different knowledge and deeper understanding of what goes on in classrooms – and this knowledge, she avers, represents “what they had been waiting for.”

With its strong focus on the lifeworld and lived experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology bridges the gap between what theory and educational documents say *should* take place in the classroom and what *actually* takes place in every-day pedagogical practice. As such, this method, approach, attitude or disposition could be described as a “reality check.” Hermeneutic phenomenology is, according to Galvin and Todres (Chapter 6), also a relatively seamless way of seeing pedagogy. Framed by ethical considerations, it involves hand (acting), heart (feeling), and head (thinking). As discussed above, hermeneutic phenomenology embraces the thought that language and our world view are intertwined: language shapes our world and our world is shaped by language. Hermeneutic phenomenology writes and talks in a language, which as Henriksson argues, makes the world of pedagogical practice recognizable for teachers.

### PART III: A “SCIENCE OF EXAMPLES”: ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Phenomenology has been famously described as “a science of examples” (van den Berg, 1955, p. 54) and the book concludes with a small number of examples of the application of hermeneutic phenomenology to research in education. These feature adaptations and modifications to the method that include its combination with photography and narrative, and drawing and interviewing techniques. Van Manen uses the phrases “methodical reduction” and “flexible narrative rationality” to characterize these and other types of adaptations of the method to the subject matter being investigated. Like the more general phenomenological reduction, its methodological counterpart entails the “bracketing” of established answers and approaches to what is being researched. But whereas the phenomenological reduction involves the exclusion of conventional theoretical explanations that may get in the way of the lived experience, the methodological reduction requires the exclusion of methodological convention:

Bracket all established investigative methods or techniques, and seek or invent an approach that seems to fit most appropriately the phenomenological topic under study. ... One must experiment with a methodologically informed inventiveness that fuses the reflective and the prereflective life of consciousness. One needs to invent a flexible narrative rationality, a method for investigating and representing the phenomenon in question. (2002, n.p.)

In both the methodological and the general phenomenological reductions – as well as in van Manen's characterization of “flexible narrative rationality,” Roth's earlier statements concerning the exclusion of “the third” take clear, practical form: Although it can never be accessed in “unfalsified” or purely pre-noetic terms, phenomenology has as its goal the exclusion of the third, of theoretical or



methodological “answers” that would come between the researcher and the experience under investigation.

In Chapter 8, the focus of Anna Kirova and Michael Emme’s methodological experimentation is to be found in the genre of the Fotonovela. This is a genre that presents a method which bridges hermeneutic phenomenology and arts-based research by combining photography with basic verbal and pictorial elements. The method was originally developed as a means to let immigrant children express their lived experiences of the first school day in their new country. The main question is, “What methods of inquiry can be used to access ‘embodied understanding’ more directly, and, in particular, the lifeworlds of immigrant children as they leave the familiar ‘home world’ and enter the ‘alien world’ of a new school?” Besides the emphasis on the photonovella, this question is explored with the help of three theoretical notions: Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a linguistic “happening,” the constantly renewed enactment of tradition; Heidegger’s understanding of the relationship between language and being; and Gendlin’s belief that our relational and bodily understandings exceed any precisely formulated “languaged,” or otherwise patterned, ways of describing it. In conclusion, Kirova and Emme argue that the fotonovela, as a collage method, that may offer a deeper understanding of embodied experiences and the complex relationships between body, language, and image.

The relationship between body, movement, and language is further explored in Chapter 9, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen’s *Children’s embodied voices: Approaching children’s experiences through multi-modal interviewing*. Building on Merleau-Ponty, Gendlin, and Mindell, Svendler Nielsen develops a multi-modal interview method, which enables explorations of how children experience their bodies in movement and how these experiences can be expressed through language, drawings, music, and movement itself. Step by step, and through examples from her research, Svendler Nielsen explains the different phases of the multi-modal interviewing approach. She also describes how she has created narratives from interviews and children’s log books and drawings, and how these narratives were analyzed and interpreted. Svendler Nielsen closes her chapter with an insightful discussion on how her multi-modal approach could be used as a pedagogical tool, and how teachers’ awareness of children’s experience bodily movement can ultimately affect the child’s well-being, relationships, and quality of life.

Chapter 10, *Seeking pedagogical places* by Andrew Foran and Margaret Olson, is not *about* reflection in an overt sense; rather it is an appeal for us to reflect on pedagogical practice. Where does teaching take place and what is the meaning of pedagogical places? When does a space become a place where education unfolds? School rules often set the limit for when teaching is supposed to take place and school buildings often set the physical limits for where teaching and learning are appropriate: teaching and learning take place during the daytime in classrooms. By means of evocative anecdotes, all written by teachers, Foran and Olson show that a pedagogical place actually has little to do with the physical surroundings. Rather, any place that draws teacher and students together, any place where teachers and students are absorbed and drawn into an educative experience is a pedagogical

place. One of the conclusions that Foran and Olson formulate is that “the importance a place can have in a person’s being can border on spiritual sanctity . . . This is a full-body experience, the intentional awareness of being-in-the-world that encourages the body, beyond the desk, the classroom, or the school.”

Educative experiences, as Foran and Olson points out, can happen anywhere and anytime. Not just for the student but for the teacher too. Consider this poem from the Swedish author, Sven Nyberg:

*After all my years  
at university  
I was assigned  
to check the boys’ toilet  
before morning assembly.*

*One bleak winter morning,  
in my zealously,  
I caught a thirteen-year old  
special-ed student,  
who somewhat helplessly  
sucked on a cigarette.*

*“And who is this, then?”  
my stern voice echoed.*

*The boy looked me  
straight into my eyes  
“A human being,” he  
solemnly said.*

It would take a very uncaring teacher not to have pause for thought when reading an account of this kind. Poems and other types of literature can be powerful and transformative, as they *situate* our embodied being in concrete particularities – which abound in Nyberg’s brief and relatively terse poem: “after years of university,” “the bleak morning” before the assembly, and the helplessness of the thirteen year-old. In this way, literature is able to connect us in significant ways to the world and to ourselves.

In Chapter 11, *How literature works: Poetry and the phenomenology of reader response*, Patrick Howard investigates some of these special powers of literature. Building on Rosenblatt’s notion of a mutual *transaction* occurring between reader and text, Howard employs hermeneutic phenomenology to further explore how the text can be lived and felt. The first few pages of the chapter lets us be a part of a lesson in which a grade 9 class, together with their teacher, reads and comments on poems written by local poets. Howard, a very talented writer himself, shows, through his writing about the lesson, how literature is educative or formative because it is an aesthetic experience which can have lived meaning for the student.

One student's written response to a poem becomes the backdrop for Howard's further exploration into literary engagement, texts as "situations," and embodied language. In the hands of Howard, this student's comment on the poem vividly illustrates Bachelard's (1958/1994) observation of how

The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us ... It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being. (p. xxiii)

As a scholar of both literature and phenomenology, Bachelard helps teachers – and students – see what can be possible by cultivating a deeper understanding of reader and text.

\* \* \*

As the reader will see, each chapter in this collection has its own unique way of describing, understanding and engaging with hermeneutic phenomenology. The reader will also notice that none of the chapters offers a ready-made manual for doing hermeneutic phenomenological research. Instead, this book should be seen as offering different pathways within a common methodological landscape. This certainly makes hermeneutic phenomenology more difficult and elusive than other methods, but as both Gadamer (1975) and Rorty (1979) maintain, the method of phenomenology is that there is no method.

The fact that there is "no" method might leave us with a feeling of abandonment, of being left in the middle of nowhere with nothing more than a burning desire to undertake an experientially meaningful research study. So, to whom do we turn for guidance?

In phenomenological philosophy and methodology we find the tools we need to design a method for our research question; the phenomenological scholars provide us with theoretical knowledge. But in the process of understanding this knowledge, there is an obvious danger that literature confuses more than it clarifies. When we find that there is a plethora of perspectives within phenomenology, our open mind might turn into the antithesis – a closed mind.

If there is no method and if the philosophers we turn to do not challenge us, there is just one salvation on the road to method: the research question. Moustakas (1990) puts it well when he says:

The heuristic researcher is not only intimately and autobiographically related to the question but learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life not... because the question leads to an answer, but also because the question itself is infused in the researcher's being. It creates a thirst to discover, to clarify, and to understand crucial dimensions of knowledge. (p. 43)

Anyone who has undertaken hermeneutic-phenomenological research knows how a research question, at the beginning, is difficult to put into words. It is there, but more as an extra-linguistic feeling or sensing or empathy; waiting to play, to challenge, to tease us, even to command us – but finally to also liberate us. This thirst to discover, clarify and understand the research question is ultimately an attentive, unchained wandering into the soul of the question. Through reflection, we may find that what we actively have been searching for was already there, passively waiting for our acknowledgment.

\* \* \*

Finally, in introducing this collection, we are grateful to acknowledge the indispensable role that the online, open access journal, *Phenomenology & Practice* has played both in providing the vast majority of the chapters presented in this collection, and in developing, since its inauguration in 2006, a communal forum for hermeneutic phenomenological writing. With the exception of chapters 3, 5, and 7 (and this introductory chapter), all of the contributions to this collection originally appeared in *Phenomenology & Practice*, and four of these chapters originally appeared in a special issue on methodology published in 2009. Chapter 3, Norm Friesen's *Experiential evidence: I, we and you* has been adapted from his 2011 monograph, *The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen: Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology* (New York: Peter Lang). Chapter 5, Wolff-Michael Roth's *Hermeneutic phenomenology and cognition: Tracking the microtonality in/of learning* and Chapter 7, Carina Henriksson's *Hermeneutic phenomenology and pedagogical practice* have not previously been published.

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# **PART I**

## **Introducing Hermeneutic Phenomenology**



## 2. DEBATING PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODS

### INTRODUCTION

Phenomenological philosophers have been “extraordinarily diverse in their interests, in their interpretation of the central issues of phenomenology, in their application of what they understood to be the phenomenological method, and in their development of what they took to be the phenomenological programme for the future of philosophy” (Moran, 2000, p. 3). This diversity finds reflection in phenomenological research, where the application of philosophical ideas to the empirical project provokes both uncertainty and controversy.

Phenomenological researchers generally agree that our central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings. We aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived. Phenomenological description “must stick close to experience, and yet not limit itself to the empirical but restore to each experience the ontological cipher which marks it internally” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 157). As Wertz (2005) puts it:

Phenomenology is a low hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known. (p. 175)

There is a general consensus that we need phenomenological research methods that are responsive to both the phenomenon and the subjective interconnection between the researcher and the researched.

That said, we continue to engage in a spirited debate about how to do phenomenological research in practice. While this debate is healthy, tensions are occasionally created in our community by unduly critical debate where confusion about what constitutes appropriate or “sound” phenomenological research makes our field difficult for novices to access. When commitment to shared scholarly exploration is displaced by dogmatic assertion, both the quality and the potential of phenomenological inquiry are threatened.

Six particular questions are contested: (1) How tightly or loosely should we define what counts as phenomenology? (2) Should we always aim to produce a general (normative) description of the phenomenon or is idiographic analysis a legitimate aim? (3) To what extent should interpretation be involved in our descriptions? (4) Should we set aside or bring to the foreground researcher subjectivity? (5) Should phenomenology be more science than art? (6) Is phenomenology a modernist or postmodernist project, or neither?

In this chapter, I examine each of these areas of contention in the spirit of fostering dialogue and promoting openness and clarity in phenomenological inquiry. In addition to mapping the phenomenological field as a whole, I indicate the routes favoured by hermeneutic phenomenologists, including myself. The



specific choices we make regarding our methodology arise out of a broader field and it's important we acknowledge that context.

To prosper and advance, it becomes important for any discipline to evaluate its theoretical and methodological propositions from within its own evolving framework rather than insulate itself from criticism due to threat or cherished group loyalties. (Mills, 2003, p. 150)

#### WHAT COUNTS AS “PHENOMENOLOGY?”

Many different research methods and techniques are practiced under the banner of phenomenological research. What are the boundaries, the defining characteristics, of phenomenology? What distinguishes our work from other variants of qualitative research that investigate subjective meanings?

Focusing specifically on psychological phenomenological approaches,<sup>1</sup> Giorgi (1989) has stated that four core characteristics hold across all variations: The research is rigorously *descriptive*, uses the phenomenological *reductions*, explores the *intentional* relationship between persons and situations, and discloses the *essences*, or structures, of meaning immanent in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation. Elsewhere Giorgi (1997), more straightforwardly, argues that the phenomenological method encompasses three interlocking steps: (1) phenomenological reduction, (2) description, and (3) search for essences.

Yet, variations in phenomenological methodology flourish. Some adhere reasonably closely to Giorgi's framework based on the reduction and imaginative variation while, at the same time, offering their own emphases (e.g., the open lifeworld approach of Dahlberg et al., 2008; van Manen's, lived experience human science inquiry, 1990; the dialogal approach, Halling et al., 2006; the Dallas approach, Garza 2007; Todres' embodied lifeworld approach, 2005, 2007; and Ashworth's, lifeworld approach, 2003, 2006).

There also exist a number of phenomenological writers who focus on rich descriptions of lived experience and meanings, but which do not explicitly use Husserlian techniques such as eidetic variation. The literary, contemplative, existential-dialectical approach of Jager (2010), Todres (2007) and others offer variants of hermeneutic phenomenology anchored in the poetic tradition of late Heidegger. Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which has gained considerable purchase in the qualitative psychology field in the United Kingdom, is example of a different hermeneutic approach. Smith argues that his idiographic and inductive method, which seeks to explore participants' personal lived experiences, is phenomenological in its concern for individuals' perceptions. He also, however, identifies more strongly with hermeneutic traditions which recognize the central role played by the researcher, and does not advocate the use of bracketing (Smith, 2004).

The debate about whether or not a method is in fact “phenomenological” pivots on the issue of criteria. Specifically, is it sufficient to strive for rich description of lived experience, or are additional aspects required such as having a special

phenomenological stance or attitude? Is Giorgi's Husserl-inspired method the template against which other versions should be measured? When Giorgi (2008a, p. 34) states that he does not consider the ways some colleagues have adapted his own basic method with wider variations to be sound – from either a research or phenomenological perspective – is he more tightly ring-fencing the psychological phenomenological project? In fact, in an earlier paper, Giorgi is clear that his method is neither exclusive nor exhaustive and that it should not be considered paradigmatic (Giorgi, 1975). His complaint would appear to be directed against researchers who either claim their work derives from Husserl when primary sources have not been read or understood, or against researchers who evoke Giorgi's own name and method falsely, thereby misrepresenting his work. More recently, Giorgi (2008b) has critiqued students' illogical tendency to lay claim to ideas stemming from philosophers or methodologists who have irreconcilable differences.

My own position on this question is that phenomenological research is phenomenological when it involves both rich description of either the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon. Put another way, I support Husserl's idea that varying modes of "givenness" can only be unfurled through the reduction and, as Marion (2002) puts it, with more reduction we get more givenness. I also think that researchers should be clear about which philosophical and/or research traditions they are following. I have concerns about research which purports to be Husserlian when, for example, there is no evidence of any reductions being attempted. Similarly, researchers who claim to have bracketed and, therefore, transcended their assumptions while using a hermeneutic approach would seem to be both naïve and confused.

In my view, a phenomenological method is sound if it links appropriately to some phenomenological philosophy or theory, and if its claims about method are justified and consistent. For example, in one paper, six researchers (including myself) apply different approaches to – versions of – phenomenology (King et al., 2008). We regard ourselves as practicing phenomenologically-based empirical work as distinct from engaging a philosophical reflection on "things in their appearing" in the philosophical sense. While there are commonalities in our methods of analyses and findings, we also diverge; but in this divergence, we link explicitly and reflexively back to different theoretical and philosophical commitments.

It is perhaps helpful to recognize that a number of qualitative approaches to research have borrowed and built upon phenomenological philosophy and techniques. As Wertz (2005) says, any genuinely psychological qualitative method implicitly uses the descriptive psychological reflection that is characteristic of the phenomenological approach. It he suggests that is perhaps best to accept research which does not fully embrace the phenomenological project's commitment to description along with the researcher having an open *phenomenological attitude* (if not actually applying specific reductions), as phenomenologically-inspired or

phenomenologically-orientated. Any research which does not have at its core the description of “the things in their appearing” which focuses experience as lived, cannot be considered phenomenological.

#### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OR IDIOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS?

Phenomenologists contest what should be the focus of their research. Many, like Giorgi (following Husserl), seek to throw light on the essential and general structures of a phenomenon. One version of this approach is to explicitly focus on the lifeworld, which is seen to be a human universal consisting of essential features (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 2008; Todres, Galvin, & Dahlberg, 2006; Ashworth, 2003, 2006).<sup>2</sup> A variant of lifeworld research is a reflective and practical focus on *lived experience* adopted by many in the pedagogic (see van Manen, 1990) and health care fields (e.g., see Crotty’s 1996 review of nursing research). Other phenomenologists concentrate on the *narratives* emerging from data; Langdridge (2008) and his Critical Narrative Approach following Ricoeur is one example.

With these different approaches, the phenomenon in question varies subtly. For instance, in researching the topic of anxiety, one could explore the lifeworld of a person who is anxious; another could aim to explore the general structure (or essence) of the lived experience of “being anxious”; yet another could explore the stories people tell of their experience of feeling anxious. Underlying these different approaches, with their varying points of focus, are questions that ask to what extent the phenomenology practiced aims to describe the experience in general (i.e., as one shared by many), or is it instead focused on explicating individual experience?

Giorgi (2008a) is clear that the purpose of the method he has developed is to clarify the nature of the phenomenon being studied in a more traditional, normative, and scientific sense. He recommends recruiting at least three participants, arguing that the differences between them make it easier to discern the individual experience from the more general experience of the phenomenon. As he puts it: “At least three participants are included because a sufficient number of variations are needed in order to come up with a typical essence” (Giorgi, 2008a, p. 37). In Giorgi’s method, idiographic analysis may form part of the process of analysis but the eventual aim is to explicate – eidetically – the phenomenon as a whole regardless of the individuals concerned. Idiographic details are thus discarded or typified and generalized.

In contrast, other phenomenologists explicitly seek out idiographic meanings in an attempt to understand the individual which may or may not offer general insights. In the United Kingdom, the work of Ashworth (e.g., Ashworth, 2006; King et al., 2008) is notable here, as are the contributions of those using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (for instance, Smith & Osborn, 2003; Eatough & Smith, 2006). For my part, I have also favored an approach with a strong idiographic, narrative element when exploring how particular health conditions may be experienced by individuals. For example, I was interested in explicating how one woman experienced her particular variant of multiple sclerosis

(Finlay, 2003), and how another coped with her particular journey related to receiving a cochlear implant (Finlay & Molano-Fisher, 2008).

There is also a middle position. Halling (2008) accepts both the particular and general by arguing that idiographic research can also be general in that it may well identify general structures of experience. He suggests that phenomenologists engage three levels of analysis: firstly, they look at particular experience, such as one person's story of being disillusioned; secondly, they concern themselves with themes common to the phenomenon (for instance, the nature of disillusionment in general); thirdly, they probe philosophical and universal aspects of being human, by asking what is it about our nature and relationships that creates disillusionment. Halling counsels researchers to move back and forth between experience and abstraction – between experience and reflection – at these different levels.

Building on Halling's formulation, we could say that single cases may offer insight into individual essences (as opposed to typical or universal essences). Husserl (1913/1983) lends support to this position when he says, "Eidetic singularities are essences which necessarily have over them 'more universal' essences as their genre, but do not have under them any particularization in relation to which they would themselves be species" (p. 25). Thus, the choice of a single case may provide sufficient access to a phenomenon depending on the epistemological goals of the project, and the rigor of the eidetic approach adopted. If the research aims for generality across the field, then a wider sample representing different aspects is required.

Todres and Galvin (2005, 2006) provide an example of research which examines the phenomenon of the "caring narrative" both generically (thematically) and idiographically. Significantly, they also bridge both descriptive and interpretive elements as the italicized example below shows.

#### DESCRIPTION OR INTERPRETATION?

Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts, set down in everyday language and avoiding abstract intellectual generalizations. The researcher proceeds by reflectively analyzing these descriptions, perhaps idiographically first, then by offering a synthesized account, for example, identifying general themes about the essence of the phenomenon. Importantly, the phenomenological researcher aims to go beyond surface expressions or explicit meanings to read between the lines so as to access implicit dimensions and intuitions.<sup>3</sup> It is this process of reading between the lines which has generated uncertainty. To what extent does this approach involve going beyond what the person has expressed and enter a more speculative realm of interpretation?

While all phenomenology is descriptive in the sense of aiming to describe rather than explain, a number of scholars and researchers distinguish between descriptive phenomenology versus interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology. With descriptive (i.e., Husserl-inspired) phenomenology,<sup>4</sup> researchers aim to reveal essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon. They stay close to what is

given to them in all its richness and complexity, and restrict themselves to “making assertions which are supported by appropriate intuitive validations” (Mohanty, 1983, cited in Giorgi, 1986, p. 9).

Interpretive phenomenology, in contrast, has emerged from the work of hermeneutic philosophers, including Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, who argue for our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding. “The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation,” says Heidegger (1962, p. 37). Interpretation is not an additional procedure: It constitutes an inevitable and basic structure of our “being-in-the-world.” We experience a thing as something that has already been interpreted.

Thus, a phenomenological method which purports to be “hermeneutic” needs to be able to account explicitly for the researcher’s approach and how interpretations are managed. It needs to address how the relationship between researcher and researched – the interface between subject and object – is negotiated.

Interpretation is required, say hermeneutic phenomenologists, to bring out the ways in which meanings occur in a *context*. Firstly, any description of lived experience by participants needs to be seen in the context of that individual’s life situation. When a participant with chronic fatigue points to being frustrated with their “lack of energy,” the statement takes on more color and significance when we understand the participant is a professional athlete (Finlay, 2011). Secondly, interpretation is implicated as researchers make sense of data by drawing on their own subjective understandings and life experiences. Thirdly, interpretations are filtered through a specific historical lens and arise in a particular social-cultural field including that which relates to the specific co-creating researcher-researched relationship involved.

The division between these descriptive and interpretive or hermeneutic variants of phenomenology finds reflection in research. Giorgi (1985), a proponent of a thorough, descriptive Husserlian method, and prolific writer provided the impetus for what became known as the Duquesne approach or tradition (e.g., Wertz, 1985; Fischer, 1974). Others have embraced more explicitly hermeneutic versions, including the existential, hermeneutic approaches of the Dallas School (Churchill, 2003; Garza, 2007); the open lifeworld approach of Dahlberg et al. (2008); the dialogal approach of Halling and his colleagues (2006); the embodied enquiry approach of Todres (2007); the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in use by Smith and his colleagues (Smith, 2007; Smith et al., 2009) and the person-place-architecture phenomenology of Seamon (Seamon, 2010; Seamon & Mugerauer, 1985).

Some scholars, including myself, prefer to see description and interpretation as a continuum where specific work may be more or less interpretive.<sup>5</sup> Van Manen (1990) suggests that when description is mediated by expression, including nonverbal aspects, action, artwork, or text, a stronger element of interpretation is involved. However, drawing on Gadamer’s ideas, he distinguishes between interpretation as pointing to something (interpretation suited to phenomenological description) and interpretation as pointing out the meaning of something by

imposing an external framework (such as when offering a psychoanalytic interpretation). Ricoeur has made a similar distinction between the “hermeneutics of meaning-recollection” which, he says, aims for greater understanding of the thing to be analyzed in its own terms, where meanings are brought out and the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” which involves deeper interpretations needed to challenge surface accounts (Ricoeur, 1970).<sup>6</sup> Wertz (2005) picks up the former sense of interpretation when he argues that “‘interpretation’ may be used, and may be called for, in order to contextually grasp parts within larger wholes, as long as it remains descriptively grounded” (p. 175).

I agree with other hermeneutic phenomenologists who argue that interpretation is inevitable and necessary because phenomenology is concerned with meanings which tend to be implicit and/or hidden. Interpretation is thus centrally involved in unveiling hidden meanings (rather than being a process whereby external frames of reference are brought in and imposed). That we make a transition from actual experience to a second-hand explication indicates a level of translation and interpretation is involved.

Phenomenology is seeking after meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity’s mode of appearing ... The things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing. (Moran, 2000, p. 229)

I also agree with Langdrige when he notes that in practice there are no hard and fast boundaries between description and interpretation, as “such boundaries would be antithetical to the spirit of the phenomenological tradition that prizes individuality and creativity” (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1131). An example is offered in the italicized text below which illustrates how description and interpretation might be usefully and creatively blended. Here, Todres and Galvin offer a description and an embodied textual interpretation of the experience of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s.

Through numerous experiences of L’s memory loss, M first learned that he could not control or stop its exacerbation. Initially he found this extremely irritating and used the term ‘nauseous’ to express his visceral, angry, emotional reaction to what was, to him, the repetitiveness of her saying or doing something over and over again. His initial angry response to her forgetfulness manifested itself in an attempt to control her into being less forgetful ...

#### Embodied interpretation

To see a loved one change in this way. No ... How deep is the urge to want to stop the exacerbation of memory loss ...? It deserves at least an angry ‘No,’ a great refusal. It is also a sinking feeling, the ‘nausea’ of an awareness that relentlessly breaks through .... (Todres & Galvin, 2006, p. 53)

RESEARCHER SUBJECTIVITY

Phenomenologists all accept that researcher subjectivity is inevitably implicated in research – indeed, some would say it is precisely the realization of the intersubjective interconnectedness between researcher and researched that characterizes phenomenology. The question at stake is to what extent, and how, researcher subjectivity should be marshalled in phenomenological research. As Giorgi has firmly stated,

nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity. (1994, p. 205)

Phenomenologists also concur about the need for researchers to engage a “phenomenological attitude.” Using this attitude, the researcher strives to be open to the “other” and to attempt to see the world freshly, in a different way. The process has been described variously as disciplined naïveté, bridled dwelling, disinterested attentiveness, and/or the process of retaining an empathic wonderment in the face of the world (Finlay, 2008).

While phenomenologists agree about the need for an open attitude, there remains debate as to whether or not it is necessary to engage the reduction and, if so, what it involves.<sup>7</sup> In other words, there is a consensus that a change of attitude is required but how that change of attitude is to be affected has generated long debate. One particularly divisive issue for researchers is how much attention they should pay to bringing their own experience to the foreground and reflexively (i.e. with self-awareness) exploring their own embodied subjectivity. To what extent should the researcher’s attention be on the noetic (manner of being aware) dimension along with the noematic (object of awareness) dimension?

Some phenomenologists emphasize the reduction as a process of rendering oneself as noninfluential and neutral as possible. Here researchers aim to “bracket” their previous understandings, past knowledge, and assumptions about the phenomenon so as to focus on the phenomenon in its appearing. Novice researchers often misunderstand this process of bracketing as an initial first step where subjective bias is acknowledged as part of the project to establish the rigor and validity of the research. In fact, bracketing involves a process whereby “one simply refrains from positing altogether; one looks at the data with the attitude of relative openness” (Giorgi, 1994, p. 212). More specifically, Ashworth (1996) suggests that at least three particular areas of presupposition need to be set aside: (1) scientific theories, knowledge and explanation; (2) truth or falsity of claims being made by the participant; and (3) personal views and experiences of the researcher which would cloud descriptions of the phenomenon itself. Importantly, this “setting aside” is required throughout the research process; it is not just a first step.

Other researchers – particularly those of hermeneutic sensibility – would deny it is possible, or even desirable, to set aside or bracket researchers’ experience and understandings. They argue instead that researchers need to come to an awareness of their preexisting beliefs, which then makes it possible to examine and question

them in light of new evidence (Halling et al., 2006). Researchers need to bring a “critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions and to be conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings” (Finlay, 2008, p. 17). Researchers’ subjectivity should, therefore, be placed in the foreground so as to begin the process of separating out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched. Colaizzi (1973), for example, argues that researcher self-reflection constitutes an important step of the research process, and that preconceived biases and presuppositions need to be brought into awareness to separate them out from participants’ descriptions. Van Manen (2002) proposes a version of the reduction he calls “hermeneutic reduction”:

One needs to reflect on one’s own pre-understandings, frameworks, and biases regarding the (psychological, political, and ideological) motivation and the nature of the question, in search for genuine openness in one’s conversational relation with the phenomenon. In the reduction one needs to overcome one’s subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through.

Gadamer (1975) describes this process in terms of being open to the other while recognizing biases. According to him, knowledge in the human sciences always involves self-knowledge.

This openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it ... This kind of sensitivity involves neither “neutrality” with respect to content nor the extinction of one’s self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings. (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 268-269)

Thus, in terms of research, the researcher should shift back and forth, focusing on personal assumptions and then returning to looking at participants’ experiences in a fresh way. Wertz (2005) picks up this point when accepting the value of researchers’ subjective experience when engaging the epoché of the natural attitude and during the analyses that follow from the phenomenological reduction. He suggests this process allows researchers to:

recollect our own experiences and to empathically enter and reflect on the lived world of other persons ... as they are given to the first-person point of view. The psychologist can investigate his or her own original sphere of experience and also has an intersubjective horizon of experience that allows access to the experiences of others. (Wertz, 2005, p. 168)

Following Wertz, in a previous paper I discussed the “phenomenological psychological attitude” as a process of retaining a reductive openness to the world while both restraining and using preunderstandings (Finlay, 2008). Here, the researcher engages a dialectic movement between bracketing preunderstandings and exploiting them reflexively as a source of insight. I suggest the challenge for



phenomenological researchers is “to simultaneously embody contradictory attitudes of being ‘scientifically removed from,’ ‘open to’ and ‘aware of’ while also interacting with research participants in the midst of their own experiencing” (Finlay, 2008, p. 3). In this context, researcher reflexivity in hermeneutic phenomenology becomes a “process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings” (Finlay, 2003b, p. 108). To use Gadamer’s metaphor (1975), it involves an active evaluation of the researcher’s own experience in order to understand something of the fusion of horizons between subject and object.

Our understanding of ‘other-ness’ arises through a process of making ourselves more transparent ... New understandings emerge from a complex dialogue between knower and known, between the researcher’s pre-understandings and the current research process. (Finlay, 2011, p. 114)

One critical danger of engaging researcher reflexivity is that of falling prey to navel gazing. The researcher needs to avoid preoccupation with their own emotions and experience if the research is not to be pulled in unfortunate directions which privilege the researcher over the participant. The focus needs to stay on the research participant and the phenomenon in its appearing.<sup>8</sup>

One possible way of avoiding this trap is to embrace the intersubjective relationship between researcher and researched. “There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other,” says Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 138). As researcher and participant intermingle in “pre-analytic participation” (1968, p. 203), each touches and impacts on the other.

Where more explicitly relational approaches to phenomenological research are adopted, data is seen to emerge out of the researcher-participant relationship, and is understood to be co-created in the embodied dialogical encounter.<sup>9</sup> Researchers who support working in this way argue that what we can know about another arises from that intersubjective space between. Examples of this way of working include the research by Halling and colleagues (2006) using their dialogal method; Churchill’s (2003) research on empathy and communication with a bonobo; and my own reflexive-relational phenomenology. (Finlay, 2009; Finlay & Payman, forthcoming)

The passage reproduced in italicized text below is taken from reflexive-relational research on one woman’s (Mia’s) traumatic abortion-cum-miscarriage experience shows a layered process of how the researcher’s (Barbara’s) reflexive interpretations formed part of the eventual analysis.

“Mia integrates layers of monstrous damage, betrayal and abandonment which have replayed themselves through at least two generations. She ‘betrayed’ her baby and she ‘abandoned’ herself (psychically in her dissociation), just as her mother ‘betrayed’ and ‘abandoned’ her.”

Barbara writes reflexively of Mia’s miscarriage experience:

“And I curled up and went to sleep with my little glass with the blood in it in the bathroom.” I feel myself reacting to Mia’s words – it is almost as if I have to remind myself to breathe – somehow her words ‘take my breath away’...

I think perhaps it is as if I am being transported into the scene. My empathy for Mia is evoked in such a way that it is almost as if I am somehow ‘identifying’ with her. I have the sense that so much of her (life) story could be found within those few words ...

The girl (Mia) had to be ‘so big’ – had to ‘look after herself,’ no matter how difficult things were emotionally. Somehow ‘my little glass’ seems to symbolize so much; to carry so much of ‘the story’ – no matter how bad things got (like ‘giving birth’ to ‘her baby’ in the toilet). She still had to get it together herself to look after herself (fish ‘the baby’ out of the toilet into a glass). And somehow maybe Mia metaphorically captures the ‘distance’ of mother from child (i.e. the absence of an ‘empathic other’) in the picture of ‘her baby’ being ‘in a glass,’ ‘in the bathroom’ as she sleeps in the bedroom whilst similarly her own mother has returned to her room to sleep leaving Mia alone.” (Finlay & Payman, forthcoming)

#### SCIENCE OR ART?

All phenomenologists agree on the need to study human beings in human terms. They therefore reject positivist, natural science methods in favor of a qualitative human science approach. As a human *science*, phenomenology aims to be systematic, methodical, general, and critical (Giorgi, 1997). At the same time, phenomenology also pursues the intertwining of science with art, the imparting of a “poetic sensibility” (Ashworth, personal communication) to the scientific enterprise. In this sense, science blends with the stylistic realms of the *humanities*. Where phenomenologists disagree, is about how much weight should be accorded to scientific versus artistic elements.

While Giorgi supports the need to have a “certain openness and flexibility” (2008a, p. 42) when it comes to applying his method, he insists that criteria associated with scientific rigor need to be completely respected. Any discerned meanings that come out of the research need to be seen as based on data and achieved through a systematic process of free imaginative variation which allows a kind of internal validity check.<sup>10</sup> A rigorous application of this eidetic variation involves freely changing aspects of the phenomenon in order to distinguish essential features from particular or incidental ones.

Other phenomenologists, particularly of hermeneutic persuasion, recommend engaging modes beyond the scientific: Art, literary prose, and poetry can be utilized at all stages of research as part of data collection, analysis and writing up. Jager (2010) argues that researchers interested in the human condition need to think in terms that apply to our lived world:

An education [or phenomenology] remains only partial and incomplete as long as it concentrates exclusively on science and technology...and neglects the religious, literary, musical, thoughtful, and artful practices that build a liveable human world ...

We should remain mindful of the fact that we come face to face and heart to heart with our friends and neighbour or with a work of art only by entering into a covenant and obeying the grammar of an inhabited cosmos. (2010, pp. 80-81)

Hermeneutic phenomenologists like Jager seek methods that retain their concrete, mooded, sensed, imaginative, and embodied nature (Finlay, 2011). Todres, for example, recommends balancing textural and structural forms as part of communicating the aesthetic dimensions of human experience (Todres, 2000, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenologists in particular will often utilize metaphor in the service of finding words that carry textural, visceral dimensions of lived experience forward. A net may be cast wide across space and time, the cosmos and history, drawing on myths and parables, fable and fiction. “The words must be made to vibrate to the touch of Eros” (Blouin, 2009).

Todres opens such a space in the following passage:

In living a human life we come with the seasons, with dryness and wetness, with the rhythms of darkness and delight, of going away and coming back, of continuities and great discontinuities, with its Janus-face of both potential anguish and renewal. Framing and permeating all this is finitude; there, in the possibility of not being, and there, in the fragility of flowers, in the beauty of a sunset, and in the passing of a smile. (Todres, 2007, p. 116)

“Phenomenology, not unlike poetry,” says van Manen (1990, p. 13), is a “poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in an original singing of the world.” More recently, he suggests that,

not unlike the poet, the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations – and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect. (van Manen, 2007, p. 12)

Embracing the Utrecht School tradition, van Manen (1990, 2007) advocates the writing up of phenomenological research as including, ideally, an artistic dimension to “stir our pedagogical, psychological or professional sensibilities” (van Manen, 2007, p. 25). His point highlights how the balance of science-art considerations may shift according to the stage of research.

My belief is that researchers need to attend to the audience they are attempting to communicate with. I value research which has *both* rigor and resonance. I favor reporting research in whatever mode is going to have the most relevance and impact. Broader political, instrumental, or strategic interests cannot be ignored and it behoves phenomenologists to be reflexively aware of the issues at stake when they are presenting their research (Finlay, 2006a). Sometimes, researcher arguments are best presented by emphasizing the systematic nature of research methods applied and the scientific credentials of the research. At other times, the research may be more memorable when creatively presented. As Behar (1996 as cited in Bochner 2001) once said in reference to anthropology, research which “doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore” (p. 143). A

phenomenological text is most successful when readers feel addressed by it (van Manen, 2007):

Textual emotion, textual understanding can bring an otherwise sober-minded person (the reader but also the author) to tears and to a more deeply understood worldly engagement ... To write phenomenologically is the untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself. (van Manen, 1990, pp. 129, 132)

Similarly, I value the communicative power of research that challenges, unsettles, and reverberates with our everyday experience of life. I want to be touched by the allusive power of research which resonates and evokes the ambivalence and ambiguity of lived experience. In my view, phenomenology achieves this best when it can turn to aesthetic, literary forms turning the reading of research into an experience in itself.

An example of a hermeneutic entwining of research and literature is offered in the italicized text below. In his research, Madison (2005, 2010) explores the phenomenon of ‘existential migration’ both empirically (by interviewing twenty voluntary migrants about their experience) and conceptually (by weaving into his thesis philosophical and literary references). He suggests a number of themes including notions of escape, freedom, belongingness, homelessness and return while drawing on the Heideggerian concept of *Unheimlichkeit* (not-at-homeness). Madison’s analysis is further enriched by literary allusions including the epilogue of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*.

“As the main characters return to the Shire homelands, Frodo, in conversation with the wise wizard Gandalf, complains about his shoulder wound. Gandalf sighs: “Alas! There are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured.” Frodo continues:

I fear it may be so with mine ... There is no real going back ... I shall not be the same ... To me [returning home] feels more like falling asleep again ...

... The fact that our co-researchers seem to continue to look for ‘home’ in some form indicates that they, at least at times, seek the tranquilized ‘at-homeness’ that they are nonetheless unconvinced by .... (Madison, 2010, pp. 181, 201)

#### MODERN OR POSTMODERN PARADIGMS?

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert that the qualitative research field is “defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations” which move back and forth between “the broad, doubting postmodern sensibility and the more certain, more traditional positivist, postpositivist, and naturalistic conceptions of this project” (p. 15). Phenomenology is not exempt and the different variants of phenomenology, with their different supporters are caught in, and articulate, this debate (Finlay, 2011).

Phenomenology is sometimes linked to a modernist agenda (Moran, 2000). Some would argue that it offers an inductive methodology to explore human subjectivity systematically in terms of what individuals are *really* feeling and

experiencing. “The main function of a phenomenological description is to serve as a reliable guide to the listener’s own actual or potential experience of the phenomena” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 694). Here, phenomena are seen to be made up of essences and essential structures which can be identified and described if studied carefully and rigorously enough. In such characterizations, phenomenology can be seen as tending towards being a realist, modernist project where there is a belief in a knowable world with universal properties (at least in some senses), and the aim is to examine the “real world out there.”

Others would deny such a simplistic and static view of the phenomenological project. For one thing, attributing fixed immutable properties to human phenomenon is antithetical to the phenomenological project. Philosophers such as Hegel have stressed essence as being a dynamic, dialectical process (Mills, 2005). Also, phenomenological philosophy originally arose, at least in part, in critique of the effects of modern natural human scientific outlook on human beings.<sup>11</sup> If modernism is aligned to a worldview of an ordered universe ruled by mathematical laws which can eventually be uncovered by science (Polkinghorne, 1992), then phenomenology might be better described as postmodern. In this context, many phenomenologists favor an approach which forgoes any search of true fixed meanings, recognizing that truth is a matter of perspective. Instead, they embrace ambiguity, paradox, descriptive nuance, and a more relational unfolding of meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). They recognize the relative, intersubjective, fluid nature of knowledge. They argue that researcher and participant co-create the research; that subject-object/self-other are intertwined in intergiveness (Marion, 2002).<sup>12</sup> In such a paradigm, also, the phenomenological researcher’s epistemological authority is disrupted.

Giorgi (1994) engages elements of this debate by highlighting the epistemological rift between “naturalist” and “phenomenological” paradigms. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), he describes the naturalist paradigm as claiming multiple, constructed, holistic realities where the knower and known are seen as inseparable and interactive. By then contrasting this paradigm with the phenomenological one, he seems to aim to distance phenomenology from any whiff of relativist postmodern sensibility, while favoring a more modernist and grounded critical realist position<sup>13</sup> which admits to a reality independent of consciousness (while accepting knowledge of this can only come through study of consciousness). For him, the phenomenological paradigm involves the researcher describing “the nature of reality as taken up and posited by the research participants. This frees the researcher to discover possible reality claims that may be outside his or her a priori specifications” (1994, p. 203). At the same time, Giorgi supports the Husserlian argument which both insists the groundedness of essential structures and accepts the multiplicity and relativity of appearances,<sup>14</sup> including how these arise in the intersubjective encounter of knower and known – sentiments which seem to come close to the naturalist ideas described by Lincoln and Guba.

The argument about whether phenomenology is a modernist or postmodernist project largely rests on how one defines these concepts (Kvale, 1992). If

postmodernism is seen as a perspective which: (i) avoids privileging any one authority or method, (ii) embraces ambiguity, paradox and multiple meanings and (iii) denies that any one approach has a clear window on subjectivity/human experience, then many phenomenologists would feel comfortable with this position. In fact, it could be said that even Husserl's early work laid the foundations of the postmodern movement by highlighting varying modes of givenness and relativity of appearances (Rodemeyer, 2008). Here, relativity of understanding is stressed instead of relativism as such (Churchill, 2002).

For some, however, postmodernism involves the dissolution of the autonomous, rational subject: the "self is anesthetized" (Mills, 2005, p. 166). Postmodernism is also associated largely with the poststructural, relativist, deconstructive turn where language is seen as an unstable system of referents, thus making it impossible to adequately capture meanings of social actions or texts leading to messy, critical, reflexive, intertextual representations. Supporters of the turn to discourse argue that we cannot simply see participants' talk about their subjective feelings and experiences as a transparent medium through which to glimpse their (internal) worlds. Instead, they say, we need to focus on the performative and constitutive aspect of language which deconstructs any truths concerning a *subject's* lived experience. While fewer (if any) phenomenologists support this more extreme position, some are working to bridge both modernist and poststructural paradigms. Langdrige (2008), notably, seeks to bring together phenomenology and discursive psychology through Ricoeurian hermeneutics and the application of critical social theory.

The question at stake is: where does phenomenology fit in a postmodern world of ironically shifting boundaries and plurality of perspectives, a world in which construction and deconstruction (of both language and lived embodiment) seem twin imperatives? In the world of qualitative research, where cultural and historical contingency are highlighted, and discursive, poststructuralist, feminist/alternative approaches dominate, is there a plausible space for assertions of authentic selves and universal truths? Or is Langdrige (2008) correct in his critique that phenomenology has continued its mission with "scant regard for the issues raised by contemporary philosophers of language and ... discursive psychology" (p. 1134)? Can phenomenology embrace the 21st century future without casting regretful backward glances to earlier times?

I believe phenomenology needs to move forward and take its place beyond the modernist-postmodernist divide – the era some call post-postmodernism. The goals and language of psychology (and other disciplines) and the qualitative research field have changed over the last few decades. I think it is necessary for phenomenologists to deal with this "new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 15). I appreciate the move towards less authoritative, self-critical texts which acknowledge their partial, partisan and socially contingent character. I can enjoy forms of phenomenology where poetic, hyper-reflexive

forms offer an ironic counter-point representing our ambivalent, fragmented, multi-colored lived worlds. Ihde's (1993) notion of postphenomenology works well here:

Postphenomenology is precisely the style of phenomenology which explicitly and dare I say 'consciously' takes multidimensionality, multistability, and the multiple 'voices' of things into account – to that degree it bears a family resemblance to the postmodern. (Ihde, 2003, p. 26)

In the current climate, phenomenologists (along with other types of human science researchers) are challenged to recognize that any knowledge produced is contingent, proportional, emergent, and subject to alternative interpretations. At the very least research which is anchored in a more critical realist, modernist position deserves some healthy questioning and can expect critical challenge. The practice of returning to participants to validate researchers' analyses, for example, could be disputed as a problematic throwback to empirical, realist ideals.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, while phenomenologists may embrace more ironically playful, creative presentations and relativist understandings, they must also ensure they do not lose the speaking, embodied, experiencing subject.

I like the message offered by Gendlin (1997): "Let us enter and speak from the realm that opens where all distinctions break down" (p. 269). We need to go beyond the lines drawn by both modernism and postmodernism embracing both and neither.

#### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have mapped out some of the key areas of confusion and controversy surrounding the application of phenomenology in research. Researchers entering the phenomenological field have to decide for themselves where they stand on questions concerning what paradigm phenomenologists embrace, what their research means, and to what extent interpretation can be involved in the basic descriptive project. They need to work out whether they are seeking normative or idiographic understandings, how to manage researcher subjectivity, and whether phenomenology should be treated as a science, an art, or both.

The competing visions of how to practice phenomenology stem from different philosophical values, theoretical preferences, and methodological procedures. Different forms are demanded according to the type of phenomenon under investigation and the kind of knowledge the researcher seeks. Given a multiplicity of appearances and meanings, surely a multiplicity of methods is also appropriate. Rather than being fixed in stone, the different phenomenological approaches need to remain dynamic and undergo constant development as the field of qualitative research as a whole evolves: "The flexibility of phenomenological research and the adaptability of its methods to ever widening arcs of inquiry is one of its greatest strengths." (Garza, 2007, p. 338).

Whatever method is embraced, the value of phenomenology remains its ability to bring to life the richness and ambiguity of existence (Finlay, 2011). The magic comes when we see ordinary, taken-for-granted living as something more layered, more nuanced, more unexpected and as potentially transformative; when something is revealed of the *extra*-ordinary.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Psychological phenomenological approaches can be contrasted with social phenomenological approaches as advanced by Schütz (1967) and others. In this chapter, I restrict my discussion to psychological phenomenology and I privilege empirical forms of research where participants are involved.
- <sup>2</sup> Ashworth (2003, 2006) offers the following list as “fractions” to be employed heuristically in phenomenological lifeworld analysis including: selfhood (meanings of identity, agency, presence, voice); relationships with other people and what others mean to the person (sociality); embodiment (meanings related to one’s own sense of one’s body); temporality (meanings about past, present and future); spatiality (sense of place, space and bodily scope and possibilities); project (the central concern for the person which reveals itself in the situation); discourse (socially available ways of talking or acting that the person is drawing upon); mood-as-atmosphere (i.e., the feeling tone of the situation).
- <sup>3</sup> Technically, the term “intuition” is used in Husserlian philosophy to refer to the experienced presence of any object to consciousness, be it perceived or imagined. Intuition, in this sense, can be understood as general understanding of “fleshy actuality” (Marion, 2002) rather than the more common usage definition as a hunch which is tacit and elusive.
- <sup>4</sup> Other commentators such as von Eckartsberg (1998) call the descriptive version “empirical existential-phenomenological” and contrast it with the “hermeneutical phenomenological” approach. He suggests a number of researchers follow this tradition including Amedeo Giorgi, Adrian van Kaam, Paul Colaizzi and William Fischer.
- <sup>5</sup> Scholars contest the extent of confluence between Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophy. Some argue that the ontological dimension was present in Husserl’s work on life-world and developed with his generative phenomenology; others suggest that Heidegger nudged Husserlian ideas in a different direction. Then there are some who say that positing a “continuum” of description and interpretation may be insufficiently attentive to the radical nature of Heidegger’s ontological concerns which moved away from philosophy as a scientific discipline.
- <sup>6</sup> Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion go beyond what is given, for example, where Freudian-type analysis brings understanding to bear which is not in the analysand’s awareness. Most phenomenologists would argue that the phenomenological spirit is to stay anchored to what is given.
- <sup>7</sup> For Husserl, the reduction delivers the philosopher to the “groping entrance into this unknown realm of subjective phenomena” (1936/1970, p. 161). A number of steps or procedures are involved including: 1) the *epoché* of the natural sciences; 2) the *epoché* of the natural attitude; 3) the transcendental reduction; and 4) eidetic reduction. Each of these results in something being put in “brackets” and in a “reduction” of the field which commands one’s special focus of attention. The problem remains: how to convert this philosophical method into a practical and empirical one?
- <sup>8</sup> Giorgi (1994) offers a more specific argument against the dangers of researchers’ overemphasising their own self-awareness and attention to the research relationship – at least in the context of



practising a phenomenological method true to Husserl's project. Giorgi would argue the need to keep clear the intentional objects to which the researcher's acts are directed. He asserts that work like Moustakas' (1990) use of "self-dialogue" in his heuristic research approach is not consistent with the phenomenological project as the goal appears to be a researcher's own growth and self-development rather than the explication of a phenomenon. (For this reason, while some phenomenologists might include "heuristic research" as part of the broader field of phenomenological inquiry, others would not.)

- <sup>9</sup> This kind of approach might be criticized for mixing up the focus of the inquiry (i.e., the phenomenon being investigated moves onto the relationship) and for collapsing therapeutic and research interests (Giorgi, 2008b).
- <sup>10</sup> Halling (2008) suggests a slightly different version of this free imaginative variation which he calls "empirical variation." Here, emphasis is placed on working collaboratively with others where the group members dialogue about their various perspectives allowing the phenomenon to show itself in new ways. In adopting such an approach, Halling is engaged in a distinctly scientific project. However, he also acknowledges something of the art within the process: "The process is an intermingling of receptivity and creativity, of discovering truth and creating truth" (Halling, 2008, p. 168).
- <sup>11</sup> For example, Husserl has argued against rationalism promoting naïve objectivism and naturalizing the spirit; Heidegger's work is conceived as antimodernism; and Gadamer argues that not all truth is encapsulated in the scientific method.
- <sup>12</sup> In the relational-centred approach developed by Ken Evans and myself (Finlay & Evans, 2009), for example, data is seen to emerge out of the researcher-coresearcher relationship, co-created in the embodied dialogical encounter. There is an ambiguity and unpredictability that arises in that intersubjective opening between, where anything can appear. Central to this approach is the need to develop awareness of intersubjective research dynamics and parallel processes (where unconscious processes are being re-enacted) through reflexivity.
- <sup>13</sup> In between the two poles of realism and relativism is a position variously called "critical realist," "subtle realist" or "new realist." Here researchers tend to be pragmatic. They consider meanings to be fluid while accepting that participants' stories of having an illness reflect something of their subjective perceptions of their experience (if not their actual experience) (Finlay, 2006b).
- <sup>14</sup> There are, as Husserl notes in *Ideas I*, varying modes of givenness. How the givenness is unfurled depends on the extent of the reduction performed – the more reduction, the more givenness (Marion, 2002). Put in other words, the givenness of lived experience can only be captured (in parts and in different appearances) through the reduction.
- <sup>15</sup> Colaizzi (1978) recommends participant verification as a final stage of his seven-step analysis. New data emerging from participants' feedback "must be worked into the final product" (1978, p. 62). Giorgi (2008b), on the other hand, argues that such member checking is both misplaced and not trustworthy, as participants in their natural attitude, cannot confirm the meaning of their experiences; nor do they have the relevant phenomenological skills or disciplinary attitude necessary to adequately judge the analysis.

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