Phenomenological Research Methods for Counseling Psychology

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This article familiarizes counseling psychologists with qualitative research methods in psychology developed in the tradition of European phenomenology. A brief history includes some of Edmund Husserl's basic methods and concepts, the adoption of existential-phenomenology among psychologists, and the development and formalization of qualitative research procedures in North America. The choice points and alternatives in phenomenological research in psychology are delineated. The approach is illustrated by a study of a recovery program for persons repeatedly hospitalized for chronic mental illness. Phenomenological research is compared with other qualitative methods, and some of its benefits for counseling psychology are identified.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method originally developed by the philosopher Edmund Husserl. In the tradition of Giambattista Vico, Franz Brentano, and William Dilthey, Husserl broadened the concepts and methods of modern science to include the study of consciousness, profoundly influencing philosophy, other humanities, and the social sciences throughout the 20th century. Husserl formulated scientific methods that are uniquely fashioned to assist psychological researchers in the investigation of human experience and behavior.

The Phenomenological Movement and Mental Health Psychology

Throughout his career, Husserl devoted much attention to psychology. The phenomenological movement, as it evolved through the 20th century, continued to make substantive contributions to psychology in the work of Karl Jaspers, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schutz, Gaston Bachelard, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul Ricoeur (Spiegelberg, 1982). Although their works provided groundbreaking knowledge in such basic areas of psychology as perception, imagination, emotions, behavior, language, and social processes, the greatest impact on psychology has occurred in the area of mental health (Spiegelberg, 1972). This work was a protest against dehumanization in psychology and offered original research and theory that faithfully reflects the distinctive characteristics of human behavior and first-person experience.

Halling and Nill's (1995) excellent brief history of phenomenology in psychiatry and psychotherapy highlights the multiple sources and influences that undergird, compliment, and permeate the field's traditional and mainstream approaches. In Europe,

Ludwig Binswanger, Eugene Minkowski, Erwin Straus, Medard Boss, F.J.J. Buytendijk, Viktor von Gebsattel, Igor Caruso, Henri Ey, H.C. Rümke, J.H. van den Berg, Viktor Frankl, and R.D. Laing assumed leadership roles and produced an impressive volume and breadth of scholarship across diverse topics in clinical psychology. Some themes unifying these works include the emphasis on "experience, process, freedom, the importance of the client-therapist relationship, and viewing the client's problems from his or her perspective" (Halling & Nill, 1995, p. 28).

This work began to come to the attention of American psychologists in the 1930s through Robert McLeod and later Gordon Allport as well as through European Americans Andreas Angyl, Adrian Van Kaam, and Henri Ellenberger as well as more recent immigrants Kurt Kaffka, Wolfgang Kohler, Paul Tillich, and Erwin Straus. Halling and Nill (1995) cited Martin Buber's participation in the William Alanson White Memorial Lectures in 1957 and the publication of *Existence* (May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958), a collection of previously untranslated papers, including those of many of the aforementioned authors, as the two pivotal events that unexpectedly created an upsurge of psychotherapists' interest in the European existential-phenomenological movement. In 1962, Duquesne University began its doctoral program in existential-phenomenological psychology for the training of counseling and clinical psychologists. American-born mental health scholars and practitioners, such as James Bugental, Eugene Gendlin, and Irving Yalom, have made original contributions to a broadening American movement that continues today.

Some Basic Methods and Concepts of Phenomenology

This section briefly details the methods that characterize phenomenological research developed by Husserl and some basic concepts concerning human psychological life that the movement has contributed for use by clinical and counseling psychologists.

The Epochés and the Psychological Phenomenological Attitude

Husserl's phenomenology uses the familiar methodological principle that scientific knowledge begins with a fresh and unbiased description of its subject matter. Husserl (1913/1962) used

two procedures called *epochés*, which are *abstentions* from influences that could short-circuit or bias description. The first is the "epoché of the natural sciences" (Husserl, 1939/1954, p. 135) and requires that the researcher abstain from incorporating ("brackets") natural scientific theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations of the subject matter. This epoché involves setting aside prior scientific assumptions in order to gain access, in Husserl's famous phrase, "to the things themselves (*Sachen selbst*)!" This epoché delivers the investigator to manifestations of the subject matter as it exists prior to and independent of scientific knowledge. This return to phenomena as they are lived, in contrast to beginning with scientific preconceptions, is a methodological procedure and does not imply that such knowledge is false; it simply suspends received science, puts it out of play, and makes no use of it for the sake of fresh research access to the matters to be investigated.

This first epoché delivers the investigator to the "natural attitude" in the prescientific life-world (*lebenswelt*), that is, to the unreflective apprehension of the world as it is lived, precisely as it is encountered in everyday affairs. In the natural attitude, we live straightforwardly toward the world, whose existence we assume. For the most part, we do not notice the conscious and experiential processes through which the world is objectively given, do not reflect on its meanings, and do not attend to the subjective performances that constitute the world's meanings. The natural attitude is appropriate for physical scientific research, which does not investigate meaning or subjectivity; however, sciences that seek knowledge of human experience cannot remain naive about consciousness. They require a transformation of attitude, a new epoché, the *epoché of the natural attitude* (Husserl, 1939/1954, pp. 148–150).

This second epoché is a methodological abstention used to suspend or put out of play our "naive" belief in the existence of what presents itself in the life-world in order to focus instead on its subjective manners of appearance and givenness—the lived-through meanings and the subjective performances that subtend human situations. Again, this is a purely methodological operation; it does not imply that what presents itself in human life does not exist. The existence and validity of human situations are "bracketed" only in order to allow the shift from naive, straightforward encounters to a *reflection on how* the life-world presents itself, that is, to its constitutive meanings and subjective performances (e.g., perceptual syntheses, kinestheses, emotions, beliefs, expectations, and intersubjective communalizations).

This second epoché and the analyses that follow from it allow us to recollect our own experiences and to empathically enter and reflect on the lived world of other persons in order to apprehend the meanings of the world 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 (Husserl, 1939/1954, p. 254). Husserl refers to the focus on experience (apart from issues concerning the existence of what is experienced) as *the phenomenological psychological reduction* (Husserl, 1939/1954, p. 236) because it "reduces" the investigative field to the psychological. This presence of the psychological allows the investigator to reflectively describe the meanings and psychological performances of lived-through situations. In Husserl's view, the scientific study of subjectivity requires a more radical epoché beyond the scope of this article—the transcendental phenomenological reduction, which is necessary to philosophically ground and inform the science of psychology (Husserl, 1954, p. 260).

Intuition of Essences (The Eidetic Reduction)

Husserl established another important but much misunderstood scientific procedure, one that is fundamental to qualitative research because it enables the researcher to grasp "what" something is: the *intuition of essence* or the *eidetic reduction*. This method is neither inductive nor deductive; it descriptively delineates the invariant characteristic(s) and clarifies the meaning and structure/organization of a subject matter. Husserl (1913/1962) developed and formalized a special procedure that provides rigor in knowing essences called *free imaginative variation*. One starts with a concrete example of the phenomenon of which one wishes to grasp the essence and imaginatively varies it in every possible way in order to distinguish essential features from those that are accidental or incidental. This is the method par excellence for the acquisition of qualitative knowledge, for it informs us of *what something essentially is*. Eidetic seeing or insight provides evidence of those features that must be present in any and all possible instances of a subject matter.

According to Husserl, there are different kinds of essences, such as the exact, formal essences of mathematics (e.g., "three," "triangle") and material essences (e.g., "rock," "lentil"), that require inexact, morphological concepts to delineate them. The life sciences study vital phenomena that have their own kind of essential being, and psychology must consider the essential characteristics of its subject matter—"the body," "behavior," "perception," "stress," "schizophrenia," or "mental life"—in order to ensure that its proper psychological features are reflected in research findings and knowledge. This procedure is important in the phenomenological critique and overcoming of reductionism. For instance, it has shown that physicalistic concepts distort the essence of the body, which is not merely an object in the physical world but an *agent of action*, and the essence of behavior, which is not merely muscular movement but involves a *meaningful goal structure*. Eidetic science helps set the proper epistemological and conceptual foundations for the empirical sciences. Through eidetic analyses, phenomenological philosophy has offered "regional ontologies" that inform us of the essential kinds of being that are investigated in empirical sciences, such as physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, and theology. A rigorously scientific empirical psychology requires the foundation of eidetic psychology if its investigations are to respect the essential qualities of its subject matter.

Intentionality and Intentional Analysis

In bracketing natural science knowledge and carrying out descriptions of such psychological processes as perceiving, thinking, imagining, speaking, and feeling in an effort to gain insight into their essence(s), Husserl reaffirmed and radically revised Brentano's broadly applicable concept of intentionality, that is, that consciousness is *consciousness of something* (independent of consciousness itself). I see a blackbird, think two and two is four, hallucinate a pink elephant, speak my mother's name, open a door,

or resent an insult. In these examples, my mental life involves a transcendence, that is, a relation to something (an "object") beyond itself that *means something* to me. The procedure developed by Husserl (1939/1954, 1913/1962), called *intentional analysis*, is relevant to psychology because it provides knowledge of human situations, their meaning, and the processes that generate those meanings. Intentional analysis begins with a situation just as it has been experienced—with all its various meanings—and reflectively explicates the experiential processes through which the situation is lived.

The Life-World (Lebenswelt)

Phenomenology's recognition of the fundamental nature of intentionality makes its analyses of mental life radically contextual and ecological. "The lived world" is a central theme. The intentionality of human mental life is not an isolated ray, illuminating a single object; intentionality includes its relational context as it illuminates a "world." The life-world manifests itself as a structural whole that is socially shared and yet apprehended by individuals through their own perspectives. *Spatial* surroundings span through and beyond my immediate situation in an order of mutual references, including equipment, cultural objects, natural objects, aesthetics, other people, and cultural institutions. Whereas human situations are at every moment given meanings through a living present, they unfold within a larger *temporal* process that includes both the collective and individual person's determinate past and yet-to-be-determined future. Every human situation includes our bodies not only as things in the world but also as subjective ways of relating to our surroundings. The human body plays a key role in the constitution of the world and the establishment of the meaning of our surroundings through its sensory-perceptive openness and behavioral exploration. As *body-subjects*, we activate historically sedimented skills and habits in situations whose meanings (e.g., "too hot," "useful," "comfortable," "nearly within reach") are constituted by our bodily ways of being toward them. The life-world as a whole—every situation in it and every moment of our psychological lives—entails various forms of *sociality* as part of its essential structure. Language also pervades the meanings of our surroundings and forms part of what makes the life-world more a collective place than the product of an individual's isolated subjectivity. Collective forms of subjectivity at various levels—for example, the ethnic, national, cultural, and religious—have historically shaped and inextricably pervade the life-world and must therefore be acknowledged by any psychology that seeks full knowledge of the human being. And yet the individual person experiences this world in a way that is uniquely relevant and meaningful to the self in the course of their individual histories that begin with their birth and end with their death, making the life-world a place meaningfully apprehended from "one's own" perspective (*Eigenwelt*). A person must not be reduced to his or her facticity or actuality because, as long as the person is alive, he or she holds greater potential for activities and meaningful relations to the world, which means that the future remains an indeterminate ground of possibilities for becoming.

Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology

Apart from research in which norms are borrowed from the physical sciences—research in which hypothetical deductive ex-

planations have been tested by means of quantitative analysis—psychologists of many stripes have used qualitative methods designed to investigate meaning and subjectivity. However, these works, including Sigmund Freud's (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams* and William James's (1902/1982) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, lacked a supporting conceptualization of science, formal specification of methods, and explicit methodological norms. The Social Science Research Council began an initiative in the 1930s to study such qualitative methods that were being used across the social sciences. Sponsored by the Council, Gordon Allport (1942) cited extensive use of qualitative methods in psychology, acknowledged their low status but high scientific value, compellingly challenged virtually every criticism of these methods, and called for a formal account that would establish rigorous methodological norms for their use. Only in the 1970s did American psychology begin to benefit from the formalization and deliberate development of such methods and methodologies.

Formalization of Phenomenological Methods

The advances made in counseling and clinical psychology within the phenomenological movement were similar to those in psychoanalysis in that, although qualitative research was conducted, there was almost no formal specification of its procedures or methodological norms. Research based on scholarly reading and informal analyses of clinical experience was presented, but systematic empirical research using publicly available data collected primarily for research purposes was extremely rare. One notable exception was Laing and Esterson's (1963) interview-based study of the relationship of schizophrenic symptoms to the family, but even this study left implicit the analytic procedures through which they reached their conclusions regarding the social intelligibility of symptoms. The emergence of rigorously specified and deliberately implemented research procedures and of attempts to make the research process transparent in publications did not occur until the 1960s and 1970s.

Cloonan (1995) provided a history of phenomenological research in American psychology and credited Amedeo Giorgi with leadership. Giorgi, who is not a clinical psychologist but received his doctorate degree from Fordham University in experimental psychology (psychophysics), joined the graduate program at Duquesne University in existential-phenomenological psychology that had been founded by Van Kaam, in 1962. His primary task, given his background in rigorous empirical research, was to develop a phenomenological research method in which general psychology students as well as those researching clinical and counseling topics could be trained. Influenced by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Giorgi worked through the 1960s to develop such a method and, in 1970, offered the first course in the Duquesne program in phenomenological research methods for psychology. Qualitative research training in the program quickly expanded into a multisemester sequence, required of all doctoral students, that culminated in an "Integration Seminar" taught by Giorgi and attended by other dissertation advisors in which students formulated their dissertation research methods. In 1970, Giorgi founded and edited the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, the first psychology journal with the explicit intent of providing a forum for qualitative research in psychology.

The emergence of phenomenological research was led by Giorgi and the Duquesne Circle, including William Fischer, Rolf Von Eckartsberg, Anthony Barton, Constance Fischer, Edward Murray, Frank Buckley, Charles Maes, and Paul Richer. From 1970 to the present, Giorgi developed varied methods, described procedures used in various projects, refined his understanding of their phenomenological core, and wrote on such general methodological issues as reliability and validity. This focus on reflectively and deliberately developing and accounting for research methods has given rise to an impressive production of research projects. In the past 40 years, Duquesne doctoral students trained in phenomenological research methods have completed over 250 psychological dissertations, most on topics relevant to counseling psychology (Smith, 2002). These topics include, for instance, expectations prior to psychotherapy, disclosing one's problem to an intake physician, insight in psychotherapy, use of diazepam to transform anxiety, transformative imagining in systematic desensitization, resolution of adolescent suicide ideation, disclosing one's HIV positive/AIDS diagnosis, and caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's disease. Other graduate programs have trained students in the use of phenomenological methods, and the publication of a considerable body of empirical research has appeared in the psychological literature (e.g., Giorgi, Barton, & Maes, 1983; Giorgi, Fischer, & Murray, 1975; Giorgi, Fischer, & von Eckartsberg, 1971; Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979; Valle & Halling, 1988).

Phenomenological research, largely influenced by this work at Duquesne, has led the qualitative research movement in psychology. Rennie, Watson, and Monteiro (2002) conducted a study of the rise of qualitative research in the 20th century that included a literature search using terms presently associated with the field. Prior to 1980, *phenomenological* (and *existential phenomenological*) *psychology* were the only terms that yielded hits in psychology journals—a total of 126 hits in contrast to 9 for *qualitative research*, *grounded theory*, and *discourse analysis* combined across the social sciences. Of journals publishing articles involving the search terms, the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, consistent over the last three decades, included by far the most (195), with the next closest journals being the *Journal of Pragmatics* (a Language and Communications journal with 54 discourse analysis articles) and *Canadian Psychology* (20). Of Rennie et al.'s key terms, *phenomenological psychology* "overwhelmingly appeared in psychology journals and dissertations rather than coming from other fields (350 versus 9)" and came mainly from North America (269 vs. 92) (Rennie et al., 2002, pp. 185–186).

A Common Core Through Variations

Phenomenological methods are scientific by virtue of being methodical, systematic, critical, general, and potentially intersubjective. Like all good science, they require critical thinking, creativity, and reflective decision making that give rise to many procedural variations and innovations. Many different types of research participants, situations, forms of expression/description, analytic procedures, and ways of presenting findings have been used. Giorgi (1989b) has indicated several core phenomenological characteristics that hold across the variations of these psychological research methods: This research is descriptive, uses the phenomenological reductions, investigates the intentional relationship between persons and situations, and provides knowledge of psy-

chological essences (that is, the structures of meaning immanent in human experience) through imaginative variation. Of the process of analyzing descriptions provided by research participants, Giorgi (1975, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003), asserts that four steps are involved: (a) reading the entire description in order to grasp the sense of the whole; (b) rereading the description and demarcating spontaneous shifts in meaning, or "meaning units," in the text with a psychologically sensitive interest in the phenomenon under investigation; (c) reflecting on each and every meaning unit in order to discern what it reveals about the phenomenon under investigation or what research-relevant psychological insight can be gained from it; and (d) synthesizing these reflections and insights into a consistent statement that expresses the psychological structure of the experience. Every descriptive statement by research participants is accounted for, and its analytic treatment is available for public scrutiny.

In an effort to document the diverse procedures used in phenomenological research that had been conducted at Duquesne in 1978, I reviewed all completed dissertations and attempted to specify the procedures from start to finish of the research project. I was especially interested in the "operative intentionality" of researchers in Giorgi's third step, that of psychological reflection. I supplemented this with an effort to reflectively track my own operative procedures of psychological reflection in a research project on "being criminally victimized." These two efforts led to a more explicit specification of the phenomenological-analytic operations involved in psychological research (Wertz, 1983a, 1985). A subsequent review of informally conducted psychological research in the broad phenomenological tradition found the same procedures to be implicitly operative throughout the literature prior to 1970 (Wertz, 1983b). These same basic constituents of *descriptive psychological reflection* have been found to be used by Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts (Wertz, 1987b, 1993), leading to the conclusion that the method Giorgi has begun to specify characterizes any and every genuinely psychological qualitative research method. The role of the phenomenological approach to psychology has merely been to clarify its nature and provide an adequate justification. This is to be expected if the phenomenological research method is what it intends to be, a method that is shaped according to the intrinsic demands "of the things themselves"—the psychological lives of human beings.

Typical Variations and Options in Research Methods

Identifying the Phenomenon and the Research Problem

The research project begins with the identification of a psychological topic. This identification involves locating and delineating its presence in the life-world. Counseling phenomena may include problems or situations that lead clients to counseling: professional counseling practices, the counseling process, relational issues between counselor and client, and outcomes of counseling. In defining the research problems and goals, the researcher reviews established knowledge and critically identifies its limits—some gap between knowledge and reality that requires qualitative knowledge, that is, an understanding of what occurs. Research is then designed to solve the problem, fill in the gap, and overcome the flaw. All the choices the researcher makes throughout the project are ideally determined after critically and reflectively weighing the

relative merits of the alternatives for making our knowledge a better description of reality.

Data Constitution

Participants. One of the researcher's first choices involves the identification and selection of human beings whose lives involve a revelatory relationship with the subject matter under investigation. Phenomenological researchers have solicited the participation of (a) the researcher himself or herself, (b) laypersons, (c) expert—professional or literary—witnesses, or (d) a system or group of related persons. The basis of this decision is the judgment of whose experience most fully and authentically manifests or makes accessible what the researcher is interested in. In a study on "racism-related stress," participants may be recruited from among working racial minorities, but the researcher may also identify a novel that would offer revelatory descriptions of this phenomenon. It is also possible that nonminority coworkers would contribute relevant descriptions of the expressive responses of racially stressed workers. If the gap in the literature or analyses of the experiences of work-stressed minorities indicates the need to better understand the "stressors," that is, persons who induce stress, then they might well be recruited as participants.

The question of "how many participants?" can only be answered properly by considering the nature of the research problem and the potential yield of findings. If in-depth knowledge of one individual's experience will fulfill the goal(s) of the research, 1 participant may be sufficient. For instance, if a researcher seeks to know in depth the psychological process through which a professional develops multicultural counseling competence, the choice of one master counselor who is recognized as a superlative model in this area may provide sufficient access to the phenomenon to fulfill important research aims. However, knowledge of differences in the field may suggest the need for representatives of other approaches if the research aims for generality across the field. It is not always possible to determine the required number of participants before conducting the research and carrying out analyses. Particularly when the research requires knowledge that addresses a broad range of the topic's manifestations, the researcher may deliberately continue recruiting different additional participants until "saturation," that is, redundancy of findings that fulfill the research goals, is achieved. The nature and number of participants cannot be mechanically determined beforehand or by formula. Rather, deliberation and critical reflection considering the research problem, the life-world position of the participant(s), the quality of the data, and the value of emergent findings with regard to research goals are required in a continuing assessment of adequacy. Participant selection always limits the results, and reflective accounting of such limits is an important part of the research process.

Situation(s). The situations studied further limit the knowledge achieved by research. The researcher may select the situation(s) to be described as one might in investigating a particular short-term vocational counseling protocol that is offered at several educational sites. The researcher may also designate a "type" of experience and invite the participant to choose the particular situation(s), as when an investigator asks a client to describe a situation in which he or she kept a secret from his or her counselor. Situations researched can be naturally occurring, as when Mexican American students are asked to describe a situation at college in which they "became very distressed." The situation can also be constructed specifically for the research, as might occur if one solicited participants to learn a new relaxation intervention in the research situation and provide descriptions of the learning process as they master the activity.

Procedures of description. Descriptions are usually verbal, but some researchers have used other expressive forms such as drawings (Wertz, 1987a). Descriptions may be generated from the point of view of the "self," the "other," or both. Phenomenology does not privilege first-person description and acknowledges that others have (in some cases superior) access to psychological phenomena. For instance, counselors may provide revelatory descriptions of clients who do not return after the first visit by describing their expressive behavior during the initial consultation. The phenomenon of "denial of homophobia" may be fruitfully described by a person who observes another person's conduct. However, many studies, such as one on the expectations of counseling prior to the first visit, require first-person description.

Typically, descriptions use ordinary language and may be provided verbally or in writing by individuals through dialog/interview or in group discussion. In each case, the researcher gives the participant(s) a descriptive task with instructions that specify a focus and yet remain open to the particular content that the participant offers. Interviews are useful when the phenomenon of interest is complex in structure, extensive in scope, and/or subtle in features that participants are not likely to offer spontaneously in response to questions or instructions at the outset. Interviews typically begin with open-ended instructions such as "Please describe a situation in which you had an interaction with another person who was unsupportive of your sexual orientation." The researcher may have an interview schedule with a number of follow-up issues or questions that would be brought into the interview at appropriate moments or in order to complete the description if they were not spontaneously addressed, such as Did that unsupportive interaction change the other person in any way after the interaction occurred?

Descriptions of actual life experiences can be provided simultaneously or retrospectively. Researchers have sometimes used literary, even fictional, texts or asked participants to provide imaginative descriptions, which can be useful, provided that they are not ideologically derived and truly describe in detail a specific instance of the subject matter. The most outstanding quality of data sought by the phenomenological researcher is concreteness, that the descriptions reflect the details of lived situations rather than hypotheses or opinions about, explanations of, interpretations of, inferences, or generalizations regarding the phenomenon. If an interview participant starts out saying, "In my view, sexual risk taking is primarily due to the failure of parental responsibility," the researcher may gently ask the participant to "Describe an actual situation in which you did something risky in a sexual encounter, starting beforehand and walking through the experience from its beginning through what happened afterward." The data collected should provide the researcher access to concretely described psychological life beyond any previous knowledge or preconceptions. Descriptions are almost always surprising in their concrete details. These descriptions of situations provide data that transcend even what the participants themselves think or know about the topic.

Analysis of the Data

Preparatory operations.   In order to prepare the data for analysis, the phenomenological researcher may listen to and transcribe verbal descriptions and interviews. Once in written form, data are openly read first without the research focus in mind in order to grasp the participant's expression and meaning in the broadest context. Because the description may be lengthy and complex, particularly when it involves time and multiple features and processes, the researcher differentiates parts of the description, identifying "meaning units" that organize data for later analysis of parts. For instance, in a description of career counseling, the researcher may differentiate the following series of meaning units: (a) the participant's surprise at a suggestion (based on an inventory) that she has interest in business, (b) a spontaneous series of images of unattractive work situations, (c) voicing doubt to the counselor about the rightness of the inventory, (d) the counselor asking the client to elaborate on a series of positive responses to business-related inventory items, and so on.

In preparing the data, researchers may eliminate redundancy, for instance, in interview data, if it does not appear to contribute to the meaning of the description (sometimes redundancy is meaningful). Other incidental and irrelevant expressions found in the description may be eliminated. Some phenomenological researchers name themes found in the descriptions in order to better organize lengthy and complex material. In phenomenological research, the identification of themes and any "coding" or categorization of data is merely preparatory in that it organizes data conveniently for a more in-depth, structural, eidetic analysis that follows. Finally, descriptive material may be reordered so as to be maximally useful for the later analysis. Researchers often use a narrative that temporally reflects the original experience, but material may be ordered by themes if that better suits the research. These operations prepare an organized written description of situation(s) in the first-person language of the participant(s). This protocol has been called a "situated description" or an "individual phenomenal description," for instance, "The day I was sexually harassed by my mentor."

Attitude.   Phenomenological research requires an attitude of wonder that is highly empathic. The researcher strives to leave his or her own world behind and to enter fully, through the written description, into the situations of the participants. The researcher empathically joins with participants ("coperforms" participants' involvement) in their lived situation(s). This sharing of the experience is the basis for later reflection on meanings and experiential processes. This attitude involves an extreme form of care that savors the situations described in a slow, meditative way and attends to, even magnifies, all the details. This attitude is free of value judgments from an external frame of reference and instead focuses on the meaning of the situation purely as it is given in the participant's experience. This is the implementation of the phenomenological epoché. The researcher not only attends to what is experienced but also reflects on the how—the psychological processes: bodily, perceptual, emotional, imaginative, linguistic, social, behavioral, and so on that are involved in its constitution and in this way carries out an intentional analysis using the phenomenological psychological reduction.

Analyzing individual descriptions.   Phenomenological analysis begins by focusing on particular situations prior to attempting

general knowledge. Idiographic analysis involves a number of reflective operations. The contours of the phenomenon of interest are distinguished from its baseline—the lived experience prior to the subject matter of interest. For instance, the researcher may note in a protocol describing "perfectionism," the point at which the participant begins becoming perfectionistic while working on a term paper, before which the work was not perfectionistic. This enables the researcher to grasp what the matter being investigated is, distinct from the rest of the participant's experience in which it is embedded. The researcher then goes on to distinguish its parts or constituents as preparation for discovering how the various moments interrelate in their overall organization. For instance, in the protocol on perfectionism, the participant's imagination of the teacher citing numerous faults may be one part of the description that is distinct from the student's repetitive use of a grammar check tool. The researcher reflects on the relevance of each part of the described situation and of the psychological process involved, that is, what they freshly reveal for our knowledge about the phenomenon of interest. The phenomenological researcher does not remain content to grasp the obvious or explicit meanings but reads between the lines and deeply interrogates in order to gain access to implicit dimensions of the experience-situation complex. For instance, a researcher may grasp in a participant's thought of suicide not only a challenge to an abandoning other but also an implicit trust that the other will show love through rescue. The phenomenological researcher continually focuses on relations between different parts of the situation and the psychological processes that subtend it while attempting to gain explicit knowledge of how each constituent contributes to the organization of the experience as a whole. The researcher continually moves from part to part and from part to whole in order to grasp the structural organization and interdependence of parts that make up the lived experience. A distinctively phenomenological characteristic of analysis is that the researcher attempts to grasp the essence of the individual's life experience through imaginative variation.

Finally, in an advanced stage of the analysis, the researcher may deliberately abandon the epoché and interrogate the situation in view of previously posited concepts and theories. Preconceptions may be used as heuristic guides for knowledge. If they are phenomenologically useful, then they may reveal aspects of the material that were or were not yet previously evident. Analytically tracking a heuristically adopted theory's relation to the descriptive manifestation of the phenomenon can be instructive for a later discussion of the theory.

The researcher may synthesize his or her insights concerning the essence of this particular instance of the topic with statements in the voice and language of the psychologist. This amounts to a single case study in which an idiographic psychological structure of the phenomenon is described. For instance, such descriptions may be entitled "An Individual Psychological Structure of Being Sexually Harassed by a Mentor" or "An Idiographic Structure of Suicide Ideation" (see Wertz, 1983a, 1985, for an individual analysis of Marlene's [a research participant] experience of being criminally victimized).

Grasping general structures.   Researchers are usually interested in general knowledge of a topic, and the research problem or goals require movement beyond particular individual instances. Fortunately, this is possible because what is generally qualitatively true is also necessarily evident in each individual instance encoun-

tered and analyzed in the study. Nevertheless, general meanings and psychological structures may be difficult to identify. A series of interdependent procedures establish general qualitative knowledge. One is to look in the individual empirical analyses for what seem to be general characteristics and features. Such judgments remain relatively inconclusive inasmuch as individual analysis does not directly present evidence of generality, but a tentative effort to identify apparent or "possible/probable" generality may be used as a starting point for the process of directly examining evidence that will allow the researcher to draw grounded conclusions.

The second procedure, which brings to bear a broader scope of empirical evidence of generality, is to look at other cases for a feature that was identified as potentially general in the first case in order to "verify" the broader applicability of the insight or knowledge. Anything that can be "verified" in more than one instance is to some extent "general." Questions regarding how general may carry us beyond qualitative research into the quantitative realm, but generality in qualitative knowledge can be extended in other ways. Two or many more individual cases that were analyzed individually can be compared, and commonalities can be identified and delineated. Phenomenological researchers typically perform this operation with all of the instances collected empirically in order to identify common meanings, general constituents, themes, psychological processes, and organizational features. This operation often yields the finding that some knowledge statements are evident in more than one case and are therefore general but are not true of all cases. For instance, although the "dream of rescue" may be found in some instances of suicide ideation, others may hold no such immanent meaning and some may instead contain the implicit teleology of an end to worldly suffering in detached, solitary peace. This gives rise to insights into typical variations in the subject matter or *knowledge of types*.

Typologies or knowledge of limited generalities are quite valuable in psychology because what is universal is often trivial and of little use; variations (differences) that are not completely idiosyncratic, though not universally true, are usually the most significant. Procedures using systematically collected and freshly generated data may be supplemented by less formal but invaluable use of instances generated from the researchers' personal memory. In addition, nonfictional publications and media (including professional literature offering genuinely concrete descriptions), personal imaginative production, and fictional publication and media may be used to provide broader ranging and more diverse data sources for reflection on levels of generality. These can be essential in the researcher's ability to extend knowledge from the idiosyncratic, through the typical, to the highly general, and finally, even the universal. While remembering, imagining, and collecting new instances of already discovered findings, the researcher remains on the lookout for counterinstances of the phenomenon that throw into question and require modification of the general knowledge as it takes shape.

One distinctively phenomenological method is imaginative free variation, used for the purpose of grasping general essences at various levels—for instance, the essences of particular context bound "types." Essential knowledge in psychology does not imply freedom from context, abstraction, or universality; it qualitatively characterizes the context-bound structures of phenomena. Contextual dependency of psychological structure is phenomenologically demonstrated by the imaginal exercise of removing that context and discovering the collapse of meaningful coherence. Through imaginative variation, one determines what must be the case of all (imaginable) instances for them to be considered members of the typical category of phenomena. Giorgi (1982, pp. 332–338) clarified the point that essential generality in psychology tends not to be universal laws but what he calls "empirical generality," "contingent generality," or "context-bound generality."

Presentation

Presentations of good phenomenological research in psychology require more space than does quantitative research, and this is gladly provided by journals committed to publishing such material. Beyond the framing of the research problem in light of previous knowledge, reports require an account of methods used, including selection of participants, choice of situations researched, procedures of data collection, and methods used in organizing and analyzing the data. The validity of these procedures is established by demonstrating their fidelity to the phenomenon under investigation in its prescientific life-worldly presence. Because this research emphasizes the importance of access "to the things themselves" and honors the most concrete individual instances with the bedrock level of evidence they require, research reports may contain raw data—verbatim descriptions provided by participants or interviews—either in the body of the text or as an appendix. It is also common practice to include material that reflects the researcher's organization of the data and expresses lived experience quite directly, such as succinct first-person narratives distilled from long interview transcripts. Research reports may also contain sample analyses that illustrate and account for procedures. These provide readers with an opportunity to follow and judge the soundness and evidentiary basis of the conclusions. Findings may be presented in various forms ranging from an abstract to a series of nutshell propositions in bullet points or to long elaborative essays. Findings may be represented and summarized through diagrams, tables, illustrations, and photographs. Illustrative quotations from participants' concrete descriptions are a hallmark of phenomenological research because of their capacity to maintain the groundedness of all knowledge claims. Finally, the findings may be discussed with regard to (a) their impact on a knowledge field, for example, bearing on previous research and theory; (b) their practical applications, for example, for professionals, policymakers, or laypersons; and (c) their impact on participants in research that may have been problematic, difficult, challenging, pleasant, and useful and are often emancipatory.

An Illustration of Phenomenological Research in Psychology

Davidson, Strayner, Lambert, Smith, and Sledge (2001) conducted participatory phenomenological research on the difficult problem of recidivism among people with schizophrenia. Some distinctive variations present in this research are its program-evaluative and action-oriented goals, its inclusion of participants as active collaborators with the researchers, its interview methods, and its limited local level of generality.

The Research Problem

The context of the study was a program in an academic medical center where outpatients were closely monitored for symptoms in order to prevent relapse, and early intervention, including education, individual assessment of relapse patterns, and individualized action plans, was provided. Twice-weekly relapse prevention groups took place first during hospitalization and then after discharge. Not one patient (of 36 eligible) returned to attend group sessions after discharge. The readmission rate remained unchanged, and the ineffectiveness of the program became apparent. The researchers suspected that the program's approach to the problem of recidivism was limited by the clinical way the problem was defined, namely its focus on the symptoms of disorder per se and its assumption that the return of the symptoms of schizophrenia required the patients to be readmitted. The perspectives of various other stakeholders, including family members and especially the patients themselves, had not been taken into consideration, nor were the larger social and material environment or the world and the agency of the patient. The purpose of this research was to acquire knowledge of the problem of recidivism by examining the actual discharge situation, as lived through and experienced by the patients themselves. The researchers were also interested in gaining knowledge of the meaning and function of acute hospitalization for the patients.

Participants, Constitution of Data, and Situation

In this phenomenological participatory action research, Davidson et al. (2001) tracked 12 recidivist patients (defined as having had two rehospitalizations in the past year) "to elicit their experiences of rehospitalization, the circumstances of this event, and the function it served in their lives" (p. 167). Data were collected through open-ended interviews that encouraged participants to provide narratives of their life experience leading up to, during, and following their most recent rehospitalization. Rather than posing questions that the researchers presumed to be relevant, they allowed the descriptions to provide access to meanings relevant to the participants. Interviewers also solicited descriptions of the situations in which patients received the new relapse prevention interventions during hospitalization and their discontinuation of the program after discharge.

Analysis

After transcribing the audiotaped interviews, three researchers independently analyzed the protocols and then met together to establish a consensus about findings. The analysis attempted to understand the participants' experiences independent of any prior views of the researchers, focusing on experiences from the point of view of the participants without considering how well they conformed or did not conform to the researchers' preconceptions. The researchers also involved the participants themselves in the process of elaborating on the meanings found in the described situations. Transcripts were analyzed directly within each individual and across individuals. The team identified the themes of the experience in each individual case and unified them in an edited synthesis of their understanding of each case in narrative form. Researchers then compared the individuals, put aside statements that were limited to individual cases, and retained only statements that were confidently based on the data and, even if implicit, were present in all cases, culminating in a general structural synthesis. Researchers discarded any assertions that appeared to be ungrounded speculation or inference and integrated the strongly data-evident insights of the investigators within a single narrative. A group of original research participants were then convened in order to read through and provide feedback on the tentative findings. They were specifically asked to identify important areas that were missed and to evaluate how faithful the narrative was to their experience. Finally, the researchers collaborated with the participants to use the findings to design a new intervention.

Findings

The most striking finding was that the clinicians' goal of preventing rehospitalization was not found within the experience of participants. The hospital was experienced as an attractive place of safety, food, respite, care, and privacy to which participants appreciated being able to return, as if for a "vacation," a word used by several participants. Perhaps the most important meaning of the hospital was "a place where people listen to you." For one participant, the positive value of the hospital grew steadily in the course of three hospitalizations, the third being "the best I think." This meaning of the hospital was structurally dependent on the context of a relatively impoverished community life—for instance, in a homeless shelter or, as one participant reported, "broke, unemployed, the same harsh feeling everyday." In contrast to the hospital, life in the community was characterized as socially isolated, without supportive and caring others. One participant characterized himself as "popular" in the hospital in contrast to being alone and abandoned outside it. The self outside the hospital was experienced as powerless and lacking in control, not just in relation to symptoms but more importantly in relation to employment and financial well-being. Even the distress associated with symptoms gave way to a numbness and apathy that one participant described as "becoming cold . . . do not care no more." Here, the personal body is lived in the mode of powerlessness, as an "I cannot (travel, get a job, make friends)," and temporality is one of becoming colder, more numb, and closing off to the world. As this context became increasingly established in their lives, the participants saw mental health treatments and programs as useless, not worth any effort, and characterized the educational interventions designed to enable them to recognize symptoms as idle exercises disconnected from their current lives. The only value of "the program," remembered within the hospital context, was the care shown by the "treaters," who were experienced as those with power and competence. The participants saw no connection between outpatient treatment, which was not worth the effort, and rehospitalization, with its plenitude of care.

Practical Consequences

The design of an alternative program followed these findings. The revised program no longer focused on teaching participants to recognize the symptoms of schizophrenia and to act on them but on addressing participants' isolation and loneliness by helping them establish a sense of community of care in which they belong outside the hospital. The new program also addressed the sense of

powerlessness pervading participants' self by helping them achieve mastery over the conditions and problems that they themselves initially identified as significant and worth the effort. The new program invited participants to become social agents—decision makers and caregivers involved in something larger than themselves to which they belonged. Finally, the researchers attempted in the new program to make the benefits of treatment more salient from the point of view of former patients. The new program, which was implemented by former patients who thereby became consumer-providers, included such elements as easy transportation, friendships, lunches, and fun outings to places decided on by participants who became agents in planning and activities that had a tangible impact on their future. In the context of this thoroughgoing restitution of a fuller life-world intentionality in "after care," staying out of the hospital became a byproduct of a more meaningful, socially satisfying, and free life. Compared with a matched control group 3 months after discharge, the readmission rate of those who participated in the new program was reduced by 70%, and total days in the hospital were reduced by 90%.

Commentary

The key phenomenological elements of this research are (a) suspending scientific assumptions about the nature of the patients' problems along with assumptions about the causes of recidivism—for example, uncontrollable symptoms of disease; (b) gaining descriptive access, through interviews, to the life-world situations within and outside of the hospital as they were experienced by former patients in the course of their own lives; (c) an analysis of the meanings of situations inside and outside the hospital and the psychological processes that gave rise to them; and (d) imaginative variation through which the essentials of the life-worldly experience was grasped first at the level of each former patient and then at a more general level that held for all former patients. There was no claim to universality in these findings, but only to generality within the context of the program investigated in this study. It is easy to imagine other former patients for whom the hospital is a virtual "prison to be avoided at all cost" and is a place one returns to only involuntarily, which is in the hands of more powerful others like the police. But this different type of meaning of the hospital is not a part of the essence of recidivism as experienced by those in the program under investigation; for them, the hospital was an attractive and welcome refuge. If a study aimed at greater generality beyond this type of recidivism, then other persons possibly from other hospitals, with other kinds of life experiences, would have to be selected as participants. A study of different participants would most likely yield different context-bound or empirically contingent essential characteristics. Perhaps there are universal truths in the psychology of recidivism, but this was not the most fruitful level of analysis for the present study and might be too high flown and consequently trivial for psychology as a discipline because its subject matter is essentially quite variable and bound by its different contexts.

Similarities and Contrasts With Other Approaches

The sharpest contrast between the phenomenological and other approaches to psychological research is in its philosophy. Its *bracketing of presuppositions* and *commitment to description* distinguish phenomenology from positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical, and relativistic approaches. Phenomenology is more hospitable, accepting, and receptive in its reflection on "the things themselves" and in its care not to impose order on its subject matter. Phenomenology does not form theories, operationalize variables, deduce or test hypotheses, or use probabilistic calculations to establish confidence as do positivist and neopositivist approaches. Phenomenology holds that psychological reality—its meanings and subjective processes—can be faithfully discovered. Psychological realities need not be constructed; they have essential features that can be intuited and described by the research scientist. "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. Although phenomenology can provide culturally critical and emancipatory knowledge, it is not ideologically driven and does not subordinate its grasp of human experience to any ideology; phenomenology dwells with and openly respects persons' own points of view and honors the multiperspectivity found in the life-world. 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.

Phenomenological research shares many procedures with other approaches to qualitative research. The following methods used by phenomenologically oriented psychologists may be found in other approaches: writing down one's preconceptions prior to carrying out the research, keeping a research journal of reflections and insights, including participants and other nonprofessionals in any and every phase as coresearchers, interviewing in depth, naming themes in data, analyzing linguistic expressions, interpreting within broad contexts, deconstructing taken-for-granted realities, studying individual cases, presenting narratives, critiquing culture, and applying resolutions in action. Some of these procedures, such as in-depth interviewing, are quite generic. The value of these generic procedures is phenomenologically justified when demanded by the nature of subject matter. Nevertheless, because they are not relevant for every research problem, they are not to be considered essential ingredients of phenomenological research method. Moreover, when used in phenomenological research, such procedures must be used in distinctive ways, as, for instance, interviews must take place within the phenomenological reduction and remain genuinely descriptive rather than test hypotheses.

Other approaches may use procedures that are distinctively phenomenological and essential to its approach. In some cases, other approaches to qualitative research have been derived from or built on the work of phenomenologists, as is the case with some interpretive, critical, collaborative, and action research. In other cases, "phenomenological" procedures have been independently discovered in and used with other approaches. This is to be expected if the principles and practices developed by phenomenologists are necessary and required by the demands of scientific rigor as they interact with the nature of psychological subject matter. Any researcher who (a) sets aside previous theories (the epoché of sciences), (b) secures descriptive access to the immanent meanings within psychological life as it occurs in natural contexts (the epoché of the natural attitude—the psychological phenomenological reduction), (c) analyzes the complexities of these meanings by using reflection on the psychological processes that constitute them (intentional analysis), and (d) gains insights about

what is essential to the psychological processes under study (intuition of essence, the eidetic reduction) is using core phenomenological elements in psychological research whether it is acknowledged or not.

It is not necessary for researchers to have philosophical training or to deliberately use phenomenological procedures in order to be phenomenological. Action research on the infant's experience of birth by the French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer, who did not have formal training in either philosophy or psychology, brilliantly describes and uses photographs to illustrate the newborn's expressive lived experience in a fully phenomenological way (Wertz, 1981). Probably the most outstanding example of such protophenomenology is William James's (1902) classic study of religious experiences. Although unaware of Husserl's work, James deliberately bracketed natural science, prior theories, and naive preconceptions of religion and used the procedure Husserl named the "phenomenological psychological reduction" without calling it by any name other than simply "psychology." James performed extensive and intensive intentional analyses with rigorous imaginative variation and a consistently penetrating intuitive grasp of the essential constituents and types of religious experience.

Phenomenological procedures are required and used by any genuine psychology. Had psychology not been dominated by the natural science approach and instead founded itself as an autonomous discipline by rigorously describing its subject matter and developing procedures demanded by it, psychology would have been phenomenological from the beginning, and no specific phenomenological movement would have been needed. Had James's turn-of-the century investigation of religious experience been recognized as fulfilling the demands of science, appropriated by the discipline of psychology as a good example of rigorous science, and set the standard for research in the young discipline, psychology would have been an early leader rather than a tardy follower in 20th-century qualitative research. If someday psychology accepts the contributions of the phenomenological movement and appropriates them as a normative part of its methodology, even without any recognition or acknowledgment of the historical movement of phenomenology, then the unwieldy descriptor *phenomenological* would no longer be called for, and these practices could simply be called "psychological research."

Until such a time when phenomenological contributions are incorporated into the standard operating procedures of psychological researchers, the approach may be understood as a relatively distinct historical and ongoing movement. As such, there are eight distinctive features that make this movement worthy of study and relevant for researchers in the field of counseling psychology: (a) its continuous and multiple lines of development over a 100-year period; (b) its sophisticated and still evolving philosophical foundation; (c) its concepts and methods specially designed for the discipline of psychology; (d) its development across all basic disciplinary areas such as learning, perception, language, cognition, personality, and social life; (e) its formalization of qualitative research methods and methodology, with justification and norms concerning reliability and validity (Giorgi, 1970, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Wertz, 1986, 1999); (f) its long-standing and diverse contributions in specific areas of mental health and counseling; (g) its employment in graduate education, including the development of a complete, APA-approved curriculum (at Duquesne University) incorporating philosophy of science,

clinical praxis, and training in qualitative research; and (h) its lively dialog with other disciplines, with other schools of psychology, and with other approaches to research in psychology.

The phenomenological movement has expanded the conceptual foundation and practice of science in order to include the descriptive study of subjectivity and the full human person. The phenomenological approach emphasizes the importance of returning to psychological subject matter with an open attitude and evoking fresh, detailed descriptions that capture the richness and complexity of psychological life as it is concretely lived. This approach provides researchers with well-established methods capable of securing sensitive insights into the human meanings of situations and the processes that engender them. This approach is especially suited for counseling psychologists, whose work brings them close to the naturally occurring struggles and triumphs of persons. Counseling psychologists require high-fidelity knowledge of persons that maximally respects the experience and situational contexts of those they serve. Informal phenomenological inquiry can be seamlessly integrated with counseling practice, and formal phenomenological research can complement other scientific methods, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as provide rigorous practices and knowledge in its own right. I hope that researchers in counseling psychology will find increasing value in the phenomenological approach that has developed steadily through the last century as the field enhances itself by incorporating a new methodological pluralism in the 21st century.

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