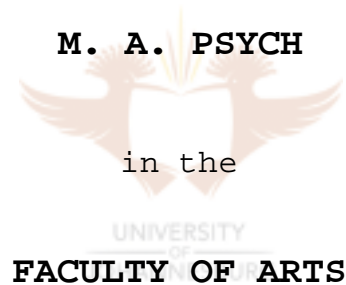


**PHENOMENOLOGY: HISTORY, ITS METHODOLOGICAL
ASSUMPTIONS AND APPLICATION**

by

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**Mini-Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree**



at the

RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY

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October 2002

INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Mankind's evolution over the centuries has been characterised by a number of global discoveries and advances that includes space travel, advances in scientific knowledge and the technological age of computers. Regardless of these amazing advances, one issue still eludes complete understanding: the complexity of human experience.

It is impossible for anyone to fully appreciate the depth of human experience. Even as individuals, certain life experiences resonate with our sense of self, others seem transcendent and some remain a mystery (Braud & Anderson, 1998). It is due to this complexity, that human experience has become an area of wonder and fascination for researchers in the human sciences. Understanding human experience has become an ordinary human exploration, practiced in the focused context of scientific inquiry

If one conceptualises scientific inquiry as a hunt for a precious relic, it may be argued that the maps left by previous researchers provide the basis but still require deciphering. Similarly, when considering an exploration

of human experience, we need an imaginative and creative science that enables a deciphering of the experience.

It can thus be stated that conventional methods of acquiring knowledge in the natural sciences although useful in certain circumstances, may not honour the depth and uniqueness of human experience that includes moments of grieving, passion, healing, insight and illumination (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

The present mini dissertation explores an approach that is believed to honour the complexity and depth of human experience: Phenomenology.



1.2 MOTIVATION

The aim of this study is to enhance the reader's understanding and appreciation of phenomenology as a method of inquiry. This study also aims to explore the applicability and usefulness of using phenomenology as a method of understanding human experience. In addition, this study is an attempt to show a different way/approach to elucidate human experience since it is believed that ' a dialogue between approaches must begin, as each sheds light where the other sees only shadow' (Valle & King, 1978, p. 9).

1.3 OUTLINE OF MINI-DISSERTATION

The following mini-dissertation will include an exploration of the philosophy of phenomenology and its relationship with psychology. The discussion will further highlight the move from positivist to post-positivist methodology with emphasis on the nature of knowledge. The different methodologies in the human sciences will then be highlighted with a deeper exploration of three particular approaches: the empirical research approach, the hermeneutic approach and the phenomenological approach. The discussion will then track the development of existential-phenomenology. In addition to this, the central tenets, concerns and methodological assumptions of the existential phenomenological approach will be explored. The final section will include the application of the phenomenological method with focus on two methods of analysing phenomenological data.

1.4 METHODOLOGY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Human existence poses unique challenges by being a sphere of awareness. It embodies consciousness and consciousness implies experiencing with meaning (Valle & King, 1978). In addition, consciousness searches for and interprets interactions with the environment. According to Polkinghorne (1983), three characteristics render the human condition difficult to investigate as an object for study. It possesses systemic organization, which implies that its parts cannot be investigated without reference

to their context and relationship to the whole (Keeney, 1983). In addition, it lacks clear boundaries and is in a constant process of development by creating new patterns of interaction.

A second difficulty is that the act of knowing is a human phenomenon and as such cannot be investigated without taking into account the human element. Finally, humans exist in a context wherein meaning is of fundamental importance and which is not accessible to objective observation (Polkinghorne, 1983). Even physicists such as Heisenberg - who said that it is impossible to separate objectivity from subjectivity in nature - believed that the experimenter cannot be detached but must define himself as part of the problem (Valle & King, 1978).

It may be argued that the positivists claim to knowledge and providing indisputable truths, limits an understanding of human uniqueness. The tension between producing truth and addressing significant aspects about the human condition has been present since the conception of the human sciences (Kockelmans, 1973).

1.5 FROM POSITIVIST TO POST-POSITIVIST METHODOLOGY

The pursuit of knowledge forms the motivation for every research effort. It is important to understand how researchers define knowledge since questions of knowledge

influences what is considered acceptable as a subject of investigation and what methods are considered useful in obtaining an acceptable and valid account of phenomena. A definition of what knowledge is will thus influence the procedures and methods used to obtain the knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

The concept of knowledge has been a subject of discussion for philosophers for centuries. Philosophers have distinguished between doxa (opinion or belief) and episteme (certainty and knowledge) in an attempt to clarify the differences between one's experience of the world and reality (Polkinghorne, 1983). Episteme informs the study of epistemology and can be described as the search for methods that leads to assurance of the truth of one's beliefs. Therefore, there is a clear distinction between what we believe to be true (our subjective understanding and belief about the world) and knowledge (true and certain understanding of the world) (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The last few decades have witnessed great debate within the human sciences on which methods are able to provide certain knowledge while considering the uniqueness of the human being. Research methodology in the human sciences originated from the methodological practices of the natural sciences and psychology has traditionally been embedded within the natural sciences methodology, which embraces a positivist approach to the pursuit of

knowledge (Neuman, 2000). The positivist idea of science is located in their definition of knowledge, which maintains that only that which is absolutely certain can be counted as knowledge. Thus mere uncertainty about a claim renders it scientifically disproved (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The positivist's claim of certainty has been criticised for not conforming to the criterion of certainty. It is argued that pure observation, which is necessary to attain certainty, is contaminated by theoretical assumptions that exist in the positivist methodology. This results in knowledge becoming the best explanation instead of the eventual explanation of the phenomenon investigated (Polkinghorne, 1983). In addition, with the new awareness that science is a human activity wherein the subject is knower, knowledge is rendered conditional and constructed within the individual's conceptual system and as such is not an absolute viewpoint (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The standards of the positivist science resulted in a neglect of that which is central to human experience if study had to be limited to those areas where research tools are designed to produce certainty (Polkinghorne, 1983). The conception of a post-positivist science emerged from the disagreement and dissatisfaction of this neglect. The post-positivist science challenges the belief that knowledge is accessed through unquestionable

truths. According to Kuhn who is one proponent of the post-positivist movement, what was mistakenly considered to be advances in knowledge was actually a shift in people's perception of things (Polkinghorne, 1983). An interpretive perspective thus emerged where truth became a matter of perspective. Literary scholars and hermeneutics further postulated that readers engage with a text with preconceptions and as a result will provide interpretations of the text, instead of ultimate truths.

Unlike positivism, post-positivism does not suggest a unified view of science. It reflects an attitude about knowledge where there is no prescribed method to follow. Science evolves into a search to gain deeper understanding, using approaches that are responsive to the particular questions and subjects addressed (Polkinghorne, 1983). As such, reliability of methods relies on their participation in a particular system of inquiry (Valle & King, 1978). Three main systems of inquiry have been identified in the human sciences, each able to elicit a particular kind of knowledge about human beings. They are: the empirical approach, the phenomenological approach (descriptive) and the hermeneutic approach (interpretive).

1.5.1 THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH APPROACH

Empirical research has its roots in positivism and makes a number of assumptions. The basic assumptions of

empirical research are: the belief that there exists an objective reality, that this reality is observable and measurable, and that more than one observer can agree on its existence and characteristics (Neuman, 2000). In addition, the empirical approach maintained that all that was needed to access knowledge or expand on existing truths about the world was the correct method. It was argued by empiricists, that by identifying the rules of particular procedures that had been previously successful in acquiring knowledge, these same methods could be used by any discipline to generate knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1983).

An example of an empirical approach is the quantitative research method. This research method involves the collection of data using observable and measurable variables whose objective is to test and predict a formulated hypothesis (Morse, 1997). In quantitative research, the researcher decides which variables s/he wishes to obtain information from, at the outset of the research endeavour. The next step is to formulate a statement that expresses the expected relationship(s) between the variables. This statement is called the hypotheses and the actual research attempts to find evidence in order to accept or reject the hypothesis. Quantitative theory is created through processes of reasoning and deduction using existing knowledge and as such the data obtained is inferential and hypothetical (Flick, 1998).

Within the positivistic approach to science, the data that is obtained is also open to discussion, modification, verification and replication (Flick, 1998). Knowledge is obtained through the use of methods (see Table 1.1) that attempt to overcome personal bias and opinion and which distances the researcher from personal involvement for the object of inquiry. The researcher's point of view is thus distanced from the life-world of his subjects and this results in his knowledge being derived from the observation of facts. Although this may reflect a pure method of scientific enquiry, it tends to neglect the complex nature of the human being. It can be argued that this may result in a theory that is not open to ambiguity and is simplistic with conventional yet arbitrary boundaries (Morse, 1997).

Some criticism has been aimed at quantification in the human sciences. Firstly, the practice of quantification has been criticised for excluding variables that provide a context for the subject under investigation (Flick, 1998). Quantitative studies involve control procedures and randomisation, which results in one questioning the validity of outcomes. Another criticism is that quantitative researchers tend to avoid exploring the purposes and meanings people attach to their behaviours (Neuman, 2000). It may be argued that human behaviour cannot be completely understood without considering these aspects.

An important implication of aligning psychology within the tradition of the natural sciences is that psychology becomes likened to behaviourism, thus neglecting the aspect of experience that is of great significance in human phenomena. Behaviour is observable and measurable and as such, can be studied using the empirical approach. Experience however, requires addressing the question what? which is beyond an observable position and instead requires methods that transcend the linear cause and effect situation (Neuman, 2000). Other approaches are therefore necessary to compensate for the limitations evident in the empirical approach. The phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches provide two other contexts for acquiring knowledge and both are contained within the umbrella of the qualitative research method as outlined in Table 1.1. A discussion of the qualitative research method will pre-empt an exposition of the two examples mentioned, mainly phenomenology and hermeneutics respectively.

1.5.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodology studies the qualities of human behaviour. According to Flick (1998), the use of qualitative methods has a long tradition in psychology as well as the social sciences dating back to Wilhelm Wundt (1900-1920) who used descriptive methods in his folk psychology.

CONTINUUM					
Qualitative		-----		Quantitative	
Idiographic (Understand) (Explain)				Nomothetic (Predict) (Control)	
Qualitative Methods				Quantitative Methods	
<u>Experience</u> <u>Conceptualisation</u>				<u>Process</u> <u>Outcomes</u>	
* <i>What is the experience of x?</i>		* <i>How can we conceptualise x?</i>		* <i>How does x unfold as a process?</i>	
* <i>How is x perceived by the participant?</i>		* <i>What are useful explanations or interpretations of x?</i>		* <i>What are the concomitants of x?</i>	
				* <i>What sets the stage for the occurrence of x? What facilitates x? What inhibits x?</i>	
Phenomenological	Theoretical	Correlational		Experimental	
Heuristic	Historical	Causal-Comparative		Quasi-	
Narrative	Grounded Theory			Experimental	
Life Stories	Textual Analysis	Field Studies		Single-	
Case studies	Discourse Analysis			Subject	
Feminist Approach	Hermeneutic			Action	
Organic approach				Research	
Interview					
Questionnaire					
Surveys					

TABLE 1.1 Qualitative and Quantitative methods of inquiry with related disciplines within each approach. (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

The study of subjective meanings and everyday experiences is essential in the social sciences and psychology in order to understand the nature of certain phenomena, such as the uniquely human experience of humour for example. It has however been argued that quantitative research lacks relevance for everyday life since it is not

sufficiently dedicated to thoroughly describing the details of such an everyday experience (Morse, 1997). The qualitative research method on the other hand, takes into account different subjective perspectives, related social backgrounds and the diverse viewpoints and practices that exist.

Qualitative research methods do not reduce objects or participants to single variables. Instead it considers the context in which participants find themselves of the utmost importance (Flick, 1998). The goal of qualitative research is not to test hypotheses objectively but instead to emphasize the human factor and the personal involvement of the researcher within the research setting. A qualitative researcher's first hand knowledge of events, participants and their situations may raise the question of bias, but it also provides a sense of immediate and direct contact that facilitates intimate knowledge of that which is being studied (Neuman, 2000).

Different types of qualitative research can also be identified that ranges from the most descriptive to the most abstract, generalizable research. Morse (1997) identifies 4 levels of classification for qualitative research that includes the descriptive type (phenomenology, ethnography, ethology and participant observation), the interpretive type (hermeneutics, ethnography and narrative enquiry), disclosive type (grounded theory and concept analysis) and the

explanatory type (triangulated methods). The present study will provide a detailed discussion on phenomenology (descriptive) and hermeneutics (interpretive) respectively.

1.5.3 PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH APPROACH

This approach is conceptualised as a descriptive system of inquiry, which refers to the process of describing the basic structure of lived experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). Phenomenology is a movement that today means different things to different people. It is an attempt to give a direct description of experiences as it is in itself without taking into account its psychological origin or its causal explanation (Kruger, 1979). The method of phenomenology involves prolonged interaction with a selected number of individuals in order to access patterns, themes and relationships of meaning of a particular phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1975).

The following section will include the historical development of phenomenology, its concepts and methodological assumptions historical development, foundational concepts and methodological assumptions.

1.5.3.1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTENTIAL- PHENOMENOLOGY

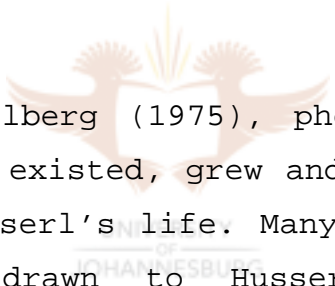
Originally trained as a mathematician, Edmund Husserl was drawn to Philosophy toward the end of the nineteenth century by Franz Brentano, who at that stage began to criticise the plight of empiricism (Spiegelberg, 1975). Brentano believed that the object of inquiry for psychology should be human experience, which is not merely a reflection of the physical realm but is in fact a realm in its own right (in Polkinghorne, 1983). His ideas represent part of the original effort to define the nature of human science.

Husserl, who is described as the father of phenomenology, along with Soren Kierkegaard rejected the reductionistic tendencies of the natural science. The salient point of Kierkegaard's philosophy is that man's existence is unique. While Kierkegaard was insistently anti-scientific, Husserl (like Brentano) denied that the natural science was the only form of science that exists (in Giorgi, Barton & Maes, 1983)

Husserl believed that natural scientific measurement is not a suitable vehicle to understand the human being since man cannot be reduced to a measurable object (in Kruger, 1979). He proposed that in order to understand one's fellow man, one needs to look at the quality of

experiences and as such he placed great emphasis on consciousness.

Husserl described his phenomenology as a science of consciousness and concluded that there is a strong relationship between psychology and phenomenology since both are concerned with consciousness (in Kockelmans, 1987). He did however contend that psychology is concerned with empirical consciousness (that is with consciousness being an empirical being in the real world) whereas phenomenology is concerned with pure consciousness.



According to Spiegelberg (1975), phenomenology was not founded but instead existed, grew and continued changing till the end of Husserl's life. Many later philosophers and others were drawn to Husserl's phenomenology. Heidegger, who is considered one of the main contributors to the theory of phenomenological psychology, was successful in merging existentialism and phenomenology. He expanded on Husserl's phenomenology to include not only consciousness but also the individual's world in which he lives (Vonder Hoeven, 1965). According to Heidegger, 'being-in-the-world' precedes all our thinking of the world (in Giorgi et al., 1983). In postulating the notion of being-in-the-world, he suggested an existential reformulation of Husserl's philosophy. For Heidegger, pure consciousness was no longer the object of investigation, as it had been under Husserl's theorizing.

Instead the focus shifted to a study of consciousness as it presents itself in the lived experience of the individual (Valle & King, 1978).

Existentialism and phenomenology can further be described as being complimentary approaches to studying man since phenomenology underlies existential philosophical principles (Farber, 1967). Together, phenomenology and existentialism forms the discipline existential phenomenology and when applied to human psychological phenomena, it becomes existential phenomenological psychology. This discipline seeks to explain the essence or structure of human experience through the use of descriptive research techniques (Valle & King, 1978).

Sartre (in Spiegelberg, 1965) expanded further on Husserl's phenomenology by introducing a reflexive and pre-reflexive consciousness. He believed consciousness to be ahead of itself and as such capable of being aware of itself. Sartre further thought of consciousness as being an action where individuals can become aware of their experiences and consciousness merely by reflecting consciousness (in Spiegelberg, 1965).

Merleau-Ponty enlarged the area of phenomenology by not merely considering reflecting (as Sartre did) but included a phenomenology of perception (Spiegelberg, 1965). He believed that individual perception has an

original relationship to the world since individuals do not actually perceive their world but instead, their world is what they perceive. The individual thus co-exists with his world and this co-existence is made possible by consciousness, and "without human consciousness there is no world" (Merleau-Ponty in Luypen, 1966).

Sartre and Merleau-Ponty emphasised the importance of considering the pre-conceptual structures that are the origins of experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). They maintained the foundational concepts of Husserlian theory and in addition, they reflected on structure of consciousness that consists of levels of transactions. These transactions in turn have been developed into meaningful human experiences in order to make sense of human existence (Valle, King & Halling, 1989).

It becomes clear that the growth of the phenomenological movement involved a number of differing ideas, however all the thinkers believed in the idea of the individual as being-in-the-world. This constitutes one of the central tenets of phenomenological thought. According to Natanson (1969), the central terms of phenomenology are all bound together and imply each other. An exploration of this and other central terms in existential-phenomenology will now be undertaken highlighting the interwoven nature of the concepts.

1.5.3.2. **EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPTS**

This section serves to highlight and describe those existential-phenomenological tenets, which are relevant to the present study.

i) Being-in-the-world

According to Heidegger's existential phenomenology, being-in-the-world precedes all our thinking of the world and as such man as being here (Dasein) should be the starting point for all questions about being (Giorgi et al., 1983). The person is seen as having no existence apart from the world and the world any existence apart from the person. The concept attempts to express that the person and environment are one and the same thing. Husserl posits that it is impossible to consider the world without human consciousness, since without consciousness there is no world (in Luypen, 1966). It is through the world that the meaning of an individual's existence emerges for him and for society (Spiegelberg, 1965).

In emphasising the union of consciousness and the environment, the existential-phenomenological approach is concerned with an investigation of how human beings are in-the-world (Valle et al., 1989). By emphasising this union, the existential-phenomenological approach is in fact challenging the notion of objectivity and pure constituting consciousness (Luypen, 1966). The existential-phenomenological approach emphasises a total,

indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his/her world (Valle et al., 1989).

The concept of being-in-the-world contains three broad categories namely the **Umwelt, Mitwelt and Eigenwelt**. All three categories assume the operation of awareness and reflect the dimensions of the authentic being. The umwelt refers to the biological and physical world around the individual. Importantly though, it constitutes the individual's subjective awareness and perception of his/her relationship with the umwelt or physical world within which he/she lives (Maddi, 1989). The mitwelt refers to the individual's social world (that is the people with whom the individual interacts), that we share with others and which constitute the individual's awareness, perception and experience of others. Husserl believed that the structure of being human could only develop in a dialogue with others (in Kruger, 1979). The Eigenwelt represents the internal processes and dialogue that one has with oneself.

The three modes of being-in-the world represent the individual's process of perceiving and experiencing the biological, social and personal world around him/her. To understand a person's behaviour or expressions one has to study the person in context, since it is only there that what a person values and finds significant, exists. Thus phenomenology regards the individual as possessing a meaningful set of relationships, practices and

experiences by virtue of being born into a culture and thus by being-in-the-world (Caelli, 2000).

ii) Lebenswelt

The existential-phenomenological approach highlights three levels of perception, constituting three perceptual worlds: the pre-reflective world, Lebenswelt and the scientific world. At the first level, awareness and perception includes a sense of that which is visually accessible. This level serves as the ground of any meaningful human experience and may be regarded as an aspect or dimension of the lebenswelt (Valle & King, 1978) since the second level builds on the first and emerges at the level of reflective awareness as meaning (Bruzina, 1970; Valle & King, 1978). The lebenswelt or life world is the world lived by the person and not an entity independent of him. The lebenswelt is further constructed by consciousness and is independent of scientific interpretations. The third level of perception, the scientific world, is in fact the sphere in which deductions are made through scientific premises.

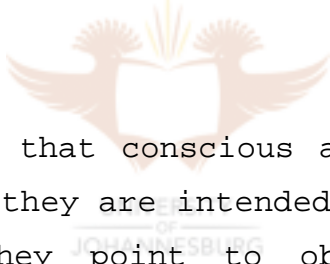
Positivist scientific practices have served to decontextualise individual experience by reducing it to objective, deductive parts. Phenomenology serves to emphasise the disconnection between scientific explanation and human experience by restoring the lebenswelt to its position of prominence as a source of

knowledge. This knowledge is derived from meanings, which are regarded by the phenomenological psychologist as the manifestation in consciousness reflecting awareness of the underlying pre-reflective structures of the particular experience being addressed (Kruger, 1979). It thus serves as the beginning for all knowledge acquisition in the existential-phenomenological arena.

iii) Intentionality

It is believed that all situations an individual encounters in his life require choices or decisions to be made. Phenomenologists believe that it is these ongoing instances of decision-making that facilitates the individual's striving toward becoming an authentic being (Kruger, 1979). This relationship between the individual and his/her choices within his life world implies that the individual's entire life expresses what phenomenologists call intentionality. Man is thus believed to be involved in a continuous process of intentional acts of relating to the world (Giorgi et al., 1983). According to Husserl, it is by consciousness that objects are made present and similarly it is by objects that consciousness is revealed. This implies that mankind is never merely conscious but always conscious of something and this something becomes the object of consciousness (Valle & King, 1978).

Husserl further states that the object of consciousness may be concrete or abstract (in Giorgi et al., 1983). When one refers to consciousness, one is in fact referring to someone being conscious of something (the intended object). If one considers the relation between psychoanalysis and Husserl's thoughts on all acts being conscious and intentional, it seems that Husserl agrees that there are unconscious intentionalities and that these belong to the repressed affective experiences of love, resentment and humiliation (in Kockelmans, 1987). However, it can be argued that although these intentionalities are unconscious, according to psychoanalytic thought, they do present themselves in some form or other in everyday life (Maddi, 1989).



For Husserl, to say that conscious acts are intentional does not imply that they are intended or deliberate acts, but rather that they point to objects (in Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991). Thus the word intentional signifies nothing else than the fundamental property of consciousness: to be conscious of something. Husserl (in Moustakas, 1994) further describes the intentional act as the perceiving of something. Intentionality therefore indicates the interdependence between the subject and the perceived world (Hammond et al., 1991).

Every moment in life expresses intentionality since everything in life is a situation requiring decision or choice (Valle et al., 1989). Each person has the freedom

to make choices within a given situation and within given limitations that are presented by the world. This freedom to choose and make decisions highlights one's responsibility for directing one's own life (Giorgi et al., 1983).

iv) Ontological anxiety and guilt

Every situation that involves choice or decision presents two options for the individual: one, which pushes the person into the future that is unpredictable and unfamiliar and the other that pulls the person into the past, which is known and comfortable (Maddi, 1989). The future invites possibility for challenge and growth but at the same time, it being unknown, evokes anxiety. Similarly, although the past provides comfort and safety, it also impedes growth and development. It is at this point that individuals are prone to develop guilt and anxiety, which are referred to as ontological. According to Kockelmans (1987), the accompanying conflict between the two is considered an inevitable part of being.

The existence of some ontological guilt reflects the life one has led free from falsification and denial of that life. It is further believed that in order to achieve a sense of authentic being, the individual must minimise guilt by occasionally choosing the option of future development (Maddi, 1989). In addition, there is much strength and courage in confronting ontological anxiety

since doing so implies creating one's own life, and in so doing one can reach freedom of individuality.

v) Thrownness

Existential-phenomenology's postulate that one is free to create a world through mental activity, however there exists limits to this freedom. These limitations or givens of life are called 'thrownness' of existence and the term was coined by Binswanger and was later called facticity by Sartre (in Sartre, 1967). It is believed that individuals must accept the biological and social limits that exist in the possibilities of his existence, in the same way that he must accept ontological anxiety and guilt as inherent parts of existence. The acceptance of these limitations without opposition allows for a pursuit of those possibilities that are available. The more these limitations are opposed, the more an individual's thrownness gains in influence.

According to Maddi (1989), there exists very few actual necessities or givens beyond some biological one's. Individuals tend to confuse possibilities (like life situations or commitments) with necessities. This act of confusing commitments is considered to be an act of avoiding personal responsibility. This is further considered to be a denial of ontological guilt and these individual's lack the courage that pre-empts developing as an authentic being.

The terms mentioned above encapsulate the foundational elements of the existential-phenomenological framework. They highlight the frameworks approach to understanding beings-in-the-world, the relationship between consciousness and the physical world, and the choices which individual's face. The philosophical premises discussed above forms the basis for investigating the lebenswelt of individuals. Before embarking on a discussion of phenomenology as a methodology, a slight digression is necessary in order to clearly locate phenomenology within its theoretical frame. The third system of inquiry alluded to earlier, mainly hermeneutics, will now be discussed with reference to its relationship with phenomenology.

1.5.4 THE HERMENEUTIC RESEARCH APPROACH

Hermeneutics is an example of the interpretive method of inquiry. It can be described as the science of interpretation or understanding (Kockelmans, 1987). Since the human sciences are concerned with the meaning of human actions, and since the meaning of these actions are not directly accessible in ordinary perception (implicit), another kind of perception is needed to facilitate meaning (Polkinghorne, 1983).

According to Morse (1997), interpretive research makes that which is implicit explicit. This implies that the interpretive method allows the reader to experience an instant recognition of the phenomenon, even when the reader is not a participant. The research is not context-bound and its theoretical abstraction allows for it to be accessible and understood by the reader (Polkinghorne, 1983). Hermeneutics can thus be defined as a method involving formal procedures that enables an understanding and interpretation for researchers.

The term hermeneutics dates from the 17th Century and the actual activity of hermeneutics, which is the endeavour of text interpretation, dates back to the period after the Renaissance (Polkinghorne, 1983). German Protestant theologians who questioned the intelligibility of the scriptures precipitated the movement. This led to the development of a method that would return to the text and clarify the principles of interpretation that was intrinsic to the text. Later, historians expanded on this method and tackled the problems of hermeneutics (Polkinghorne, 1983).

One historian in particular, Wilhelm Dilthey, recognised the potential in this method and attempted to make hermeneutics an equivalent of the natural sciences in terms of its scientific method. He also introduced history as the preferred discipline for practicing hermeneutics. He suggested that instead of examining

one's own experience, we should examine experiences of life by examining them through the course of history.

Dilthey believed that history and other related disciplines to be more inclined to correct interpretation than one's own experience. According to Dilthey, hermeneutics broadens an understanding of that which can be investigated in the human sciences, which has been neglected in the empirical sciences and highlighted by phenomenology (in Polkinghorne, 1983).

There exists a close relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology. Heidegger has been influential in both the phenomenological movement as well as the development of hermeneutics (Valle et al., 1989). He included history into phenomenology and described the world as a shared world, one that is created and shared in the form of language. According to Heidegger, there is no escape from the historical foundation of our understanding because it serves as an ontological base for our being-in-the-world (in Polkinghorne, 1983). Husserl's philosophy tends to disregard history whereas hermeneutics considers it to be pivotal to its discipline. (See Table 1.2).

Some theorists however, suggest that Heidegger has been able to integrate aspects of hermeneutics and those of phenomenology (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Apart from sharing a common tradition, both approaches also share significant philosophical principles: both are concerned with phenomenon and texts respectively (Refer to Table 1.2). The point of divergence however is that hermeneutics emphasises linguistics, seeing life as a context that humans are constantly reading and interpreting (Valle et al., 1989). According to Heidegger, being-in-the-world is a constant search for meaning and in creating meanings, individuals also perform acts of limitation. That is, we choose what to look at and listen to. These limitations are further ruled by ones prejudices, which Heidegger termed pre-understanding. Heidegger's notion of limitations can be likened to the phenomenological tenet of thrownness.

Hermeneutic theory also posits that the human realm can never be fully understood and known since it is ever evolving, and the tools for acquiring this knowledge are part of the changing human condition (Valle et al., 1989). This postulate positions both hermeneutics and phenomenology in the post-positivist framework where truth and knowledge is a matter of perspective.

The above outline of the relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology together with Table 1.2 intended to highlight the theoretical framework in which phenomenology is positioned by including differences and

	PHENOMENOLOGY	HERMENEUTICS
ESSENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on developing a complete, clear and articulate description and understanding of a particular human experience. • Achieves its goals by using a special investigator stance and approach and through specialised methods of participant selection, solicitation of information, data treatment and assembling of final report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to interpret texts. • Analysis of structure of implicit meanings within a text or record of human action. • Explicates meanings for initial audience, successive audiences or participants directly involved. • Meanings are uncovered layer upon layer and then interpreted.
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides rich and complete descriptions of human experience and meanings. • Findings emerge and are not imposed. • Techniques ensure the faithful handling of data. • Bracketing implies minimal researcher influence on the findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous set of procedures for exploring and interpreting the meaning of texts or record of human actions
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method depends on articulate skills of the participant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-verbal factors or other unrecorded expressions may be missed thus compromising intended meanings.

	PHENOMENOLOGY	HERMENEUTICS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and terms used usually obtuse. • Conclusions depend on participants chosen. • Methods may miss the development, outcome and consequences of the experience. • Little interest in explaining the experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual meanings only emerge with investigator influence. • Investigators may not necessarily agree with derived interpretations.
Illustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is sexually abused children's experience of Gestalt Play Therapy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the meaning of mystical texts describing sacred weeping?

TABLE 1.2. Summary of phenomenology and hermeneutics. (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

similarities between the two. Reference was also made to their post-positivist underpinnings that highlight the role of both the participant and the researcher in the latter's' search for knowledge. The discussion that follows includes an exploration of phenomenology as methodology.

1.6. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY

According to Giorgi et al., (1983): 'Phenomenology is the study of the phenomenon of the world as experienced by conscious beings and it is a method for studying such phenomenon.' (p. 146). To study one's experience phenomenologically is to consider how the subject relates

to the experiences, how he is aware of the situation, how he understands the phenomenon, and what the phenomenon means to him and how he values the phenomenon. (Kockelmans, 1987). Phenomenology is a method as well as an attitude of respect and wonder as one attempts a dialogue with the world, to get the world to disclose itself to one (Hammond et al., 1991).

The primary goal of the phenomenological method is to observe, to understand and then make explicit what is seen, whilst remaining true to the facts as they are happening. The researcher further aims to describe the phenomenon, as it appears (called noesis since it reflects the way in which something is experienced), as accurately as possible rather than try to explain it within a given framework (Pivcevic, 1970).



The existential-phenomenological psychologist aims to access the structure of experiences through descriptive techniques by asking the question 'What?' (See Table 1.2). Husserl (in Moustakas, 1994) calls this the noema since it refers to that which is experienced. He/ she (the existential-phenomenological psychologist) rejects the notion of causality and as such does not ask 'why?' things are the way they are. Furthermore, hypothesis formation, experimentation and suppositions are also rejected since they too imply a linear, quantitative element to the experience.

For the existential-phenomenological psychologist, only phenomena that are revealed as pure or worthy of attention are studied (Valle & King, 1978). Description through reflection therefore replaces the experimental method of research and structure and meaning replaces the notion of cause and effect. Of importance is that phenomenological interpretation does lead to the creation of certain hypotheses during the analysis phase, however, these hypotheses are merely recommendations for future investigations (Valle & King, 1978).

Existential phenomenology views people as being in a constant process of interpretation as they journey from one situation to another and that each situation has meaning only through people's interpretation and definition of it (Giorgi et al., 1983). The existential phenomenologist thus attempts to capture the process of interpretation through empathic understanding that requires the ability to internally reproduce the feelings, thoughts and actions of others. According to existential phenomenology, one has to understand man by starting from his world but this understanding requires more than just description of the world in which he lives (Kruger, 1979). According to Husserl: 'Mere factual knowledge makes for factual men... In our desperate need, this science has nothing to say to us' (in Kockelmans, 1987, p.44). Husserl believed that one needs to look beyond the spoken word and attempt to grasp the meanings they convey (in Moustakas, 1994).

Research in the existential-phenomenological approach includes a different role for the researcher in the research process in comparison to the positivist tradition. Giorgi (1980) posits that researchers must not only be aware of their presence in the research process but must let it count in their work. The phenomenological approach also acknowledges that the subject is present with both a past and an intended future and that the interaction with the researcher includes the latter's own set of intentions and subjective interpretations.

It can be argued that no research can be purely phenomenological since the researcher still possesses the preconceived notions that motivated the specific study in the first place (Giorgi et al., 1983). The researcher can however, be true to the phenomenon by acknowledging these preconceptions and by allowing openness to new and unexpected phenomena. This idea of understanding is termed transcendental attitude (Moustakas, 1994) and will be discussed in the next section.

1.6.1. THE TRANSCENDENTAL ATTITUDE

Mankind naively assumes that the world around him or her exists independent from each individual (Valle & King, 1978). We tend to overlook the fact that our experiences are made possible by our very presence. Husserl called

this naïve belief 'natural attitude' and claimed that it is indicative of a belief taken over from science namely that the functioning of objects follows certain laws (in Moustakas, 1994). The natural attitude is further connected to the notion of Lebenswelt. The Lebenswelt has continuously been conceived of as the underlying base of our lives and a full understanding would mean a fulfilment of the phenomenology of the natural attitude (Valle et al., 1989).

Existential phenomenology however assumes a position called transcendental attitude. This attitude aims to move beyond the preconceptions and biases that are inherent in understanding human experience from within the natural attitude. A researcher in the existential-phenomenological framework reflects the movement from the natural attitude (naïve belief in the independent existence of our experience) to a transcendental position (move beyond preconsciousness).

Husserl posited two basic approaches in studying human experience: **free variation** and **intentional analysis** (in Moustakas, 1994). The former includes descriptions of essential structures or essences while the latter pays particular attention to a specific experience and describes how that experience was constructed (Valle & King, 1978). The link between these two approaches and the transcendental attitude, is that both are incorporated into the transcendental notion. The

transcendental notion posits that: in order to understand a particular phenomenon, the structure and modes of consciousness needs to be analysed while the researcher suspends his presuppositions, judgement, biases and preconceptions through a process called 'bracketing' or philosophical epoche.

Bracketing is done in order to understand the experiences of the participants as they truly are (Giorgi et al., 1983). According to Husserl, 'bracketing' or the epoche is a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also a process of setting aside prejudices and predispositions (in Moustakas, 1994). In order to achieve this, the researcher has to be prepared to enter the world of the individual with an open mind free of pre-conceptions. This is done by making the presuppositions and assumptions explicit by laying them out so that they appear in as clear a form as possible to oneself (Valle & King, 1978).

As one brackets these assumptions and presuppositions, it is believed that more emerge at the level of reflective awareness. Regular practice of 'bracketing' is believed to increase one's competency in achieving this state, however some entities (like life experiences that are intensely ingrained so that it is not part of conscious awareness) are simply not easy to 'bracket' (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl insists though that with intensive work and commitment to the process, bracketing is possible (in

Moustakas, 1994). According to Valle & King (1978), the process of bracketing and rebracketing enables one to move from the 'natural attitude' to the 'transcendental attitude'. The attempt to reach a transcendental attitude is called the reduction.

1.6.2 TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

In phenomenological reduction, the quality of the experience becomes the focus. According to Husserl, this is called transcendental phenomenological reduction because it uncovers the ego for which everything is believed to have some meaning (in Moustakas, 1994). The aim of reduction is to describe the general features of an experience excluding everything that is not immediately within one's conscious experience. Thus one needs to literally reduce the world (as it is considered in the natural attitude mentioned earlier) to a world of pure phenomena where the reduced phenomena is claimed to be as it is for the consciousness that beholds it, with no mention of the facts of the experience (Giorgi et al., 1983).

Husserl includes another dimension of phenomenological reduction, which he calls the process of horizontalization (in Moustakas, 1994). A horizon is described as that which comes into mankind's conscious experience and which serves as a grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinct character (Moustakas, 1994). Horizons

are believed to be unlimited since humans can never completely exhaust their experience of things regardless of how many times they are reconsidered (Giorgi et al., 1983). A new horizon arises each time one diminishes and no horizon lasts indefinitely. Thus, a complete reduction is impossible in the same way the process of bracketing never ends. It may be said that both are never-ending processes that embodies the phenomenon of the relationship of the individual and the world.

1.6.3 THE NATURE OF ESSENCES

In phenomenology, the focus is on the essence or structure of experiences. The terms essence and structure are used interchangeably in this paper. Phenomena reveal themselves in diverse ways depending on how they are looked at. Regardless of which characteristics are revealed at a certain time, a phenomenon is believed to have the same essential meaning when it is perceived over time in different situations (Valle & King, 1978). The investigation of the essences of experience therefore involves the move from the description of the phenomenon to the essence of that phenomenon (Kruger, 1979). Investigation should move further from the essence of the phenomena to the psychological meaning of the phenomena. Thus, through description, the prereflective life-world is brought into reflective awareness where it is manifested as psychological meaning.

The justification for selecting this specific approach in accessing individuals' experiences will now be discussed.

1.7 JUSTIFICATION FOR USING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH APPROACH

Every individual attaches a specific meaning to an experience or event. Freud understood consciousness as something that is immediately accessible in everyday life in which perceptions, representations, memories and wishes are to be found (Kockelmans, 1987). Even the unconscious manages to send through, a semblance of its processes, which is presented, in everyday living. It did not escape Freud's notice that every behaviour and every experience has a meaning which at first remains hidden from conscious self-observation but can later reveal itself in the development of the personality (Kockelmans, 1987). One needs to avoid focusing too much on actual behaviour itself but instead deal with how it is perceived and experienced by the individual. Of fundamental importance are the individual's relationship with and reaction to real life events as well as the quality of individual experience.

It is believed that the qualitative phenomenological approach is able to provide much needed understanding and insight into a range of individual experiences that has previously eluded one's understanding. Since phenomenology is located within the post-positivist

tradition, it focuses on the quality of experiences and involves the participant in the acquisition of knowledge. This knowledge is gained by using methods that focus on descriptions of experience rather than descriptions of worldly objects (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The following section will highlight two different methods of undertaking a phenomenological investigation.

1.8 APPLYING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHOD

Possible topics for a phenomenological study include any meaningful human experience that can be articulated in everyday language such that a number of individuals would recognise and acknowledge the experience being described (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Some examples of topics that could be investigated include: 'being anxious', 'learning', 'healing', 'experience of therapy', etcetera.

In phenomenological research; unlike in the case of quantitative research where there is a formulation of formal hypotheses; focus is achieved by formulating a general description of the experience that the researcher desires to investigate (Polkinghorne, 1983). This description may include formal statements that are formed from the investigator's beliefs and attitudes about the research under investigation. These statements form the basis by which research questions can be formulated. The

researcher then poses to the participants the appropriate set of questions that lead to presuppositions and that guide the research.

The success of all phenomenological research methods and questions depends on the extent that they tap the subjects' experiences of the phenomenon (Valle & King, 1978). The method developed by Giorgi (1980) will be highlighted in the following section.

1.8.1 GIORGI'S 'EMPIRICAL PHENOEMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS'

Giorgi (1980, in Polkinghorne, 1983) helped develop one of the methods used by the Duquesne University for describing psychological meanings from structures or essences of human experience. Giorgi drew on Merleau-Ponty's idea that there are three orders of structure - physical structure, vital structure and human structure - each of which interacted with the environment in a different way (Giorgi, Knowles & Smith, 1979). Giorgi describes structure as the 'how' of experience and adds that 'it is a network of relations that is lived through rather than known . . . thus to be aware of a structure is to be present to the very organisation of the world as one lives and thinks it' (Giorgi et al., 1979, p.87).

Merleau-Ponty related the structures to the life world and as such located human science within the human realm.

In addition, he emphasised that investigations should move from the basic and universal description of structures to description of the unique and individual experiences of people in the world (in Polkinghorne, 1983). In Giorgi's method called 'empirical phenomenological analysis', the researcher gathers empirical or objective data in the form of written descriptions or interviews on the topic of investigation, from the participants. The researcher then follows these steps:

- 1) The researcher reads through the entire description to get a sense of the whole.
- 2) Next, the researcher reads the same description more slowly and delineates each time that a transition in meaning is perceived with respect to the [phenomenologically] intentional discovering [of the experience].
- 3) The researcher then eliminates redundancies and refines or elaborates to himself the meaning of the units just constituted by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole.
- 4) The researcher reflects on the given units, still expressed in the participant's concrete language, and highlights the essence of that situation for the participant with respect to the phenomena

being investigated. Each unit is systematically cross-examined for what it reveals about the phenomena for the participant. The researcher then transforms each unit, when applicable, into the language of psychological science.

- 5) The researcher synthesises and incorporates the insights attained into a consistent description of the structure of the phenomena. (Summarised by Giorgi in Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 211).

In the method above, descriptions are developed from a dialectical approach in which one describes the phenomena and then accesses it with a deeper description until a structure is illuminated (Polkinghorne, 1983). In addition, this method emphasizes structure as a way of interacting with the world. The goal of the method is to describe the themes from the data that constitute experience.

Table 1.3 lists the four sources of descriptive data that can be used. They include written descriptions, dialogal interviews (involves the method of imaginative listening), observation of living (method of perceptual description), and from imaginative presence to the phenomenon under investigation (method of phenomenological reflection)(Valle & King, 1978). It may be argued that phenomenological research does not imply

using one of the methods mentioned. Instead an integration of some or all of them are often used.

Sources	Methods
Written Descriptions	Protocol Analysis
Dialogal interviews	Imaginative Listening
Observation of lived-events	Perceptual Description
Imaginative Presence	Phenomenological reflection

Table 1.3. Sources of descriptive data and descriptive methods. (Valle and King, 1978, p.67).

The above discussion highlighted Giorgi's method of 'empirical phenomenological analysis' that may be used to investigate the experience of phenomena. In addition, Table 1.3 lists the different sources of descriptive data as well as the different methods that are accessible to a phenomenological investigator. The following section will include another method of phenomenological inquiry to illustrate the diverse ways of undertaking a phenomenological investigation.

1.8.2 INTEGRATION OF METHODS

The following method to be discussed includes an integration of the methods of analysis of phenomenological data by Van Kaam (in Moustakas, 1994) and Kruger (1979).

According to Kruger (1979), the spoken interview allows the subjects to be as close as possible to their lived experience. It is suggested that the open-ended interview be conducted in a non-directive manner since this allows for flexibility in allowing the investigator to grasp more fully the participant (Kruger 1979; Moustakas, 1994).

It is however highlighted that many, if not all of the descriptions by the participant will be incomplete due to lack of skill in expression, poor vocabulary, forgetfulness and the inability to express oneself clearly (as in the case of young children). This problem may be overcome by using more participants since this may increase the possibility of finding underlying themes (Kruger, 1979).

The integrated method follows these steps:

i) Data Generation

Step 1: Engagement in the Epoche process

The epoche or bracketing involves the researcher entering the world of the individual with an open mind free of pre-conceptions (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher thus has to first concern him with the phenomenon as directly experienced, concentrate on what is given, and only then should specific questions be formulated. Table 1.4 includes some questions that may be used.

- How did you experience . . . ?
- What incident and people intimately involved with the experience, stand out for you?
- How did the experience affect you?
- What changes do you associate with the experience?
- How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
- What feelings were generated by the experience?
- What thoughts stood out for you?
- What states or bodily changes were you aware of at the time?
- Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

Table 1.4. Examples of questions to ask in the data generation phase (Moustakas, 1994).

ii) Data Analysis

Step 2: An intuitive and holistic grasp of the data

In the initial reading of the data, the researcher's bracketing that was emphasised in the first step is crucial. The bracketing will enable an objective and faithful handling of the data (Kruger, 1979). The aim of this step is to provide a naïve understanding of the participants' experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

After the initial reading of the descriptions, they are read again with a more reflective attitude in preparation for the further steps that include deeper analysis.

Step 3: Spontaneous emergence of Natural Meaning Units

In this step the data are broken down (reduced) into natural meaning units (NMU), each conveying a particular meaning as they are presented in different parts of the description (Kruger, 1979). The intention that is conveyed by each NMU is expressed in a reduced form in the subject's own terminology in order to be faithful to the subject and his data. The task of this phase is to extract central themes presented, with the awareness that each meaning unit and theme is inter-related.

This task is accomplished by being objective, and includes the use of judgement and intuition while assumptions and opinions are bracketed. This ensures that the meaning units highlighted express the participant's own meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Step 4: Constituent Profile description

After listing all the reductions of the NMU's, the researcher then examines them for repetitions or redundancies. That is, those which represent an identical meaning or intention (Kruger, 1979). When this is done, irrelevant units are eliminated and this includes those that are very obviously irrelevant to the question being

investigated. The remaining units are converted into a constituent profile description, which is a condensed summary of the original data containing the essences of what the participant expressed. Once this is completed, the intention underlying each NMU is articulated by the researcher as accurately as possible (Kruger, 1979).

Step 5 Second order profiling

This step includes the examination of each NMU in relation to the topic under investigation. Attention is paid to how a particular NMU relates to the question of the study, and if some do not relate, they are eliminated. The NMU's that emerge from this procedure are listed and numbered and then translated into psychological terms by the investigator (Kruger, 1979). The researcher then discusses what the different categories reveal about the question being investigated.

Step 6 Transferring individual experience to general experience

The researcher now searches for commonalities that run through all the interviews. These commonalities reflect general experience of the phenomena as experienced by the participants and are derived from the generalization of the commonalities (Kruger, 1979).

Step 7 Testing the rigor of the data

Inter-subjective input using a panel of judges that do not include the investigator, is obtained to determine whether the descriptions are true to the data. Validity is indicated by whether the difference in wording used by the judges still reflect identical meaning or themes to those that emerged from the original investigator (Moustakas, 1994). It can be argued that the terms validity and reliability do not fit the requirements and philosophy of qualitative research and in phenomenology particularly, there is no right or wrong way to perform data analysis.

The section on the methods of data analysis in phenomenology served to emphasise the different ways of engaging with data. As mentioned earlier, the investigator has a number of methods at his disposal, to analyse descriptive data (Table 1.3), and each method has its own strengths and limitations.

The first method discussed, Giorgi's 'empirical phenomenological analysis', seemed to utilise the latter three methods in Table 1.3. The integrated model of data analysis used all four methods mentioned and each is able to generate the data required as well as analyse it. Although methods differ in terms of the procedures and tools used to access data, each method embraces the fundamental tenets and assumptions of phenomenological research methodology, and each is able to provide the

investigator with a tool in understanding the essence of human experience.

1.9 CONCLUSION

The phenomenological tradition outlined in this chapter perceives participants as beings-in-the-world. It is through the world that the meaning of an individual's existence emerges. The Lebenswelt of individuals are considered to be a significant starting point in attempting to understand human experience. Through analysis of the Lebenswelt, essential structures of experience are reached via the process of reduction, while considering the influence of the researcher on the process of analysis.

As mentioned, phenomenology provides particular information about the human realm. Any study using phenomenology as a research method seeks to explore the subjective, inner world of their participants in order to establish their meaning-making processes. This knowledge provides insight and respect for the uniqueness of humanity.

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