Phenomenology is a descriptive approach to obtaining knowledge that focuses on capturing the essence of human experience through the point of view of a distinct individual. As a form of qualitative nursing research, it provides a perspective apart from that of empirical sciences, which see the human mind and body as physical or material objects open to study only through empirical science and treatable only through physical remedies. This "how-to" book describes the foundations of phenomenology and the specifics of how to conduct nursing research using phenomenological designs. It is part of an innovative series for novice researchers and specialists alike focusing on state-of-the-art methodologies from a nursing perspective.

Authored by international scholars of qualitative nursing research, the book elucidates the theoretical rationale for using phenomenology, describes its components, and delineates a plan to conduct studies that includes appropriate methods, ethical considerations, and potential pitfalls. The book provides guidance for writing a research proposal that justifies the importance or potential impact of a study and describes how to conduct interviews that best elicit information. It focuses on achieving rigor in phenomenological research in regard to accuracy and replicability, and discusses different types of data collection and analysis and when to use them. Appendices include a list of qualitative research journals, textbooks, and other resources for more in-depth study. Chapters provide helpful advice on interviewing and data analysis. The book will be of value to novice and experienced nurse researchers, graduate teachers and students, in-service educators and students, and nursing research staff at health care institutions.

Key Features:
- Comprises the first "how-to" guide to conducting qualitative phenomenological research from a nursing perspective
- Presents a comprehensive plan for conducting studies and appropriate measures, ethical considerations, and potential challenges
- Guides readers in construction of a research proposal that justifies the importance or potential impact of a study
- Provides examples of interviews that best elicit information
NURSING RESEARCH USING PHENOMENOLOGY
Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, is professor at Kennesaw State University, School of Nursing, Georgia. She has received 13 research grants and has authored two books: *Sex Trafficking: A Clinical Guide for Nurses* (Springer Publishing) and the AJN Book of the Year Award winner, *Caring for the Vulnerable: Perspectives in Nursing Theory, Practice and Research*, now in its third edition (with a fourth edition to be published in 2015). Dr. de Chesnay has published over 21 journal articles in *Qualitative Health Research, Journal of Nursing Management, International Journal of Medicine & Law*, and others. A former dean and endowed chair, she reviews for a variety of professional journals. Dr. de Chesnay is a noted expert on qualitative research and a founding member and first vice president of the Southern Nursing Research Society.
Nursing Research Using Phenomenology

Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN
Editor
QUALITATIVE DESIGNS AND METHODS IN NURSING

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Series Editor

Nursing Research Using Ethnography: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Grounded Theory: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Life History: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Phenomenology: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Historical Methods: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Participatory Action Research: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Data Analysis: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

©Springer Publishing Company
For Terri Appelhaus, Kathy Donofrio, Laurie Ritchey, and Judy Thon, and in memory of Phyllis DeLeonardis

Old friends who are not forgotten . . .

—MdC
CONTENTS

Contributors ix
Foreword Jeffrey McCurry, PhD xiii
Series Foreword xv
Preface xxi
Acknowledgments xxiii

1 Phenomenological Philosophy and Research 1
   Tommie Nelms

2 Nursing Research Using Phenomenological Designs 25
   Mary de Chesnay

3 Lessons From Phenomenological Studies 51
   Marlene Z. Cohen and Barbara Swore Fletcher

4 Once Upon a Time: Exploring the Lived Experience of Prostitution
   Through Narrative 61
   Donna Sabella

5 Kissing Frogs: Finding the Right Phenomenologist for Framing
   Qualitative Inquiry in Nursing 113
   Rebecca Green

6 The Value of Dialogue When Planning and Conducting
   Phenomenological Research: Reflections of a Dissertation Chair
   and Doctoral Student 131
   Joan Such Lockhart and Lenore K. Resick

7 Using Phenomenology as a Research Method in
   Community-Based Research 145
   Bonnie H. Bowie and Danuta Wojnar

©Springer Publishing Company
8 Being the Parent of an Infant With Colic: A Phenomenological Hermeneutic Perspective  157
Kajsa Landgren

Appendix A  List of Journals That Publish Qualitative Research  169
Mary de Chesnay

Appendix B  Essential Elements for a Qualitative Proposal  173
Tommie Nelms

Appendix C  Writing Qualitative Research Proposals  175
Joan L. Bottorff

Appendix D  Outline for a Research Proposal  183
Mary de Chesnay

Index  187
CONTRIBUTORS

Joan L. Bottorff, PhD, RN, FCAHS, FAAN, is professor of nursing at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan campus, faculty of Health and Social Development. She is the director of the Institute for Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention at the University of British Columbia.

Bonnie H. Bowie, PhD, MBA, RN, is associate professor and chair of the Psychosocial and Community Health Nursing Department at Seattle University College of Nursing. She has conducted community-based research and participatory action research on vulnerable populations throughout the Seattle area.

Marlene Z. Cohen, PhD, RN, FAAN, is professor and Kenneth E. Morehead Endowed Chair in Nursing, and the associate dean for research at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, College of Nursing. She has conducted a number of phenomenological studies, mostly focused on persons with cancer, their families, and professional caregivers. She has collaborated with nurses conducting phenomenological research in both the United States and Italy.

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, is professor of nursing at Kennesaw State University and secretary of the Council on Nursing and Anthropology (CONAA) of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA). She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork and participatory action research in Latin America and the Caribbean. She has taught qualitative research at all levels in the United States and abroad in the roles of faculty, head of a department of research, dean, and endowed chair.

Barbara Swore Fletcher, RN, PhD, is assistant professor of nursing at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, College of Nursing. She has conducted several phenomenological studies focused on understanding communication in survivors of head and neck cancer and lymphoma. Her current
study uses phenomenological and dyadic quantitative analysis to assess communication between head and neck cancer survivors and their partners. She is currently teaching health promotion and leadership to students in the baccalaureate nursing program.

**Rebecca Green, DNS, RN, NCSN,** is assistant professor of nursing at Valdosta State University. Her practice background has included neonatal intensive care nursing, pediatric home health nursing, administration and nursing education, clinical trials monitoring, and school nursing. She has conducted qualitative research and published in the areas of vulnerable populations, chronic illness, and innovative pedagogies. She teaches across multiple program levels in diverse content areas such as professional nursing development and community health at Valdosta State University.

**Kajsa Landgren, PhD, RN,** is a senior lecturer at Lund University, Sweden. Her research focuses on infantile colic. She has studied how infantile colic affects the family and the effect of acupuncture in qualitative and quantitative studies.

**Joan Such Lockhart, PhD, RN, CORLN, AOCN, CNE, ANEF, FAAN,** is clinical professor of nursing and associate dean for academic affairs at Duquesne University School of Nursing. Dr. Lockhart has conducted phenomenological research focused on the work experience of oncology nurses and nurses’ political involvement. She has mentored doctoral students from the United States, Japan, and Lebanon in using phenomenology to explore the health-related experiences of vulnerable populations and caregivers, as well as the work experiences of clinical nurses and nurse faculty.

**Tommie Nelms, PhD, RN,** is professor of nursing at Kennesaw State University. She is director of the WellStar School of Nursing and coordinator of the Doctor of Nursing Science program. She has a long history of conducting and directing phenomenological research and has been a student of Heideggerian philosophy and research for many years. Her research is mainly focused on practices of mothering, caring, and family.

**Lenore K. Resick, PhD, CRNP, FNP-BC, FAANP,** is clinical professor of nursing, the Noble J. Dick Endowed Chair in Community Outreach, executive director of the Community-Based Health and Wellness Center for Older Adults, and director of the Family Nurse Practitioner Program at Duquesne University School of Nursing. She has conducted ethnographic
and phenomenological research focused on the health of vulnerable populations and advised doctoral students on phenomenological approaches to research.

**Donna Sabella, PhD, MEd, MSN, RN, PMHNP-BC,** is director of global studies and director of the Office of Human Trafficking, Drexel University’s College of Nursing and Health Professions. A mental health nurse, she is interested in hearing people’s stories and in qualitative research. She has taught research courses to undergraduate nursing students.

**Danuta Wojnar, PhD, RN, MED, FAAN,** is associate professor and department chair, Maternal–Child and Family Nursing, Seattle University College of Nursing, Seattle, Washington. She is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (cohort of 2012) Executive Nurse Fellow.
FOREWORD

Phenomenology is a descriptive approach to knowledge. It seeks to describe and articulate the fundamental structures—or essences, or grammars—of human experience just as this experience presents itself to and in and for experience. As such, phenomenology can explore the logic of the whole gamut of human experience—from the experience of looking at a work of art to the experience of falling in love with another person, from the experience of perceiving an object in space to the experience of fixing a broken piece of furniture. Any gerund—anything that ends in “-ing”—can be a fruitful field for a phenomenological investigation to be performed to elucidate its structure or grammar as an experience.

Of course, phenomenology’s descriptive approach to knowledge can and should also serve a critical function. While phenomenology is not opposed to other ways of knowing, in particular, those ways of engaging and understanding reality practiced in the natural and physical sciences, it does resist the attempt to colonize all knowledge and truth by some practitioners of these empirical sciences. As such, in a field like nursing, phenomenological investigations will offer a critical perspective against natural science approaches that seek to know and affect the human mind and body as physical or material objects open to study only through empirical science and treatable only through physical remedies like medicine or surgery.

A phenomenological approach in the health sciences will ask: What is the essence of the experiences of being diagnosed, being sick, being a patient, being dependent, being hospitalized, recovering, or dying? And, in the nursing field, phenomenology will ask: What is the essence of caregiving, of being present with the dying, of celebrating recovery, and so on?

Phenomenology recognizes that illness, or being ill, for example, is not only a physical phenomenon in an objective sense: Illness is also a lived experience of the subjective, embodied, feeling self. Phenomenology also recognizes that a nurse’s work is not only or even primarily scientific work,
but human work: The work of a nurse is the work of an embodied subject, a feeling and knowing and experiencing person in relationship to another embodied subject, the patient, who is another feeling and knowing and experiencing person. Phenomenology in nursing is concerned with the subjective, living person in her or his lived body in the experience of health and illness—both nurse and patient. As such, it could have radical effects.

Jeffrey McCurry, PhD
Director, Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center,
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Series Foreword

In this section, which is published in all volumes of the series, we discuss some key aspects of any qualitative design. This is basic information that might be helpful to novice researchers or those new to the designs and methods described in each chapter. The material is not meant to be rigid and prescribed because qualitative research by its nature is fluid and flexible; the reader should use any ideas that are relevant and discard any ideas that are not relevant to the specific project in mind.

Before beginning a project, it is helpful to commit to publishing it. Of course, it will be publishable because you will use every resource at hand to make sure it is of high quality and contributes to knowledge. Theses and dissertations are meaningless exercises if only the student and committee know what was learned. It is rather heart-breaking to think of all the effort that senior faculty have exerted to complete a degree and yet not to have anyone else benefit by the work. Therefore, some additional resources are included here. Appendix A for each book is a list of journals that publish qualitative research. References to the current nursing qualitative research textbooks are included so that readers may find additional material from sources cited in those chapters.

Focus

In qualitative research the focus is emic—what we commonly think of as “from the participant’s point of view.” The researcher’s point of view, called “the etic view,” is secondary and does not take precedence over what the participant wants to convey, because in qualitative research, the focus is on the person and his or her story. In contrast, quantitative
researchers take pains to learn as much as they can about a topic and focus the research data collection on what they want to know. Cases or subjects that do not provide information about the researcher’s agenda are considered outliers and are discarded or treated as aberrant data. Qualitative researchers embrace outliers and actively seek diverse points of view from participants to enrich the data. They sample for diversity within groups and welcome different perceptions even if they seek fairly homogenous samples. For example, in Leenerts and Magilvy’s (2000) grounded theory study to examine self-care practices among women, they narrowed the study to low-income, White, HIV-positive women but included both lesbian and heterosexual women.

PROPOSALS

There are many excellent sources in the literature on how to write a research proposal. A couple are cited here (Annersten, 2006; Mareno, 2012; Martin, 2010; Schmelzer, 2006), and examples are found in Appendices B, C, and D. Proposals for any type of research should include basic elements about the purpose, significance, theoretical support, and methods. What is often lacking is a thorough discussion about the rationale. The rationale is needed for the overall design as well as each step in the process. Why qualitative research? Why ethnography and not phenomenology? Why go to a certain setting? Why select the participants through word of mouth? Why use one particular type of software over another to analyze data?

Other common mistakes are not doing justice to significance and failure to provide sufficient theoretical support for the approach. In qualitative research, which tends to be theory generating instead of theory testing, the author still needs to explain why the study is conducted from a particular frame of reference. For example, in some ethnographic work, there are hypotheses that are tested based on the work of prior ethnographers who studied that culture, but there is still a need to generate new theory about current phenomena within that culture from the point of view of the specific informants for the subsequent study.

Significance is underappreciated as an important component of research. Without justifying the importance of the study or the potential impact of the study, there is no case for why the study should be conducted. If a study cannot be justified, why should sponsors fund it? Why should participants agree to participate? Why should the principal investigator bother to conduct it?
COMMONALITIES IN METHODS

Interviewing Basics

One of the best resources for learning how to interview for qualitative research is by Patton (2002), and readers are referred to his book for a detailed guide to interviewing. He describes the process, issues, and challenges in a way that readers can focus their interview in a wide variety of directions that are flexible, yet rigorous. For example, in ethnography, a mix of interview methods is appropriate, ranging from unstructured interviews or informal conversation to highly structured interviews. Unless nurses are conducting mixed-design studies, most of their interviews will be semistructured. Semistructured interviews include a few general questions, but the interviewer is free to allow the interviewee to digress along any lines he or she wishes. It is up to the interviewer to bring the interview back to the focus of the research. This requires skill and sensitivity.

Some general guidelines apply to semistructured interviews:

- Establish rapport.
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, the second question is much more likely to generate a meaningful response than the first in a grounded theory study of coping with cervical cancer.

Interviewer: Were you afraid when you first heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

Participant: Yes.

Contrast the above with the following:

Interviewer: What was your first thought when you heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

Participant: I thought of my young children and how they were going to lose their mother and that they would grow up not knowing how much I loved them.

- Continuously “read” the person’s reactions and adapt the approach based on response to questions. For example, in the interview about coping with the diagnosis, the participant began tearing so the interviewer appropriately gave her some time to collect herself. Maintaining silence is one of the most difficult things to learn for researchers who have been classically trained in quantitative methods. In structured interviewing, we are trained to continue despite distractions and
to eliminate bias, which may involve eliminating emotion and emotional reactions to what we hear in the interview. Yet the quality of outcomes in qualitative designs may depend on the researcher–participant relationship. It is critical to be authentic and to allow the participant to be authentic.

**Ethical Issues**

The principles of the Belmont Commission apply to all types of research: respect, justice, beneficence. Perhaps these are even more important when interviewing people about their culture or life experiences. These are highly personal and may be painful for the person to relate, though I have found that there is a cathartic effect to participating in naturalistic research with an empathic interviewer (de Chesnay, 1991, 1993).

**Rigor**

Readers are referred to the classic paper on rigor in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1986). Rather than speak of validity and reliability we use other terms, such as accuracy (Do the data represent truth as the participant sees it?) and replicability (Can the reader follow the decision trail to see why the researcher concluded as he or she did?).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Analyzing data requires many decisions about how to collect data and whether to use high-tech measures such as qualitative software or old-school measures such as colored index cards. The contributors to this series provide examples of both.

Mixed designs require a balance between the assumptions of quantitative research while conducting that part and qualitative research during that phase. It can be difficult for novice researchers to keep things straight. Researchers are encouraged to learn each paradigm well and to be clear about why they use certain methods for their purposes. Each type of design can stand alone, and one should never think that qualitative research is less than quantitative; it is just different.

Mary de Chesnay
REFERENCES


©Springer Publishing Company
Preface

Qualitative research has evolved from a slightly disreputable beginning to wide acceptance in nursing research. Approaches that focus on the stories and perceptions of the people, instead of what scientists think the world is about, have been a tradition in anthropology for a long time and have created a body of knowledge that cannot be replicated in the lab. The richness of human experience is what qualitative research is all about. Respect for this tradition was long in coming among the scientific community. Nurses seem to have been in the forefront, though, and though many of my generation (children of the 1950s and 1960s) were classically trained in quantitative techniques, we found something lacking. Perhaps because I am a psychiatric nurse, I have been trained to listen to people tell me their stories, whether the stories are problems that nearly destroy the spirit, or uplifting accounts of how they live within their cultures, or how they cope with terrible traumas and chronic diseases. It seems logical to me that a critical part of developing new knowledge that nurses can use to help patients is to find out first what the patients themselves have to say.

In the fourth volume of this series, the focus is on phenomenology, perhaps the core of qualitative research. Derived from philosophy, phenomenology seems to me to capture the richness of human experience from the person’s point of view in ways that no other design does.

Other volumes address ethnography, life history, grounded theory, historical research, participatory action research, and data analysis. The volume on data analysis also includes material on focus groups and case studies, and two types of research that can be used with a variety of designs, including quantitative research and mixed designs. Efforts have been made to recruit contributors from several countries to demonstrate global applicability of qualitative research.

There are many fine textbooks on nursing research that provide an overview of all the methods, but our aim here is to provide specific information
to guide graduate students or experienced nurses who are novices in the designs represented in this series in conducting studies from the point of view of our constituents—patients and their families. The studies conducted by contributors provide much practical advice for beginners as well as new ideas for experienced researchers. Some authors take a formal approach, but others speak quite personally in the first person. We hope you catch their enthusiasm and have fun conducting your own studies.

Mary de Chesnay


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In any publishing venture, there are many people who work together to produce the final version. The contributors kindly share their expertise to offer advice and counsel to novices, and the reviewers ensure the quality of submissions. All of them have come up through the ranks as qualitative researchers and their participation is critical to helping novices learn the process.

No publication is successful without great people who not only know how to do their own jobs but also how to guide authors. At Springer Publishing Company, we are indebted to Margaret Zuccarini for the idea for the series, her ongoing support, and her excellent problem-solving skills. The person who guided the editorial process and was available for numerous questions, which he patiently answered as if he had not heard them a hundred times, was Joseph Morita. Also critical to the project were the people who proofed the work, marketed the series, and transformed it to hard copies, among them Jenna Vaccaro and Kris Parrish.

At Kennesaw State University, Dr. Tommie Nelms, director of the WellStar School of Nursing, was a constant source of emotional and practical support in addition to her chapter contribution to this volume on phenomenology. Her administrative assistant, Mrs. Cynthia Elery, kindly assigned student assistants to complete several chores, which enabled the author to focus on the scholarship. Bradley Garner, Chadwick Brown, and Chino Duke are our student assistants and unsung heroes of the university.

Finally, I am grateful to my cousin, Amy Dagit, whose expertise in proofreading saved many hours for some of the chapters. Any mistakes left are mine alone.

The body is our general medium for having a world.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Phenomenology of Perception

©Springer Publishing Company
Phenomenological research methods are born out of a long tradition of a philosophy that originated in Germany. While often referred to as the phenomenological movement, there were many different varieties of phenomenological philosophy reflecting very little unity. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is considered the father of the phenomenological movement, and for him, the unifying feature was the common conviction that it was only by return to the primary sources of direct intuition and to insights into essential structures derived from them that the great traditions of philosophy with their concepts and problems could be put to use (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 5). Husserl’s phenomenology was a response to what he saw as a crisis in science whereby science was crying out for a philosophy that would restore its contact with the deeper concerns of man (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 75). Husserl’s famous saying “to the things themselves” can be seen as the core of all phenomenological research, indicating the notion that describing lived experience is the essence of phenomenology.

The second most notable figure in the German phenomenological movement was Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Husserl and Heidegger were senior and junior academic colleagues, often teaching at the same university. Heidegger succeeded Husserl as department chair in Freiburg in 1928, and Husserl hoped Heidegger would further the philosophical work Husserl had begun. While he had initially studied his senior colleague’s philosophical work, Heidegger’s philosophy went in a very different direction from Husserl’s, with a focus on human existence rather than pure ego.

Although he was not considered a phenomenologist in the strictest sense, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), a student of Heidegger’s, produced work that is often used as the philosophical framework for phenomenological research. Gadamer met both Husserl and Heidegger and considered Heidegger the greatest influence on his thinking. While
Heidegger’s philosophy is considered hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, Gadamer’s philosophy is considered philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer focused on the notion of prejudice or pre-judgment and its positive, rather than negative, impact on understanding. For him, language was far more than a tool; it was the universal horizon of hermeneutic experience. For Gadamer, the basic mode of understanding for humans was conversation, whereby a “fusion of horizons” occurred for the conversational partners.

From Germany, the phenomenological movement moved to France through the works of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). Jean-Paul Sartre became acquainted with the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger during a period of study in Berlin. While unique to him, Sartre’s philosophy evolved to one that reflected features of both Husserl and Heidegger as a result of his attention to both consciousness and existence. From time to time, however, Sartre charged both Husserl and Heidegger with what he called “bad faith” within their philosophical systems. Methodologically, Sartre was more like Husserl, favoring description over explanation, but because his book Being and Nothingness reflected a nod to Heidegger’s major work, Being and Time, he was referred to as “the French Heidegger.” Sartre never referred to himself or his philosophy as phenomenological, and because of the themes of futility, despair, and freedom that appear throughout his work, most consider him an existential philosopher in addition to a novelist, critic, playwright, editor, and political figure.

The next philosopher in the French phenomenological movement was Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a friend (although a strained friendship at times) and colleague of Sartre’s. Merleau-Ponty studied both Husserl and Heidegger at the Sorbonne, but focused more on the philosophy of Husserl. He considered Husserl’s later writings to be key, as opposed to Sartre, who focused more on Husserl’s early work. The dissent between the two French phenomenologists was reflected in their famous sayings: Merleau-Ponty’s “We are condemned to meaning” and Sartre’s “We are condemned to freedom.”

Merleau-Ponty’s most famous work was titled The Primacy of Perception. By assigning it primacy, Merleau-Ponty did not mean that perception was privileged, but rather that perception constituted the ground level for all knowledge and preceded other levels, such as those of the cultural world and specifically that of science (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 560). For him, the primary task was to see and describe how the world presents itself to perception. Methodologically, Merleau-Ponty was similar to Husserl, advocating bracketing, reduction, and description rather than explanation. As had Sartre, Merleau-Ponty included the body and embodiment as part of his philosophical system, something lacking in Husserl and Heidegger.
Philosophers like Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) have also been associated with the phenomenological movement to greater or lesser degrees, and their works have been used as philosophical frameworks for phenomenological research, though not to the extent of the other philosophers noted.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL MOVEMENT

The beginning of the phenomenological movement is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. The word “phenomenology” can be traced back through history from Buddhist philosophers to Immanuel Kant, and although used by other philosophers prior to Husserl, its meaning was different then. It is generally agreed that the movement began in the early 1900s with a group of academic philosophers at the University of Gottingen. Like many such movements, it began as a reaction against sociocultural and political forces that were occurring at the time in Germany. One of the main reasons cited for the birth of phenomenology was the progress of the natural sciences and the attempts to view science and scientific methods as the answer to all questions of the natural world as well as human problems and, ultimately, the only route to truth. There were also issues with the decline of speculative philosophy and efforts to convert philosophy into a branch of psychology, labeled psychologism (Spiegelberg, 1982, pp. 19–20). Husserl and those who followed him were intent on creating and using a rigorous human science in the service of human understanding. Their search was for a methodology that would put human science, Geisteswissenschaften, on the same footing as the sciences of nature, the Naturwissenschaften.

Pinning down a definition of phenomenology can be difficult and is somewhat dependent on the philosophical tradition from which it comes. The term phenomenology comes from the Greek word phainomenon, meaning “appearance.” Although phenomenology might commonly be called the doctrine of the “intentional structure of consciousness,” various philosophers would interpret that definition differently. According to Spiegelberg (1982), “the first objective of the phenomenological approach is the enlarging and deepening of the range of our immediate experience” (p. 679). Meeting this objective was the intent of Husserl’s motto, “to the things themselves” (Zu den Sachen), whereby phenomena would be afforded a “fuller and fairer hearing” than traditional empiricism had afforded them. Turning to “unadulterated phenomena” requires the “identification and deliberate elimination of theoretical constructs and symbolisms”—not an easy task and one that takes
determined effort. It is difficult “to undo the effects of habitual patterns of thought and return to the pristine innocence of first seeing” (p. 680). Although difficult, it has been proposed that emancipation from preconceptions and prejudices is the most teachable aspect of the phenomenological method.

The positivist, empirical notion favoring simplicity and economy in thought, evidenced by Occam’s razor, was dismissed by phenomenologists in favor of “a genuine will to know,” which requires a spirit of generosity, reverence for the undertaking, and a lens rather than a hammer. While empirics were restricted to sense data only, phenomenologists questioned what other data could be used, noting that simplification may not hold the best access to a legitimate and full picture of reality (Spiegelberg, 1982).

Given that the two main figures of the phenomenological movement were Husserl and Heidegger and that their versions of phenomenology influenced most others, the following section will highlight the major differences in their philosophies, some of which have been cited in the previous discussion. These differences become important when doing phenomenological research because of the essential expectation that phenomenological researchers declare the philosopher whose work underlies their methods and demonstrate allegiance to that phenomenologist’s philosophy. This expectation is clearly the case within nursing research, as nursing scholars have developed depth of knowledge and expertise about the various philosophers and their “brands” of phenomenology. There is also an expectation that original works of the selected philosopher have been read and understood by the researcher, in addition to following descriptions or interpretations by others regarding the philosophy.

Husserl’s form of phenomenology is considered descriptive or eidetic and is described as the science of the essence of consciousness or an inquiry into the consciousness of the researcher (Porter, 1998). As an epistemology, the researcher or subject calls attention to how the object or experience appears to the consciousness. Husserl’s brand requires the use of bracketing in an effort to maintain objectivity. With bracketing, the researcher’s preconceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs are held in abeyance to ensure that they do not prejudice the description of the phenomenon. This process within Husserl’s phenomenology is also referred to as phenomenological reduction or epoché. Porter (1998, p. 20) described bracketing as “adoption of a doubtful attitude about conventional understandings of the experience.” In the final phenomenological description, however, all data—including the researcher’s experience with the phenomenon, preconceptions, and assumptions about the phenomenon as well as new insights and understandings about the phenomenon—are used.
Another concept relative to Husserl’s brand of phenomenology is *intentionality*, the essential feature of consciousness, meaning that consciousness is directed *toward* an object. When persons are conscious, they are always conscious of something, and for humans, that consciousness is of the world. For Husserl, it was the intentionality of consciousness that connected and constituted the object or phenomenon of interest (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 99). Husserl’s intention was the creation of a systematic analysis of consciousness and its objects (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 254). Another essential feature of Husserl’s phenomenology is essences or universals as he called them, which are discussed within Spiegelberg’s methodological steps.

Heidegger’s phenomenological philosophy is considered ontology in that he originally attempted to outline the structure or “constituents” of a human being. His brand of phenomenology is known as hermeneutic or interpretive, given his notion that human beings interpret or attach meanings to their experiences as humans. If, for Husserl, the “wonder of all wonders” was pure ego and pure consciousness, for Heidegger the “wonder of all wonders” was that there is Being (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 347). Heidegger’s philosophy was a study of Being through an investigation of beings (with much significance given to the size of the “B”s). Heidegger believed that Being was revealed by studying beings. Heidegger, unlike Husserl, believed that bracketing or ridding the mind of preconceptions to approach something in a blank way was impossible. How could one explore Being by suspending belief in it? Heidegger did believe, however, that humans were so close or so immersed in being that it was often difficult for them to see without moving away from it to better explore it. This closeness to being or “everydayness” is often taken for granted by humans, but can be revealed through phenomenological questioning and examination. Heidegger might also question the notion that interpretation of a phenomenon is a step beyond description, as outlined by Spiegelberg’s method, given his belief that, as human beings, things come to us already interpreted (Finlay, 2009, p. 11).

As evidenced by the title of his work *Being and Time*, Heidegger believed that Being was inextricably tied to and constituted by Time, of which history was a part. Other constituents of the human being were radical finitude, intersubjectivity, involvement with the world, language, and one’s concern for one’s Being. Heidegger’s brand of phenomenology explores the meaning of Being for a being or beings in the world. His word for Being, a being, or beings was *Dasein*, which in German means existence or “being there.” Heidegger believed that the search to find the meaning of one’s life could cause anxiety or unsettledness, and that there could be two reactions to this anxiety for humans. In one case, humans flee the anxiety and fall into...
conforming to the behavior of others, thus failing to find the unique meaning of their lives and thereby living inauthentically. In the other case, a person stays with the anxiety while pushing forward into the unique possibilities and projects of his or her life, not expecting any final deep meaning, but rather living with authenticity (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 267). For Heidegger, with authenticity come flexibility, aliveness, and joy.

SPIEGELBERG’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

According to Spiegelberg (1982), a more common feature of phenomenology than some others was its method, and though none of the early phenomenologists elaborated a system of rules for their methodological procedures, Spiegelberg formulated a method from their philosophies. His steps are as follows: (a) investigating particular phenomena, (b) investigating general essences, (c) apprehending essential relationships among essences, (d) watching modes of appearing, (e) exploring the constitution of phenomena in consciousness, (f) suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena, and (g) interpreting the meaning of phenomena. He noted that while there was general implicit agreement on the practice of the first three steps, the other steps were used by a smaller group. Each of the steps is elaborated.

1. Investigating Particular Phenomena

Three overlapping operations make up this first step, often called “phenomenological description”: the intuitive grasp of the phenomena, their analytic examinations, and their description.

a. Phenomenological Intuiting: Rather than use the term intuition, which has a somewhat mystical connotation, Spiegelberg used the noun form of the verb intuit, “intuiting,” to describe this first step. This phase involves phenomenological seeing, described as “opening one’s eyes,” “keeping them open,” “not getting blinded,” and “looking and listening.” In this step, one begins by attempting to grasp the uniqueness of the phenomenon by comparing and contrasting it to related phenomena and examining similarities and differences.

b. Phenomenological Analyzing: This middle phase is an analysis of the phenomenon itself, rather than the expressions that refer to it. Constituents of the phenomenon are distinguished along with “exploration of their relations to and connections with adjacent phenomena”
This step consists of a “general examination of the structure of the phenomena according to the components and their configuration” (p. 692).

c. Phenomenological Describing: According to Spiegelberg, this phase begins in silence and is born out of perplexity and frustration in the face of the phenomena one is trying to describe. Its ultimate function is to provide “unmistakable guideposts to the phenomena” (p. 694) indicative of the uniqueness and irreducibility of the phenomena. Describing affirms the connections between an individual thing and every other thing that denotes or connotes it. The simplest method of description is through negation; other ways are through metaphor and analogy. All describing, however, is selective at best, given the impossibility of exhausting all possibilities.

2. Investigating General Essences (Eidetic Intuiting)

Apprehending a general essence or eidos is the next step in the phenomenological method. An antecedent or exemplifying particular must precede determination of a general essence. The qualities and characteristics of the particular are intuited, leading to awareness of common elements, affinities, patterns, or essences (Spiegelberg, 1982).

3. Apprehending Essential Relationships

This step includes “the discovery of certain essential relationships or connections pertaining to such essences” (p. 699), of which Spiegelberg notes two: relationships within a single essence and relationships between several essences. In examining relationships with a single essence, the concern is whether the components are or are not essential to it. Husserl proposed “free imaginative variation” to deal with this question. Imagine leaving off certain components entirely or replacing them with others and see what happens to the fundamental structure of the phenomenological essence. Either the essence of the phenomenon will remain the same, not requiring the deleted component, or the structure will be essentially changed, indicating a need for the deleted or replaced component. One is cautioned in this process of essential insight, however, to recognize that apprehending essential relationship involves “more than separating an essence into its component parts” (p. 700).

Examining essential relations between several essences also requires imaginative variation, using the same processes of adding and deleting essences to reveal the degree to which they are related. According to Spiegelberg, “it is always the essential nature of the essences in relation to each other
which determines their essential relationships” (p. 701). Apprehending essential relationships within a single essence may be called analytical knowledge, while apprehending relationships among several essences suggests synthetic knowledge. The question becomes whether in the relationship to one another, essences are different from what they are alone.

In determining requirements for apprehending essential relationships of either kind, Spiegelberg notes that the features needed for phenomenological insight are both experience and intuition in the face of imagination; “such insights cannot be obtained by mere thinking or reasoning” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 702). Imaginative operations into the unique and particular aspects of a case are required, along with efforts to avoid hasty generalization.

4. Watching Modes of Appearing
Phenomenology is the systematic exploration of not only what appears but also of the way things appear, known as “modes of giveness.” Ways of appearing are often overlooked in favor of what appears. Modes of giveness have to do with the degree to which a whole object can be seen, which is most often not the case. Generally what is seen are facets of an object, while the whole object is assumed to exist. At other times the object is not seen with clarity, but rather is seen through a haze or a veil. An example of appearance in this context is the paintings of the Impressionists.

5. Exploring the Constitution of Phenomena in Consciousness
“Constitution” was a key term in Husserl’s phenomenology, indicating that the objects of consciousness were “achievements” of constituting acts (p. 706). Constitution consists of exploring the ways in which a phenomenon establishes itself and takes shape in consciousness. At first things are new, maybe strange, confusing or disorienting, but gradually the newness is integrated into familiar patterns of the world. Constitution is normally spontaneous and passive, but there can be active constitution as one reflects and tries to integrate unrelated phenomena. Either way, constitution begins as small perceptions of an elementary kind that enlarge and merge with past perceptual patterns. According to Spiegelberg (1982), this constituting integration is not by chance associations, but rather follows structural “laws.”

6. Suspending Belief in Existence
This step is what is commonly called phenomenological reduction and was considered by Husserl “the master key to phenomenology,” although for others it was not common ground (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 708). Even Husserl himself never fully defined or described the step to his own satisfaction.
The original meaning of phenomenological reduction came from Husserl’s mathematics background, whereby the reduction was associated with the mathematical operation of bracketing. The idea is that one detaches the phenomena from everyday experience or the context of natural living “while preserving their content as fully and as purely as possible.” One is to suspend judgment “as to the existence or nonexistence of this content” (p. 709).

This step is seen to facilitate genuine intuiting, analyzing, and describing, as it frees one from the usual preoccupation with reality. The reduction should help one to do justice to all data, “real or unreal or doubtful,” giving them all equal attention. According to Spiegelberg, phenomenological reduction, which some might view as suspension of the question of existence, does not prevent one from concerns about human existence and its relationship to human essence. As he said, “there is no escape from the earnestness and persistence of the question of reality and of being” (p. 711).

7. Interpreting Concealed Meanings
This last step was most used by hermeneutic phenomenologists. It is seen as a step beyond descriptive phenomenology, and its most complete demonstration was in Heidegger’s Being and Time (Sein und Zeit), as later modified by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Hermeneutics is an attempt to interpret the sense or meaning of phenomena and hermeneutic phenomenology’s “goal is the discovery of meanings which are not immediately manifest to our intuiting, analyzing and describing” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 712). The interpreter must go beyond what is immediately given to unveil hidden meanings, which are most often concerned with the problems of human existence and the human situation lived in a mysterious cosmos (p. 714).

In summarizing the significance of the phenomenological approach he outlined, Spiegelberg (1982, p. 716) proposed that it could “be found in its deliberateness and its conscious challenge to the reductionism of Occam’s.” The phenomenological approach is a deliberate attempt to enrich the world of human experience by bringing out neglected aspects of the experience with the deeper motive of “reverence for the phenomena.” “One might describe the underlying unity of the phenomenological procedures as the unusually obstinate attempt to look at the phenomena and to remain faithful to them before even thinking about them” (p. 717). For Spiegelberg, it was not so much a specific step that distinguished phenomenology from other methods as much as “the spirit of philosophical reverence as the first and foremost norm of the philosophical enterprise” (p. 717).
OTHER PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODS

There are other, more current, phenomenological approaches that nurse researchers use in phenomenological research. All of them have formalized the philosophy of one or more of the historical phenomenologists into step-wise processes. Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1975), and Van Kaam (1966) were psychologists at Duquesne. They developed a psychological phenomenological method with individual deviations that closely followed the philosophy of Husserl and his three interlocking steps of phenomenological reduction, description, and search for essences. The steps of the Duquesne psychologists' methods are somewhat similar, guiding the researcher to (a) read through all participant descriptions a number of times to get a sense of the whole; (b) extract significant statements; (c) formulate meaning units; (d) collapse the meaning units into themes; (e) analyze and synthesize the meanings; and (f) write an integrated, exhaustive description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

Van Manen (1990) advocated a somewhat different kind of phenomenological method mainly from the Heideggerian tradition. His method of exploring lived experience is an interpretive, artistic approach, the foundations of which are writing and language. According to van Manen, “writing is our method” (p. 124); “writing fixes thought on paper” (p. 125). The writing of the text is the research; writing teaches us what we know and the way in which we know it. Writing is a process of self-making and self-consciousness and phenomenological researchers often don’t know what they know until it is written down. Writing is also the process that affords the ability to “see” (know, feel, understand) phenomena and as such requires the dialectic of writing and rewriting to create depth of meaning.

Van Manen’s process begins with participants writing their lived experience or sharing it with the researcher. Researchers might also closely observe participants in an experience or have them maintain diaries, journals, or logs. Participants’ experiences might then be compared to those found in literature, poetry, biographies, autobiographies, or other life histories, as well as artistic materials such as paintings, sculptures, music, or films. Other phenomenological literature about the topic can also be consulted for comparison and dialogue. Phenomenological themes or structures of experience are then explicated. As the analysis and synthesis continue, it is writing that brings forth the meanings, the structures, and the understandings of the phenomenon.
Two of the first nurse researchers to explicate a phenomenological method were Diekelmann and Allen (1989). Their hermeneutic method was in the tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer. Diekelmann also taught the method to nurses and nurse researchers who attended the Heideggerian hermeneutic institutes she led for many years at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Diekelmann’s method was unique in that she supported the notion of research teams, whereby researchers would meet regularly to analyze each other’s texts and dialogue about interpretive meanings.

The method begins with the researcher or researchers writing an interpretive summary of each research text, whether interview transcripts, stories, journals, or documents, to get an overall understanding of the text. Teams then come together to discuss the similarities and differences regarding their interpretations of the text(s) and come to a consensus about the meanings, always going back to the text(s) to verify meanings. Researchers then identify relational themes, which are those that cut across all texts. Throughout the interpretive process, texts continue to be read and reread. In the next stage, constitutive patterns are identified. Constitutive patterns are those present in all the documents or texts, and get their name from the Heideggerian ontology in which Heidegger outlined all the characteristics of the human being that made the human being what it was or that “constituted” the human being, such as death, time, world, and other humans. The last stage is preparation of the final interpretive report, using sufficient numbers of excerpts from the texts to support interpretative findings. Rigor in Diekelmann’s method was addressed by the use of group consensus or consensual validation. Multiple stages of interpretation also provided a means of bias control (Diekelmann & Allen, 1989).

Another nurse who has developed and disseminated a great deal of expertise regarding phenomenological research methodology is Patricia Munhall (1994, 2012). Munhall entreats researchers “to think phenomenologically” and “be phenomenological” (Munhall, 2012). Although she has explicated a method, she is less concerned with researchers following a formalized process than with their development of a strong depth of knowledge related to the philosophical tenets of phenomenology and the creation of a phenomenological mind set for approaching phenomenological research. Munhall believes that “becoming phenomenologic,” as she calls it, leads one to become a “very understanding person.” She espouses a flexible method, similar to that of van Manen. Her method is as follows:
1. Immersion
Munhall (2012, p. 122) considers immersion an essential step in which researchers do in-depth study of the philosophy of phenomenology; as she says, “you read, read, read about it.” During this beginning stage, it is essential that researchers become familiar with phenomenological philosophers, methods, and different interpretations of phenomenology.

2. Coming to the Phenomenological Aim of the Inquiry
In this stage, there is articulation of the aim of the study. The researchers present their relationship to the study and describe the context and experience(s) that brought them to the study, as well as their present situated contexts. The researchers “decenter” by explicating their assumptions, biases, intuitions, motives, and beliefs in an attempt to come to “unknow.” According to Munhall (2012, p. 139), “the state of being decentered and unknowing is challenging to achieve. Unknowing is an art and calls for a great amount of introspection.” In the final phase, the aim of the study is articulated in the form of a phenomenological question, whereby the ultimate aim is greater understanding of what it means to be human.

3. Existential Inquiry, Expressions, and Processing
According to Munhall (2012, p. 144), “this stage requires attentiveness, intuitiveness, constant reflection on decentering, active listening, interviews or conversations clarifying, synthesizing, writing, taking photographs, creating verse, and almost anything that will reflect your participant’s and your consciousness and awareness of the experience.” This stage is similar to what has been described by others as “dwelling,” something Munhall believes is essential. She further explicates phases of this stage:

- a. Listen to self and others: develop heightened attentiveness to self and others.
- b. Reflect on personal experiences and expressions.
- c. Provide experiential descriptive expressions: “the experiencer.”
- d. Provide experiential descriptive expressions: “others engaged in the experience.”
- e. Provide experiential descriptive expressions: the arts and literature.
- f. Provide anecdotal descriptive expressions as experience appears.
- g. Record ongoing reflection in your personal journal.

4. Phenomenological Contextual Processing
According to Munhall, this step parallels the previous step and occurs concurrently with it. In this step the researchers present their thoughts about the
material gathered in step III; the researchers write for the reader, describing situated contexts of those who took part in the study. Further phases of this step are:

- Analyze emergent situated contexts.
- Analyze day-to-day contingencies.
- Assess life worlds.

At this point, Munhall recommends the use of the four components of life worlds—spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality—to further the understandings of study participants, including the researcher (Munhall, 2012, pp. 159–161).

5. Analysis of Interpretive Interaction

- Integrate existential investigation with phenomenological contextual processing (from Step 4).
- Describe expression of meanings (thoughts, emotions, feelings, statements, motives, metaphors, examples, behaviors, appearances and concealments, voiced and nonvoiced language).
- Interpret expressions of meaning as appearing from the integration mentioned in a.

Munhall (2012, p. 164) cautions against lumping participants’ experiences into “acontextual, homogeneous” descriptions of “the one.” She urges researchers to highlight the variety of individual, contextual participant experiences with rich descriptions.

6. Writing the Phenomenological Narrative

- Choose a style of writing that will communicate an understanding of the meaning of this particular experience.
- Write inclusively of all meanings, not just the “general” but also the “particular.”
- Write inclusively of language and expressions of meaning with the interpretive interaction of the situated context.
- Interpret with participants the meaning of the interaction of the experience with contextual processing.
- Narrate a story that gives voice to the actual language and simultaneously interprets meaning from expressions used to describe the experience.

For Munhall (2012, p. 165), similarities and differences should “show” themselves in the narrative; “the differences are what challenge us and make
all the difference in meeting the needs of patients. The differences are para-
mount in our endeavor to understand individuals in their multiple realities, 
subjective worlds, life worlds, and individual contingencies.”

7. Writing a Narrative With Implications on the Meaning of Your Study

a. Summarize the answer to the phenomenological question with breadth 
and depth.
b. Indicate how this understanding, obtained from those who have lived 
the experience, calls for self-reflection and/or system reflection.
c. Interpret meanings of these reflections in relation to small and large 
systems with specific content.
d. Critique this interpretation with implications and recommendations for 
political, social, cultural, health care, family, and other social systems.

According to Munhall (2012, p. 169), critique is required to make the 
experience better for the future; “we do this because in the meaning of our 
study lies an authentic caring about individuals in experience.”

In summary, Munhall (2012) notes that what appears to be many linear 
steps is actually a multifaceted process that occurs simultaneously and can 
“flow” from phenomenological philosophy to research into human phenom-
ena. She sees phenomenology as “our hope for understanding in this world” 
(p. 170). Within phenomenology, Munhall sees optimism, wide-awakeness to 
experience, reverence for differences and the subsequent possibilities, along 
with its ability to liberate us from preconceptions and emancipate us from 
presuppositions that no longer work (p. 171).

RIGOR IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

While the need for criteria to evaluate the rigor and merit of phenomenolog-
ical research is seen as critical, specific strategies for assuring, adhering to, 
and verifying rigor in phenomenological research continue to be the subject 
of debate. As a qualitative research methodology, many phenomenological 
researchers have used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) trustworthiness criteria, or 
the parallel criteria as they are often called, because they parallel the validity 
and reliability criteria of the positivist paradigm. (And even to imply that 
there are two research paradigms, qualitative and quantitative, is a debatable 
issue!) The trustworthiness criteria were posed as four questions in pursuit of 
the determination of whether “the findings of an inquiry were worth paying 
attention to” (p. 290). The questions and the related strategies are as follows.
1. **Truth Value or Credibility**

How can one establish confidence in the “truth” of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with whom and the context in which the inquiry was carried out? The researcher must demonstrate the truth value or the credibility with which the multiple constructions of reality are represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Three somewhat similar strategies to enhance credibility are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time to meet certain purposes, such as establishing the trust of the respondents, learning the “culture,” and testing misinformation and distortions from either the research or the respondents (p. 301). Persistent observation adds depth by identifying those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the issue under study, ensuring that sufficient observations are made in favor of premature closure (p. 305). Triangulation can be done with different modes of data collection and different investigators, such as would occur with members of a research team.

Another strategy to enhance truth value of qualitative studies is peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the notion that a researcher’s true peer, who is “disinterested” in the study, will question, challenge, and probe the researcher to expose the researcher’s biases, meanings, and assumptions in an effort to keep the inquirer and thus the inquiry “honest” (p. 308). Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed the notion of negative case analysis whereby hypotheses were revised to account for all known cases without exception. This strategy may be incongruent with phenomenological methods such as Munhall’s, in which the aim is not to create a common homogeneous description of “the one,” but rather to showcase the variety of participant experiences.

One of the most debated strategies associated with credibility is member checking, which is the process of returning to participants to gather their feedback regarding data they shared with the researcher or the interpretations of the researcher regarding the phenomenon investigated. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking can be both formal and informal and occurs continuously. While some phenomenologists, such as Colaizzi and van Kaam, have advocated the benefits of member checking, others, like Giorgi, see it as inappropriate to the role of participants to cast them in the role of an evaluator instead of that of a describer of “everyday experience” (Beck, 1994).

2. **Applicability or Transferability**

How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)? Generalizability or external validity is not the purview of qualitative research. The degree to which findings are applicable or transferable to
another context is dependent upon the researcher providing enough information for readers to make that determination. The strategy of thick description, whereby the widest possible range of information is provided, allows for judgments of transferability by appliers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Consistency or Dependability

How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context? Just as there is the notion that there can be no validity without reliability, there is also the notion that without credibility there is no dependability. It may therefore be said that the same strategies that determine credibility in qualitative studies also determine dependability. While the quantitative paradigm advocates replication to ensure dependability, that strategy is incongruent with the notion of emergent design in qualitative studies. The one strategy that is strongly advocated in qualitative and phenomenological studies is the inquiry audit or the audit trail, whereby the processes and products of the study are systematically documented to allow for verification by an auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Neutrality or Confirmability

How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer? The major strategy for establishing confirmability is, again, the audit trail, of which triangulation and keeping a reflexive journal are a part. An audit trail consists of the following: raw data, data reduction and analysis, data reconstruction and synthesis, and process notes. For a variety of reasons, qualitative researchers are urged to maintain daily journals or reflexive diaries of activities, insights, musings, and methodological decisions.

Such recordings are helpful as part of the audit trail and also serve as opportunities for reminder, catharsis, and happenings related to one’s values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In 1989 Guba and Lincoln published the nonparallel or authenticity criteria. Their belief was that the positivist and constructivist paradigms were too different to have parallel criteria for assessing the rigor of studies and thus there was a need for a new set of criteria that were more closely aligned with the aims of the qualitative paradigm. The authenticity criteria are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.
Fairness is “the extent to which different constructions and their underlying value structures are solicited and honored within the evaluation process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 245). Ontological authenticity is “the extent to which individual respondents’ own constructions are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated” or “improvement in respondents’ conscious experiencing of the world” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). To demonstrate the achievement of this criterion, there must be testimony from respondents or notations at different points within the audit trail of their changed consciousness. Educative authenticity is “the extent to which individual respondents’ understanding of and appreciation for the construction of others outside their group are enhanced” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). In addition to testimony from respondents or audit trail notations, respondents must have opportunities to learn of the constructions of others. Catalytic authenticity is “the extent to which action is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation processes” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 249). Researchers must provide testimony or reports of such actions. Tactical authenticity “refers to the degree to which stakeholders and participants are empowered to act” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 250). Again, evidence of tactical authenticity must be provided.

Munhall (1994) developed a methodological system to address the rigor and merit of phenomenological studies called One P, Ten Rs. The One P was the Phenomenological Nod, and the Ten Rs were rigor, which consisted of resonance, reasonableness, representativeness, recognizability, raised consciousness, readability, relevance, revelations, and responsibility. Later Munhall added two more Rs, richness and responsiveness.

The Phenomenological Nod occurs when people reading or hearing the phenomenological description nod in agreement. The first nod should come from the participants who shared their experiences, although all may not agree with all parts of the description (Munhall, 1994). Resonance indicates that the written interpretation of meanings resonates with individuals. Reasonableness relates to the degree to which the interpretation seems reasonable. Representativeness is the adequacy of the interpretation to represent the various dimensions of the experience. Recognizability is when persons who have not necessarily had the experience read it and recognize aspects of an experience and become more acutely aware of it. Raised consciousness is when individuals focus on and gain understanding of an experience they had not considered previously. Readability is when the study reads like a conversation and is easily understood. Relevance is the extent to which studies absorb persons, making them more aware of their humanness and that of others. Revelations highlight something previously concealed. Responsibility reflects being true and faithful to participants, along with ethical considerations and sensitivity to conversations.
Richness is shown when a study reveals a full, embodied, multifaceted, multilayered, thoughtful, sensitive, impassioned description of a human experience. Responsiveness is the degree to which both participants and colleagues respond to the study as important, moving, and capable of releasing them from previously held preconceptions (Munhall, 1994).

Margaret Sandelowski (1986), a nursing qualitative research expert, noted that auditability was one of the main strategies for achieving rigor in qualitative studies and explicated ways to achieve it. According to Sandelowski, auditability is achieved by description, explanation, or justification of the following: (a) how the researcher became interested in the study topic; (b) how the researcher views the thing studied; (c) the specific purpose(s) of the study; (d) how participants or pieces of evidence came to be included in the study and how they were approached; (e) the impact the participants, the evidence, and the researcher had on each other; (f) how the data were collected; (g) how long data collection lasted; (h) the nature of the setting(s); (i) how the data were reduced or transformed for analysis, interpretation, and presentation; (j) how various elements of the data were weighted; (k) the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the categories developed to contain the data; and (l) the specific techniques used to determine truth value and applicability. For Sandelowski, auditability is demonstrated primarily in the research report.

DEBATED ISSUES IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

It becomes obvious, as one reads, that phenomenological philosophy and thus phenomenological research is full of variability, which one would expect when the clarity humans seek “is surrounded by halos of vagueness and indefiniteness” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 714). This section addresses some of the issues that are debated within the field of phenomenology and phenomenological research.

As stated previously, there is a clear expectation that phenomenologists remain true to a philosopher and his/her philosophical ideas when conducting phenomenological research. There is also a strong expectation that the original works of the chosen philosopher have been read and understood in order for the researcher to remain faithful to the philosophical tradition. One strong criticism of phenomenological researchers is the use of philosophical and methodological ideas that have irreconcilable differences (Finlay, 2009), which can be the case when philosophers with conflicting philosophies and thus methodologies are used to frame a study.
One issue debated is the notion of whether phenomenological description should reveal essential and general structures of a phenomenon (those shared by many) or focus instead on individual experience and thus idiosyncratic details. Halling (2008) argues that both should be accepted. He proposes three levels of analysis: (a) particular experience, such as a person’s story; (b) themes common to the phenomenon; and (c) probes for the universal and philosophical aspects of being human. Researchers are counseled to move back and forth between experience and abstraction and between experience and reflection at the different levels.

Historically, there has been a debate about the number of participants or observations required to adequately and successfully reveal a phenomenon under study. The question about numbers might best be addressed by building on the issue of whether or not phenomenology is, or should be, idiographic, general and essential, or universal and reflective of human beings. Early on, Lincoln & Guba (1985) noted that while informational redundancy or data saturation were the criterion measure for the number of participants or observations, it was unusual that a dozen or so participants, if properly selected, would not exhaust most available information, and they recommended the processes of purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling. Giorgi (1975) opined that at least three participants were needed to gather enough variation for an essence. According to Sandelowski (1986), however, the sample size could not be predetermined because it was dependent upon the nature of the data and where the data took the researcher. The best answer to the issue of numbers is the determination of the researcher’s purpose; are normative or idiographic understandings being sought?

Another issue of debate is the degree of interpretation researchers should afford their phenomenological descriptions. While recognizing that every experience of a thing is something that has already been interpreted, there are distinctions between descriptive phenomenology and interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, with descriptive staying very close to what is given and interpretive moving beyond what is given (Finlay, 2009). Finlay suggests that description and interpretation be viewed as a continuum, whereby phenomenological work is considered more or less interpretative. She supports the notion that hard-and-fast boundaries between description and interpretation limit the spirit of phenomenology.

The issue of researcher subjectivity is another with which phenomenologists struggle. To what extent should researchers bring “their own experience to the foreground” and explore “their own embodied subjectivity” as they strive to explore and describe participants’ experiences? For some
phenomenologists, the process of reduction or bracketing should render the researcher as “noninfluencial and neutral as possible” (Finlay, 2009, p. 12). Others believe that one’s own experiences and understandings cannot be put aside, nor should they be. For most, the best path is a critical awareness of the researcher’s preconceived biases and presuppositions in an attempt to separate them from participants’ descriptions; striving for openness to the other while acknowledging biases. Too much focus on researcher self-reflection may lead to what has been called “navel gazing,” giving too much attention to the researcher’s perspective and not enough to the participants’. While some degree of self-knowledge for the researcher is inevitable, the ultimate goal is explication of the participant’s perspective and the phenomenon in its appearing leading to a researcher–participant cocreation of data (Finlay, 2009).

Following the previous two issues is the notion of whether or not phenomenology is or should be critical. Is phenomenology to be modernist, whereby truths are sought which are fixed and immutable, or is it to be postmodern, where truths are relative, multivocal, and contingent? Munhall was clear that, to the extent phenomenological findings raise critical consciousness and lead humans to question previously held notions of human experience, it should be done. Finlay (2009) proposed that phenomenology was post postmodern and cited others who challenged phenomenologists to deal with new age messiness, uncertainty, and multivocality, along with cultural criticism and enhanced reflection. Phenomenological knowledge should be seen as “contingent, proportional, emergent, and subject to alternative interpretations” (Finlay, 2009, p. 17).

THE INVISIBILITY OF RECRUITMENT AND RAPPORT

Throughout the explication of phenomenological methods, an area that remains somewhat invisible is the notion of recruitment of participants and the development of rapport with them. Most strategies associated with rigor relate to how data and participants are treated after data are collected. The assumption is made that phenomenological researchers will find “good” participants who will share their “lived experiences” truthfully and vividly. While any participant who has lived an experience is said to be as good as any other participant to share the experience, participants who can verbalize, record, or write their experiences with ease and comfort are needed. Participants who “want” to share their experiences with the researcher or who are
at least “willing” to share their experiences with the researcher are needed. While there are many experiences about which those who have lived or are living the experience are anxious to talk and welcome the opportunity to “tell their story,” there are other experiences that, for various reasons, persons are hesitant to share with others, especially persons from vulnerable or stigmatized populations.

For example, when I was recruiting mothers who had cared for adult sons who had died of AIDS, a small ad in a major city newspaper resulted in 20 calls from women in 2 days. These women, who experienced “referred stigma” (Goffman, 1963), had had limited opportunity to share their experiences with others. They clearly had a “story to tell” and welcomed a chance to share what they experienced with a nurse (and mother) who wanted to hear what they had lived. In a later study with HIV-infected mothers, I found that having the clinic nurse “vouch” for me as a nurse researcher with integrity was extremely helpful in recruiting participants. In another study of families with a family member in the ICU, a colleague and I found that patients’ nurses were essential in recruiting participant families.

The truth value and credibility of research findings are dependent upon the depth and breadth of what participants share with the researcher, and phenomenological research participants need to be made to feel that the researcher has no agenda other than hearing and understanding their experience. Participants require active listening and authentic presencing on the part of the researcher. A true sense of caring to understand the experience of the participant will serve to build rapport, along with not prejudging them and accepting their verbal and emotional expressions. It may also be helpful for researchers to briefly share some information about themselves to “break the ice” and get the conversation started. Participants need assurance that there are no right or wrong answers as they share their experiences.

Another issue faced by phenomenological nurse researchers that may not be faced by researchers from other disciplines is the inclination on the part of the researcher to give advice or health teaching about the experience and/or the inclination to ask for nursing practice information about the experience on the part of participants. While some of the long-acknowledged benefits of participating in qualitative studies for participants are catharsis, self-reflection, healing, empowerment, and sense of purpose that comes with sharing their experience (Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994), if more nursing practice knowledge is desired by participants or deemed necessary by the researcher, arrangements can be made with participants to get the information to them separate from the data collection processes. For example, nurses in the ICU where families were interviewed about their critical
illness experiences reported to my colleague and me that families that participated said “the interview with a nurse who cared was better than therapy.” In another study, where women were interviewed about their experiences of menopause, a nurse colleague promised the women a class on the pros and cons of hormone replacement therapy after the interviews were completed. Regardless of the tangible or intangible benefits, phenomenological research participants should always be made to feel that their time and their willingness to share their experience are of value and that the understandings gained will be used for good.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

At its core phenomenology is both an art and a science, “rigor and resonance” (Finlay, 2009, p. 14). According to Finlay, “research is phenomenological when it involves both rich description of the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgments about the realness of the phenomenon” (p. 8). She further noted that “any research which does not have at its core the description of ‘the things in their appearing’ focusing on experience as lived, cannot be considered phenomenological” (p. 9). For van Manen (1990, p. 13), phenomenology was like poetry, aiming for “an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling” in “an original singing of the world.” For Spiegelberg (1982, p. 717), “what distinguishes phenomenology from other methods is not so much any particular step It develops or adds to them but the spirit of philosophical reverence as the first and foremost norm of the philosophical enterprise.” Like nursing, phenomenology is a practice, and while it requires use of the right steps, it also requires a deep understanding of its philosophical underpinnings, along with “an authentic caring about individuals in experience” (Munhall, 2012, p. 169).

**REFERENCES**


