

Phenomenology

Methods, Historical Development, and Applications in Psychology

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A scientific procedure in the broad sense, phenomenology is a wedding of rationality and observation. It is methodical, systematic, critical, self-correcting, and progressive in its development and scope. The goal and subject matter of this method are to understand what has been called “consciousness” or “lived experience,” and in doing so phenomenology seeks to freshly clarify and shed light on the very meaning of these words. Such nondualistic terms as “*Dasein*” (being-in-the-world) or “human existence,” which emphasize *the world*, have been considered preferable given some contexts, aims, and findings of these investigations.

Phenomenology is not a doctrine or fixed body of knowledge, but a core method of investigation that may be flexibly adapted and remains open to new findings, terminology, and modification of practices. The antithesis of dogma, its knowledge claims, concepts, and language are informed and shaped by concrete evidence gathered in research. Such investigations have led to the abandonment of some established concepts and to the development of new ones.

Edmund Husserl identified, programmatically articulated, and named “phenomenological” procedures for use in the full spectrum of scholarly disciplines. Husserl’s phenomenological, philosophical investigations underwent many extensions and revisions in his career. Over the last hundred years, Husserl’s followers have produced a vast, variegated body of knowledge in 53 countries, in over 40 disciplines including philosophy, theology, psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, linguistics, law, architecture, literary criticism, musicology, and art history (Embree 2010). The phenomenological method has been modified for specific subject matters, problems, and goals. This chapter delineates the core of this method, some of its history, and applications relevant to psychology with a critical assessment of its limits and future.

Although the phenomenological method is distinctive, its practices are by no means new or exclusive. They have been recognized, for instance, among ancient Greeks, modern philosophers Brentano and Dilthey, Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts, the father of American psychology William James, and contemporary qualitative researchers in various traditions.

Phenomenological Method and Problems

To explicate this method, I focus on the two core attitudes or “reductions” and kinds of analysis that Husserl called respectively “phenomenological” and “eidetic.” For Husserl, all science begins in, is founded on, and modifies the natural standpoint in everyday life by adopting a special attitude that brings certain features of the world into focus and disregards others. Physics and chemistry, for instance, thematize its pure physicality. It is important that physical science is not taken as metaphysics; it does not establish physical reality as exclusive or even primary in the order of being. Given its specific standpoint, physical science is silent about all that is not physical which it systematically and rightfully excludes from its knowledge.

The Phenomenological Attitude, Reduction, and Analysis

Like all sciences, phenomenology involves a special focus and modification of the natural attitude that requires abstaining from certain performances and engaging in others. Overall, one refrains from performances that interfere with a fresh attentiveness to the world as given in experience and engages in those that enable understanding what shows itself in concrete examples of lived experiences. Because of the prevalence of the natural science attitude, there is the danger that a researcher would approach research topics as have physical scientists. Phenomenology, in its focus on lived experience, does not utilize natural science theories or knowledge. Husserl (1954) called this abstention the *epoché of the natural sciences*. Besides eliminating irrelevant physicalistic knowledge, this serves the positive function of clearing the investigator’s access to the way lived experiences originally present themselves in the prescientific lifeworld. More broadly, phenomenologists “bracket” or put out of play all prior theories and research in order to be present to concrete manifestations of the matters under investigation. One also puts out of play the natural tendency in everyday life to be concerned with the real existence of what is experienced. Because phenomenologists are interested in the way the world appears through experience, they suspend belief in the existence of what is experienced. Husserl called this *the epoché of the natural attitude*. This “reduction” to the purposes, meanings, and values of objects as they present themselves to consciousness allows what Husserl (1913) called “intentional analysis,” which other phenomenologists have extended in interpretive,

existential, and narrative analyses. These reductions of the lifeworld to experiential givens are purely methodological and do not involve disbelief or doubt about, let alone a denial of, the validity of prior scientific knowledge or of the existence of what is experienced; they only serve the vocational function of positioning the investigator to describe and reflectively analyze how the world meaningfully presents itself in the process of living.

The core phenomenological attitude is employed with additional, more specific modifications according to particular disciplinary interests, for instance those of transcendental philosophy (Husserl 1954) in contrast to such empirical sciences as psychology (Giorgi 1970) and sociology (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In each discipline, examples of lifeworld phenomena are thematized according to a limited focus that enables the investigator to conceptualize and describe matters of philosophical (epistemological, ontological, ethical), psychological (perception, emotion, personality, psychopathology), and other interests, engendering phenomenological philosophy, psychology, sociology, theology, art history, and so on. What makes these various researches phenomenological is their common strict focus on the original way the world concretely shows itself in the phenomena investigated. If a phenomenologist investigates a physicist's theoretical work or activities in which a person's existential positing of reality is of interest, for instance in philosophical or psychological research on science, the ways in which the "validity" of a theoretical model appears to the scientist and the ways "reality" presents itself in the scientist's experience are examined and described.

The Eidetic Attitude, Reduction and Analysis

The second core constituent of phenomenological method involves its focus on essences (see Wertz 2010 for an extended treatment and its relevance for psychology). Some phenomenologists do not use the word "essence" because of its misleading connotations, from Plato, of ideas that are unchanging, eternal, complete, separate from existence, and incorrigible. In contrast, empirically grounded, scientific knowledge of *eidos* (Greek, *form*) originated with Aristotle. Phenomenology aims for a distinct kind of general knowledge that is called *eidetic* by adopting a special attitude and using a rational method for clarifying emergent concepts.

According to Husserl, eidetic knowledge is based on the ubiquitous way that our ordinary experience includes both the fact that something is experienced and our immediate sense of *what it is*. For instance, if I see my grandfather's mahogany table, I am present not only to the characteristics of this particular table but also to what is experienced – a table, which is given seamlessly in a particular concrete example as the *eidos* or essence of what is factually given. This aspect of experience is evident in the perception a group of similar things: "I see all the tables." Although we are continually familiar with and present to essences, we do not necessarily have clear knowledge of them. Knowledge of essences has been developed and expressed in works ranging from such formal disciplines as pure

mathematics to the ancient Chinese oracle, the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* (Wilhelm and Baynes 1967), which describes 64 general life situations that characterize the specific factual situations people live through. Concepts of essence guide empirical sciences. Psychology long defined intelligence as a person's score on an IQ test until Gardner (1983), critical of this concept, suggested a theory of multiple intelligences, for example, interpersonal, musical, and bodily-kinesthetic. Sternberg (1985) criticized this theory and proposed a triarchic theory of intelligence with three parts, leading to an ongoing debate about what intelligence is. Psychology depends on rigorous conceptualizations of its subject matters, and phenomenology provides a grounded, methodical procedure for developing and critically revising theoretical concepts.

Phenomenology does not aim at knowledge of the factual characteristics of experience but employs a methodical reduction to its essences through an eidetic attitude and what Husserl (1913) called *eidetic analysis*, which yields knowledge of the invariant structures. This method begins with an example of the subject matter, imaginatively varies it freely, and considers other examples and their imagined variations as a basis for identifying and clarifying the invariant characteristics present in all imaginable examples of the phenomenon. A phenomenological psychologist, for instance, is not interested in the factual characteristics of particular examples of learning, but in what learning essentially is, the common structure that makes all examples of it "learning." If these examples show differences so significant as to suggest not one but different kinds of learning, then the researcher conceptualizes not only the most general structure of learning, but also what is invariant in each of the contrasting typical structures of learning. Phenomenology can also shed light on and describe factual variations of examples taken from the real world, but it does not make empirical generalizations about them. If, in investigating memory of nonsense syllables, eidetic analysis shows three kinds of remembering strategies, these may be illustrated with some interesting factual variations in particular instances, but the analysis does not offer information about their empirical frequency or the probability of using one or another.

Grounding of Knowledge

As Husserl (1900–1901, 252) famously said, "we must return to 'the things themselves' (*zurück zu den Sachen selbst*)."

Observation or what Husserl called "intuition" – the direct encounter with concrete examples in which invariant structures are grasped – forms the basis of phenomenological research, which above all privileges evidence. Phenomenological means rationality reflective of whatever shows itself in concrete phenomena themselves. This method follows from the nature of things to be investigated, not from our prejudices and preconceptions. Husserl called the grounding, legitimating, and limiting function of the concrete data the "principle of principles."

But enough of topsy-turvy theories! No theory we can conceive can mislead us in regard to the *principle of all principles*: that *every primordial dator Intuition is a source of authority (Rechtsquelle) for knowledge*, that *whatever presents itself in "intuition" in primordial form ... is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.* (Husserl, 1913, 83, italics in original)

Unlike formal disciplines like mathematics, the subject matter of lived experience cannot be specified with exact, mathematical concepts and requires descriptive clarifications using ordinary language.

Applications of Phenomenological Method

Regional Ontology: The Psychological

One important application of phenomenological method in the philosophy of science has been to shed light on the foundations of the various sciences. Husserl called this work "regional ontology" because it involves clarification of the characteristics of various regions of being that may be investigated by a science, such as psychology. The ontology of this region is important because if psychology is to be rational and objective, its research and theory must reflect a rigorous understanding of what human psychological life essentially is. Husserl was not the first philosopher who observed that the discipline of psychology lacked a proper scientific foundation because it erroneously reduced its subject matter to physical phenomena and dogmatically imposed research methods and concepts from the natural sciences of the physical world. Husserl held that his teacher, Franz Brentano (1874), and contemporary Wilhelm Dilthey (1894), had accurately conceptualized and described the essential characteristics of experiencing human beings (Husserl 1925).

Brentano (1874) emphasized the universal *intentionality* of consciousness – its directedness toward meaningful objects. In a complementary way, Dilthey (1894) saw that psychological life – in all its manifestations – flows, streams, changes through various processes (perceiving, remembering, anticipating, thinking, feeling, acting) that are interrelated and mutually imply each other by virtue of their meaningful temporal organizations. Experience includes an embodied "I" who efficaciously and practically engages in a value-laden, fundamentally social and collective world. In actively shaping the world through personal engagements with others, the person reforms and develops, becoming toward the future as a participant in human history, wherein psychological life itself may change. This multifaceted, teleological, temporal, and social process must be the central focus of psychology. Unlike the physical world, which is external to the scientist's experience and made up of objects external to each other, psychological life is lived through by the scientist and can be grasped and understood in its meaningful

organization. Psychological life is not known by abstracting variables, measuring them in isolation, and determining their relations by functional analyses. If Dilthey's line of intuition is eidetically accurate, as Husserl (1925) asserted, the human sciences need not need not rely primarily on inference and explanation, but use descriptive and interpretive methods. No mental process can be accurately understood as static and enclosed within itself; its interdependencies must be considered as part of a larger stream in a world whose meaningful organization must be holistically and contextually understood. Psychological life is to be rationally made intelligible and known by context-sensitive interpretations of holistic unities of *meaning, value and purpose*. It is important to note that psychological essences, for Husserl as for Dilthey, are by no means necessarily static but may involve change; human experience may also be essentially vague (Husserl), ambiguous (Merleau-Ponty), and mysterious (Marcel).

The History of Phenomenological Methods Relevant to Psychology

The close relationship between phenomenological philosophy and psychology is too vast to detail here (see Spiegelberg 1972 and Cloonan 1995). The core method has adapted itself and been modified in accordance with (1) various research goals ranging from pure theory to assessment, psychotherapy, social action, and liberation; (2) the diversity of topics studied and problems undertaken; (3) multiple kinds of freshly collected and archival data from first person descriptions, journals, interviews, focus groups, behavior in the laboratory and everyday life, works of art and literature, and non-verbal expressive media; and (4) the unique perspectives of the investigators, whose individual personhoods, intellectual activities and traditions, and communities of practice are acknowledged as intrinsic to all scientific investigations.

Phenomenological philosophers have engaged in and guided psychology with the research developed in transcendental philosophy as well as in existential, hermeneutic, and narrative phenomenology. The following sample is representative of this diversity of subject matter and method. Husserl (1913, 1925, 1954) researched perception, thinking, remembering, motility, development, and social life, and new works. His 40,000 pages of unpublished manuscripts continue to provide new methods and insights (Welton 2002). The existential and hermeneutic phenomenology developed by Heidegger (1959–1969, 1962) provided a methodological and conceptual basis for psychopathology and general psychology. Heidegger's many specific analyses of moodedness (e.g., fear and anxiety), the self (collective and individuating), language, sociality, spatiality, and temporality have influenced later philosophers and psychologists. Sartre (1936, 1939, 1943, 1952, 1960) carried out psychological investigations of the imagination, emotions, self-deception, human freedom, anti-semitism, sadomasochism, and personality,

where he developed the original method of existential psychoanalysis and studied the lives of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Genet, and himself. Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1945) focused on the behavior of humans and other animals, perception, the body-subject, human development, repression, and physiologically based as well as socially based pathology in the laboratory and the lifeworld. Alfred Schutz (1962, 1967) studied a spectrum of social psychological topics including action, social-cognitive construction, multiple realities, immigration, and playing music together. Rudolf Otto (1923) researched the psychological experience of “the holy.” Gabriel Marcel (1942, 1965) researched a rich array of psychological topics, including the body, hope, fidelity, and the family. Sometimes using journals and what Marcel called primary and secondary reflection, he emphasized the essentially mysterious character of existence that resists objectification and conceptual systematization. Bachelard (1938, 1942, 1958) pioneered the psychological study of material objects such as fire, water, and space (the house). Ricoeur (1950, 1983) progressively integrated existential, hermeneutic, and narrative phenomenological methods in his analyses of freedom, action, language, remembering, story, identity, and phenomena of psychoanalysis. Gadamer (1989) also offered insights into interpretive methods, particularly addressing the problems of prejudicial preconceptions and many profound analyses including that of the experiences of play and art. Levinas (1961) developed new understandings of intentionality in his studies of enjoyment (including eating and sex), the ego, the home, human development, the face, and the ethical relation with the other. Since the 1990s, phenomenological philosophers have been engaged in a critical and collaborative dialogue with neuroscience and cognitive science (Gallagher 2012; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1990).

Phenomenological psychology is too extensive to detail. Representative research may be found in the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, founded by Amedeo Giorgi, which has been publishing research consistently for the last 43 years and has led the historical development of qualitative methods (Rennie, Watson, and Monteiro 2001). *The Humanistic Psychologist* has consistently featured phenomenological research under the editorships of Chris Aanstoos and Scott Churchill. The diverse applications of phenomenological method in psychology can be exemplified in studies of schizophrenia, which have spanned over a century. Notably, Karl Jaspers (1913) held that schizophrenia was un-understandable and found no meaning in its symptoms and no distinctive form of intentionality or structural unity in its mental processes. Subsequent research has shown his conclusions to be wrong. Binswanger (1963) and Boss (1963) used a Heideggerian framework to study schizophrenia and in doing so forged a revolutionary approach to psychopathology in psychiatry, meaningfully describing and understanding schizophrenic persons’ ways of being-in-the-world. Laing’s (1962) delineation of one typical way of becoming schizophrenic that rendered symptoms meaningful within the context of the individual’s life-historical existence was informed by Sartre’s work on ontology and the imagination. Laing’s (Laing and Esterson

1963) follow-up study using the framework of Sartre's (1960) later philosophy, was an empirical study of family life that rendered schizophrenic symptoms intelligible in their social context, the praxis and process in the family. Naudin and Azorin (2001; Naudin, Azorin, and Weider, 1998) developed and advocated a narrative framework in their analysis of schizophrenia. Fanon (2005) examined schizophrenia and other mental illnesses in the context of colonial cultural violence, as part of liberation praxis. Husserl's transcendental philosophy informed Davidson's work, including action research on recovery that has yielded effective community programs (Davidson and Cosgrove 1991, 2002; Davidson, Stayner, Lambert, Smith, and Sledge 1997). Husserl's transcendental analysis of consciousness has been clearly explained and fruitfully used in addressing the diagnosis, assessment, and a unifying theoretical explanation of schizophrenic psychopathology (see Sass and Parnas 2007). Chung, Fulford, and Graham (2007) provided a recent overview of the history and sampling of current research and theory.

An Application: Qualitative Methods for Psychological Research

The available guides to phenomenological psychological research methods include the works of Giorgi (1975, 1985, 2009), Moustakas (1994), van Manen (1990), Smith (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009), and Halling (Halling and Leifer 1991). Giorgi's method, which employs modified versions of the phenomenological attitude and eidetic analysis (of invariance – Giorgi does not use the term “essence”), has spanned almost half a century of development, has led to studies on many hundreds of psychological topics, and continues to generate research. Historical accounts of Giorgi's career and work may be found in Wertz et al. (2011), which also compares these analytic procedures to those of other qualitative methods – grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry, using the same data set.

Giorgi's innovations in research method were designed to adapt phenomenology to the requirements of psychology as a science, including the broad range of topics in laboratory and natural settings that extend beyond those accessible in the first person experiences of researchers, such as phenomena lived through by participants in psychological and physiological research of all kinds: nonverbally expressive infants and children; dyadic and group social interactions; persons with such psychopathology as psychosis, autism, anxiety, and mood disorders; and persons of diverse ethnicities and cultures. Research is sometimes designed and conducted solely by the researcher, in order to solve problems presented in the scientific literature and, in other cases, in collaborations with non-scientists to solve practical problems, for instance in action research settings (e.g., Davidson et al. 1997) and in liberation praxis (Watkins and Shulman 2008). Giorgi's directives on participant selection and data collection call for innovation

and variation commensurate with the range of goals, psychological topics, and relevant participants. This method engages participants who have lived through the topic under investigation and afford the collection of descriptions of the research phenomenon. The guiding principle in the constitution of data is that participants openly describe specific situations they have lived through in real time that are of interest to the researcher. For instance, in demonstrating research on learning, Giorgi (1985) instructed a diverse group of research participants to simply “describe a situation in which you learned something.” These descriptions, rather than being guided by any theory or preconceptions of the topic on the part of the researchers, provide access to examples from the pretheoretical, prescientific natural lifeworld, such as learning to make yogurt and to drive a car. Variants of this basic data collection strategy have utilized first person descriptions, interviews, focus groups, descriptions of others, and can also include archival, artistic, and literary works.

Once obtained, real-world examples of the research phenomenon are analyzed using a series of procedures that are methodical but not uniform, for they encourage the unique talent, spontaneity, thoughtfulness, creativity, critical presence, collaborations, and reflexivity of the researcher at every step. These steps require openness, thorough data examination, differentiation and comparison of data, relevant reflection, analysis and synthesis of parts and wholes, emergent conceptualization, examination of counter-evidence, reformulation of conclusions, repeated re-examination of data, and accountability to the scientific community. The following steps draw from descriptions by Giorgi (1975, 1985, 2009) and Wertz (1983a, 2005; Wertz et al. 2011).

1. *Comprehension of the whole.* Reading the description openly with the aim of empathically and holistically understanding what is being described, without yet thematizing the research phenomenon or engaging the specific research interest.
2. *Demarcation of meaning units.* Demarcating “meaning units” within the description as a pragmatic determination of the complex and multifaceted moments of the phenomenon presented in the description. These demarcations are made in light of both the participant’s experience as holistically understood based on open reading and the specific research interest and questions.
3. *Reflection on psychological life.* Reflecting on each meaning unit in order to explicate its relevance for the research question and to conceptualize psychological insight(s) concerning the research phenomenon. The researcher explicates psychological life as it is evident in each meaning unit within the context of other meaning units and the phenomenon as a whole. Imaginative variation is employed and invariant constituents and structures of processes and meanings are elaborated by focusing on what, about each meaning unit, exemplifies the phenomenon. The heart of the analysis, this step is laborious

and time consuming because it is an open-ended effort that may be reenacted and revised many times as the analysis develops.

4. *Articulation of the individual psychological structure(s)*. Comparing, imaginatively varying, and synthesizing the reflections on all meaning units in each description in order to clarify the psychological constituents, their interrelations, their organization – the psychological structure(s) of an individual instance of the phenomenon under investigation. This process involves a careful search for counter-evidence in the individual example in order to be sure that the claims adequately reflect all data. Ideally, each individual structure as written would not be contradicted by any of the reflections or meaning units in the entire protocol, and all relevant statements would be reflected in the individual psychological structure. Importantly, a particular protocol may reveal more than one structure of the phenomenon, as was the case in my research on perception, in which some descriptions of a single situation contained dozens of perceptions that were variously structured (Wertz 1982). Similarly, in my research on the experience of criminal victimization, abnormality, and buying, structural variations in the experience were found to take place through time, yielding a developmental sequence of sub-structural stages or phases (Wertz 1985, 1987c, Wertz and Greenhut 1984).
5. *Articulation of the general psychological structure(s)*. Comparing individual psychological structures, along with imaginative variations of them, for similarities and differences in order to identify the invariant constituents and structural configuration of meaning that is the phenomenon. One may find, in this comparison, that there are differences among individual structures that are themselves general. Identifying these leads to types, or typical psychological structures, each of which describes numerous instances of the phenomenon but not all, the others being of another or other types, as Giorgi (1985) found in his study of learning. This is not uncommon in the history of phenomenological psychology; for example, Bachelard (1938) found types in his analysis of fire, calling them complexes (e.g., the Prometheus Complex, the Empedocles Complex). If typical structures or developmental substructures were found in the prior step of the individual analyses, this step makes a more general comparison across the various structures emerging from multiple protocols and thereby provides greater clarity on general psychological structures. General structures are formulated to describe not only all instances of the phenomenon collected from research participants but their imaginative variations, as well as all empirical and imaginable examples of the subject matter.

In order to exemplify a general structure, I present a brief one from my own research, on criminal victimization, which has been elaborated in much greater detail with numerous examples and accounts of the method (Wertz 1983a, 1985). This skeletal description of the general structure was based on interviews with

100 persons who reported crimes committed against them to the Pittsburgh, PA Police Department. Although this research elaborated a single general structure rather than several typical ones, the struggle with victimization is invariably narrative and developmental, including several substructures constituting stages in a process of transformation in psychological life, from before the victimization to after it is past. The description is written in a highly general way in order to reflect meanings and psychological processes present in the 100 victimizations collected and any other imaginable instance, ranging from theft to vandalism and attempted rape.

Victimization is originally lived through in a situation experienced with a horizon of social safety and harmony that supports free action toward a desired end. An unexpected disruption of this situation, often first perceived as harmless within the prior context, becomes increasingly indeterminate and confusing. Overcoming shock and disbelief, the person perceives (1) the presence of a detrimental other, (2) one's own vulnerability and inefficacy, and (3) the absence of helpful community as an undeniable new configuration of meaning. Prey to another's inimical purposes, the person is relatively powerless to stop a destruction of one's valued situation. The person struggles against this perceived violation in effort to regain agency, aiming to overcome confusion by fully understanding the adversity as a basis for eliminating the other's inimicality. Action – a recovery of agency, possibly summoning allies, precisely follows this understanding, with the goal of restoring safety and helpful community. After the incident is past, even though victimization is no longer perceived in the immediate, actual situation, it remains virtually present as a new meaning horizon coloring the world. The person relives the three constituent meanings – destructive other, lost agency, absence of community – through recollection, perception, anticipation, imagination, and thinking. Vulnerable agency, inimical others, and unprotective community come to lurk in the world at large. This proliferating consciousness of possible victimization is a broadening attempt to understand that serves as a basis for preventing future recurrence through new forms of agency and community. Regained agency, help from allies, and the world's repeated reassertion of safety cancels victimization from the sphere of impending actuality and reestablishes a horizon of social harmony. By tuning in to and eliminating the emergent possibilities of victimization, the person shapes a significantly new existence in which victimization is integrated and relatively though not absolutely surpassed. This new order is different from that before victimization in that new precautions, alliances, and solidarity implicitly contain the meanings of victimization as a possibility. This new existential order is preferred relative to that of being victimized, but not in comparison to that of life before victimization, to which some victims yearn to return. (Adapted from Wertz 1985, 291)

The Unity and Generality of Phenomenological Method

Inasmuch as phenomenological method, as articulated by Husserl and modified for psychology by Giorgi, follow both the general demands of science and the specific demands of their subject matter, the practice can be carried out regardless

of whether one has been educated in phenomenology or calls one's approach phenomenological. Husserl identified such faithful descriptive conceptualizations of phenomena in the research of Brentano, Dilthey, and James, who did not use the term "phenomenology." This method has been practiced spontaneously by many, such as the obstetrician LeBoyer, who insightfully conceptualized psychological development in the fetal life and birth of the human infant (Wertz 1981). After analyzing the analytic operations in my own study of criminal victimization (Wertz 1983a), I found the same operations implicit in a wide spectrum of research by others in the existential phenomenological tradition (Wertz 1983b). Moreover, the same operations have been present in the practices in psychoanalytic psychology from Freud's work to the present (Wertz 1987a). There have been broad convergences of method in phenomenology and psychoanalysis (Wertz 1987b, 1993). More recently, in collaboration with experts in other qualitative methodologies, I found the same research principles, attitudes, and analytic operations in diverse qualitative methods including grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry (Wertz et al. 2011). Therefore, it appears that the phenomenological method is unified, consistent, and practiced beyond what is called "phenomenology," as a useful method in any descriptive, qualitative psychology. If these practices were delineated in the founding of psychology, developed in its history, and reflected in its methodology, the adjective "phenomenological" would be unnecessary and the method would simply be part of scientific psychology.

The Variations, Scope, and Limits of Phenomenological Methods

The boundaries of phenomenology are not easy to define because they are both variable and open. It may be more correct to speak of phenomenological methods in the plural. Phenomenology is certainly descriptive and can rightfully be "interpretive," "existential," "narrative," "dialogical," and "theoretical." This is partly because the meaning of all these terms has not been univocally established – they vary with context of use. This is also because phenomenology is quite mutable in the contexts of various disciplines' use, the phenomena under investigation, the research problem, and investigators with specific goals and styles. These methods are not the invention or sole possession of those identifying themselves as phenomenologists; they have been and continue to be practiced broadly, spontaneously, without being identified as such. Phenomenological methods can also be combined and blended with other methods and used in nonphenomenological research, either informally or methodically. It is difficult to conceive of psychological research and theory that would not use these methods in some ways and to some extent. Van Kaam (1966) developed an approach to psychological theory, called "comprehensive theorizing," which aims to self-consciously unify the disparate and often apparently contradictory models and theoretical perspectives

of psychology by investigating their common origins and references to concrete human existence, from which they originally emerged.

Phenomenological methods have the aim of knowledge rather than any practical end, and therefore in that broad sense, phenomenology is a *theoretical and reflective* rather than a practical discipline. Secondly, although many words can be used to characterize its object – *transcendental or human subjectivity, consciousness, experience, being-in-the-world, and existence* – its focus sets it apart from the physical sciences and mathematics. As a discipline that privileges description and emergent concepts from concrete examples of real world subject matter in contrast to approaches that encourage inferences, constructions, and models from other sources, phenomenology is *intuitive and descriptive*. Finally, phenomenology is *eidetic*, which means that although it includes an examination of factual data, it uses them to articulate invariant structures, patterns, and configurations of its topics in contrast to disciplines that report the facts as such.

The limits of phenomenology follow from its distinctiveness. It is not a form of practical action, and therefore such terms as phenomenological psychotherapy, counseling, management, architecture, nursing, social work, coaching can only mean that these professional activities are informed by or guided by phenomenological knowledge. Similarly, even though it is employed in the broad scope of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences), phenomenology does not yield knowledge of the material environment or the physiologically functioning body, including the brain, or any causal knowledge. Another limit, arising from its intuitive and descriptive tendencies, is that phenomenology does not yield hypotheses, inferences, predictions, and models that go beyond the relatively immediate givens of its subject matter, though it may inform such research and its achievements. Finally, as an eidetic qualitative method, phenomenology is incapable of providing knowledge of factual trends that are often important to psychologists, for instance of the empirical manifestations and frequencies of the psychological structures described, for this requires observations, data collection, and quantitative analytic methods that, although potentially informed by phenomenology, remain foreign to it.

The Future and Affordances of Phenomenological Psychology

Because of its fundamental and ubiquitous character as well as its importance in psychology, the phenomenological way of knowing will continue to play a role in this science even if it is not identified as a specific approach, studied as a distinct historical tradition, or methodically utilized. Phenomenology may have a silent, implicit presence in the future of psychology that may or may not be central or contribute profoundly to the discipline. Phenomenological method may be practiced in its own right, or it could be used in the service of other ways of knowing that are foreign and even antithetical to it. Phenomenological methods

may be used to inform practical approaches to real world problems, such as psychological interventions and services in psychotherapy, assessment, leadership training, and coaching. They may also inform the work of psychologists researching the physical environment and body; developing testable hypotheses, predictions, and models; and assessing, measuring, and calculating empirical trends. Finally, given the transdisciplinarity of these methods, there is likely to be interdisciplinary cross-fertilization between phenomenological psychology and the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and arts.

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