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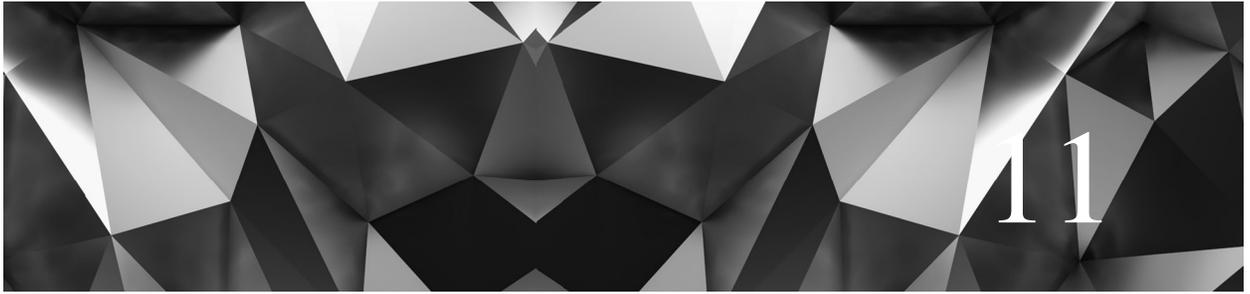
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The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method

Amedeo Giorgi, Barbro Giorgi^{†1} and James Morley

Phenomenology is a philosophy that began in 1900 with the publication of *Logical Investigations* by Edmund Husserl (1970). In that work Husserl introduced a novel way of examining and studying the phenomenon of consciousness. It should be remembered that psychology was founded in 1879 as the science of consciousness by Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig. Wundt pursued the study of consciousness primarily by the use of empirical methods. Later, when the behaviorist movement (Watson, 1913), dominated the field, positivistic approaches became dominant. These approaches made sense because both empiricism and positivism, historically, were philosophies associated with scientific investigations: empiricism since the seventeenth century and positivism since the nineteenth century. Since phenomenology was the most recent philosophy to support scientific endeavors, and its criteria and emphases differ from those of empiricism or positivism, it has not been easily assimilated by psychology. It has taken time for psychologists to respond to what it has to offer. The exception that proves the rule is the impact that it had on the Würzburg experiments on thinking (Humphrey, 1963) that took place in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Like most intellectual movements phenomenology is not all of one piece. While Husserl laid out the main dimensions of the phenomenological

movement, almost every follower of his deviated from him in some manner or other. Since there are a variety of phenomenological interpretations one should not be surprised that several interpretations of the phenomenological method have taken place within psychology. In this chapter we will detail one way in which psychologists have adapted an articulation of the philosophical phenomenological method for its scientific purposes and only briefly describe some other interpretations without any effort at evaluation.

In a previous version of this chapter we offered a mostly historical and theoretical explication of the phenomenological movement in psychology. We covered the various interpretations of the meaning of phenomenology when applied to psychology. While including a synopsis of this historical review ahead, this new chapter is intended as an example that demonstrates how the method can be concretely applied to descriptive data, but we urge that it not be construed as a completed research project. Examples of complete contemporary applications will be referenced at the very conclusion. But before doing so, it is important to spell out the intricate but different and difficult interdisciplinary relationship between the philosophical and psychological levels of analysis.

Throughout most of its history, especially in the West, science has been based on some

form of empirical philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth Century a new philosophy – phenomenology – was introduced which also had scientific aspirations. Phenomenology is not so much contradictory to empiricism as it is more comprehensive because phenomenology acknowledges certain realities that empiricism does not, e.g. givens such as ideal entities (numbers) or unreal objects (essences). For phenomenology these non-sensorial objects are given in experiences, and by acknowledging them experiential analyses can be more accurately achieved. It is important to mention this difference at the beginning because very often in our day when phenomenology is so little well understood, phenomenological psychological research reports are read and judged by empirical criteria rather than by phenomenological ones. In addition, since a phenomenological perspective brings to light aspects of a phenomenon that empiricism does not, it deviates from certain specific empirical criteria.

Phenomenology is a complex, comprehensive and intricate philosophy that thematizes consciousness and its functions. But because consciousness manifests itself very differently than physical phenomena, a special descriptive method was developed in order to analyze consciousness, and without proper use of this method, no claims regarding the use of a phenomenological method can be properly made.

In the twentieth century phenomenology became a popular philosophy and many philosophers became attracted to it and developed interpretations of it that differed from its founder, Edmund Husserl (e.g. Gurwitsch, 1964; Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Sartre, 1956). Consequently, social scientists who became interested in phenomenology appealed to different versions of it as they were expressed in the twentieth-century philosophical literature, and so divergences of a phenomenological method also exist in the social science literature. We shall not speak to all of these differences within the context of our presentation of a method. Rather, we shall concentrate on the version of a phenomenological psychological method based on the thoughts of its founder, Edmund Husserl (1983), that was developed by the lead author of this article and we will show that the method is both scientifically rigorous and psychologically fruitful.

Perhaps the best way to introduce phenomenological philosophy is to provide the description of it as articulated by one of its contemporary supporters. Burt Hopkins (2010: 83), in introducing phenomenological philosophy writes:

Husserl's pure phenomenology is driven by the goal of making philosophy a rigorous science. By 'science' he understood a method of research

capable of generating possible true and false propositions on the basis of evidence. By 'rigorous' science he understood a science that had advanced to the point of being in the possession of a methodology whose basic concepts and criteria for distinguishing true from false propositions were sufficiently demonstrated to permit an ongoing research agenda available to and embraced by a community of researchers. And by evidence he understood the legitimizing source of scientific and philosophical concepts in an experience more original than, but nevertheless related to, their conceptuality.

We believe that hardly anyone would disagree with such generic statements about the nature of science because the disagreements usually come when the general criteria are implemented. But we want to indicate that phenomenological philosophy and empiricism often have different criteria for the same purpose – a positive scientific project. Also, it should be appreciated that in the above statement, as noted before, Hopkins is speaking only about phenomenological philosophy. As we proceed to work out a phenomenological *psychology* and its method, the same understanding of Husserlian philosophy will be in force.

Now it has to be emphasized that phenomenological science is founded upon the phenomenon of consciousness and its various manifestations. Of course, this was the original definition of psychology but mainstream academic psychology originated and developed within the perspective of empirical philosophy. Because the criteria came from empirical philosophy, mainstream scientific psychology based its findings on introspective data or it correlated conscious dimensions with sensory givens of one type or another or with bodily functions. The phenomenological approach dwells on how consciousness presents itself and its functions. This focus results in two key factors that are necessary whenever studying consciousness. The first is that *consciousness is intentional*, which means that it is primarily directed toward an object which may be real or not-real and which may actually be absent, and the object may be immanent to the conscious process or transcendent to it. The key thing is that an intentional act of consciousness is directed toward something, and the object toward which it is directed may actually exist in the world (a tree in the yard), may no longer be alive (Napoleon), or may be an image in the steam of consciousness itself (my image of my boyhood home). An intentional act may also be 'empty', which means that my act is directed toward something that is missing, in which case the act is known as 'signitive'. Thus, I may be looking for

my glasses which I placed somewhere but I can't remember where, and so to understand my random behavior searching through my office one simply has to understand, that which seems like strange behavior, simply means that I'm looking for my glasses. When I find my glasses, the intentional act is fulfilled and the acknowledgement of that fact is known as an act of identification. When I find my glasses, it results in an identification between the empty intention that triggered my behavior and the object that fulfilled the quest.

The second feature that has to be acknowledged is that *consciousness is essentially non-sensorial*. We become aware of consciousness in ways that are radically different from how we become aware of things. Consciousness is the *means* by which we become aware of all sorts of physical, material, biological phenomena but it itself is none of these things. It is the medium of access to anything whatsoever that can be experienced, including unreal (non-sensory) phenomena such as ideas or numbers, but we have awareness of consciousness itself without appearances. When we reflect on our lived experiences we become aware of them but not because they appear. Appearances are correlated to things of the world and their manner of being known is different from the way we know our own lived experiences. Acts of consciousness can produce objects like images and dreams but they are very different from the objects of worldly perception and also different from our awareness of our lived experiences. In order for a method to be fruitful in researching consciousness, it has to respect the two characteristics just described.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

In the description of phenomenological philosophy that Hopkins provided above he mentioned that Husserl stated that phenomenology had posited a method by means of which phenomenological analyses could be done. He articulated the method generically but now we want to apply it in a more broadened and specific way. Husserl's philosophical phenomenological method requires three steps: First, one turns toward the object whose essence must be determined and one *describes* it; second, one must assume the attitude of the *transcendental phenomenological reduction*; finally, one must describe the essence or invariant characteristic of the object with the help of the method of *free fantasy variation*. We shall now elaborate each of these steps.

But before we present the particular steps, we want to stress the importance of attitude while conducting phenomenological research. Before any specific procedures are implemented Husserl emphasizes that all knowledge derived from sources other than what is directly given to consciousness has to be bracketed. This is known as the *epoché* which means that knowledge coming from an attitude other than the phenomenological one is put aside and rendered non-functional. All givens to be dealt with seriously have to be present to an act of consciousness that is within a phenomenological attitude. In ordinary life one functions within the natural attitude, which is the attitude of daily life and common sense. Enacting the *epoché* allows one to leave the natural attitude and prepares one to enter a phenomenological attitude, of which there are several.

In the first step of the philosophical method, the phenomenon that is to be analyzed first has to be carefully described. Phenomenology's main concern is with lived experiences so precisely how the experiences are lived need to be described by the experiencer. Philosophically, the experiences that are described are usually those lived by the philosophers themselves. This style of research allows the philosopher to conduct first person analyses on their own descriptions which is a key perspective for phenomenology. The ability to reflect on one's own experience opens up dimensions of the lived experience that would otherwise be inaccessible.

In the second step, the researcher must assume the transcendental attitude by means of the transcendental reduction. The transcendental attitude within which phenomenological philosophers must function in order to do their analyses is one which gives the philosophers access to pure consciousness. A pure consciousness is one that in no way is shared with empirical reality. The consciousness that is revealed with such an attitude is not a human consciousness nor that of any other existing creature. Because it is untouched by any empirical reality it refers to any *possible* existing consciousness but not to any *actually* existing consciousness. It permits a philosophical type of analysis that seeks to understand consciousness as such before it is interspersed with empirical reality.

In the third step, because concrete experiences are so diversified the phenomenologist seeks a result that is more stable to communicate to other researchers so he will seek the essence of the experience with the help of the method of free imaginative variation. The transcendental attitude is once again required here. With this method one systematically varies key dimensions of the concrete phenomenon in order to see what effect the

variation has on how the phenomenon appears. If the given ‘collapses’ as a result of the variation then it can be claimed that the dimension is essential for the phenomenon to appear as it really is. If the object is only slightly modified because of the variation and is basically still recognizable, then the dimension varied is considered to be accidental rather than essential. The essential features of the phenomenon also have to be carefully described.

The above description is of Husserl’s philosophical method. However, we are not doing philosophical analyses but psychological ones. Therefore, our attitude and method vary from what Husserl prescribed. We are seeking a method that is genuinely phenomenological but also human scientific. Therefore, we have to modify the method Husserl invented in order to arrive at results that are human scientific and psychological rather than philosophical. But first, we want to review the history of how the term ‘phenomenology’ has been applied to psychology.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF VARIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE METHOD

There is only space here for a very condensed sketch of how phenomenology entered into the field of psychology, but a full treatment of its philosophy is given by Spiegelberg (1982) and a more complete treatment of the development of phenomenological psychology is given by Amedeo Giorgi (2010). The entry of the phenomenological approach as a method into psychology can be told in terms of five categories, all of which refer to methods or research practices.

Goethean and Brentanian Pre-philosophical Phenomenological Approaches

This is a type of phenomenological research that is *avant la lettre*, so to speak and it consists of two historical streams that eventually merged. Today, to speak about phenomenological psychology means to demonstrate how insights from the phenomenological philosophy that began in 1900 are informing the development of psychology. However, certain styles of thinking and working that were harmonious with phenomenology were being applied to science in general and to

psychology in particular prior to 1900. Goethe (Müller, 1952; Seamon and Zajonc, 1998; Sepper, 1988) the famous poet and humanist applied such principles to the study of morphology in botany and the experience of color and light, while Hering (1964) applied it to the study of vision. The other stream was initiated by Franz Brentano who was a philosopher, but his work that influenced psychologists most was written from a psychological perspective. Brentano was renowned in Germany for his lectures and he influenced a whole generation of scholars including Meinong, von Ehrenfels, Husserl himself, Freud and Stumpf. Brentano (1874) published *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* and in that work he introduced the idea of intentionality which became one of the cornerstones of the phenomenological movement after Husserl modified Brentano’s understanding of it in significant ways. Carl Stumpf, as mentioned, was a student of Brentano’s and he also spent time with Hering at Prague, and from Hering, Stumpf learned about the Goethean style of research and subsequently integrated it with what he knew from Brentano. Stumpf and Husserl were colleagues together at Halle, so important exchanges took place at that time as well. The approach used by both Goethe and Brentano consisted of careful descriptions of the ‘givens’ without recourse to speculation, hypotheses or theories. In general, phenomenology shares those values, but of course it includes much more.

Grass-Roots Phenomenology

This type is called ‘grass-roots’ because it developed in midcentury North America independently of any philosophy and was based primarily on pragmatic interests. Donald Snygg (1941) introduced the perspective and then he was later joined by Arthur Combs and they jointly published a work (Snygg and Combs, 1949) detailing their outlook. The basis for the phenomenological label here was that the research emphasis was primarily on ‘the experiential world of the other’. The royal route for understanding the other, for Snygg and Combs, was to understand how he or she understood his or her experiential world. Unfortunately, from a phenomenological perspective, Snygg and Combs tried to fit experiential processes into the natural science cause–effect framework of mainstream psychology, and that limited their development. But of course, the phenomenological approach also uses the experiential world of a person as the basis for a psychological

understanding of that person, but the framework is different.

Interpretive Phenomenology

This type of phenomenology is probably the most popular type being used in psychology. Husserl had said that the phenomenological method was descriptive based upon the intuition of the given. His famous student Heidegger, claimed that the true phenomenological method was interpretation. This caused a division among phenomenologists that is still not resolved. Based on Heidegger, consequently, hermeneutic phenomenological methods have been developed both in philosophy and psychology. Packer and Addison (1989) have applied a hermeneutic method to psychological issues based upon Heidegger's work. Max van Manen (1990) also employs a mostly interpretive approach although he is receptive to descriptive features as well. However, as van Manen works in the interdisciplinary field of teacher education, his approach is designed for maximum flexibility across disciplines and age groups. Finally, some British psychologists have recently developed an interpretive method, known as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to apply to psychological topics. Chapter 12 in this *Handbook* presents a complete depiction of this method.

Descriptive Phenomenological Method

Other psychologists have followed Husserl and have developed strictly descriptive phenomenological methods (see Chapter 12). The lead author of this chapter, Amedeo Giorgi (1970b, 1986, 2009) has developed one such method and so has Moustakas (1994). With descriptive approaches one tries to describe the experiences being lived through very carefully and once the raw data has been obtained, a thorough phenomenological psychological analysis of the data takes place within the perspective of the phenomenological psychological reduction. Without the reduction, no claim that the analysis is phenomenological can be made today. Again, this special attitude shift involves the epoché, which means to set aside all knowledge not being directly presented to consciousness, and then to consider what is given not as actually existing but merely as something present to consciousness. The presented intuitions are then carefully described and analyzed. Since this

is the method that this chapter deals with ahead, no more needs to be said here.

Phenomenological Analysis that Begins Transcendentally and Returns to Positivity

There are actually several forms or types of phenomenological reductions in Husserl and the method we are presenting in this chapter uses only one of them – the phenomenological psychological reduction. But there is also what Husserl famously calls a 'transcendental' reduction which shifts the analysis to another level of consciousness beyond the psychological. One could call this a philosophical level of reflection whereby the researcher becomes aware of the *conditions* for the possibility of any experience. Davidson (1989) and later with Cosgrove (1991, 2002) recommend this procedure whereby one starts with a purified consciousness and then follows the establishment of psychological consciousness via the transcendental level before proceeding to the analysis of the concrete psychological phenomenon. This is the most difficult type of analysis to perform.

THE DESCRIPTIVE PRE-TRANSCENDENTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

Having first spelled out these five different ways in which phenomenology has also been applied to psychology we will now proceed to a fuller explication of the descriptive phenomenological psychological method. The psychological phenomenological method includes the same steps as the philosophical method (description, reduction and essence) but the steps are not followed in an identical way. Criteria related to scientific psychological research (rather than that of philosophy) modify the implementation of the steps but the steps remain consistent within the entire context of phenomenological philosophy.

The first major difference occurs with the very first step because the descriptions come from others rather than from the researchers themselves. Theoretically, one could have the researchers describe lived experiences and then have them analyzed by the describers of the experiences but, unlike in philosophy, this is not an acceptable procedure within the context of modern empirical natural scientific psychology. Empiricists are

skeptical of such a procedure because when the person who provides the data is the same person who does the analysis the susceptibility to an undetected bias is too strong. Contemporary empiricists are skeptical of any first person account that is not verified by others. The challenging question by the empirical critic would be: 'How do I know that your description is not unconsciously in the service of your theory of learning? If you describe the experience and then analyze it yourself, you could easily find exactly what you are looking for.' Certainly, such an objection can be answered theoretically, but phenomenology can also be adapted to a broadened research context where the experiences of others can be taken into account.

Consequently, within the psychological research context, a person other than the researcher-analyst always provides the data. Furthermore, descriptions are usually given by ordinary persons who are describing within the naïve natural attitude and may likely have no idea what phenomenology is. Now this could challenge the whole phenomenological nature of the research because phenomenological research depends upon first person analyses. However, third person descriptions do not prevent first person analyses and this will be explained more thoroughly below. Besides, it is important for phenomenology to grow by including the experiences of others. Further discussion of the legitimation of this step can be found in Giorgi (2009: 96–98).

While phenomenological philosophers employ the transcendental reduction, psychologists do not. They use what Husserl (1977) called the *phenomenological psychological reduction* and we prefer to call the 'scientific reduction.' The psychological reduction is less complete than the transcendental one. The transcendental reduction aims for a completely purified consciousness which has no relationship with anything empirical. The phenomenological psychological reduction does not achieve that degree of purity. As Husserl (1974: 41) states:

Such self-perception is essentially founded in this experience, and in such a manner that its own sense-bestowal and positing of existence inseparably perform a co-positing of physical being and finally of a whole space-time world Therefore, in order to preserve in its purity the purely subjective, the individual lived experience of consciousness, we must put out of operation all the objectivities posited therein, i.e., while we posit consciousness as existing purely as it itself, we must deny to ourselves the co-positing of that in it of which there is consciousness and which is posited.

There are two key implications of this statement. We mentioned above that the transcendental

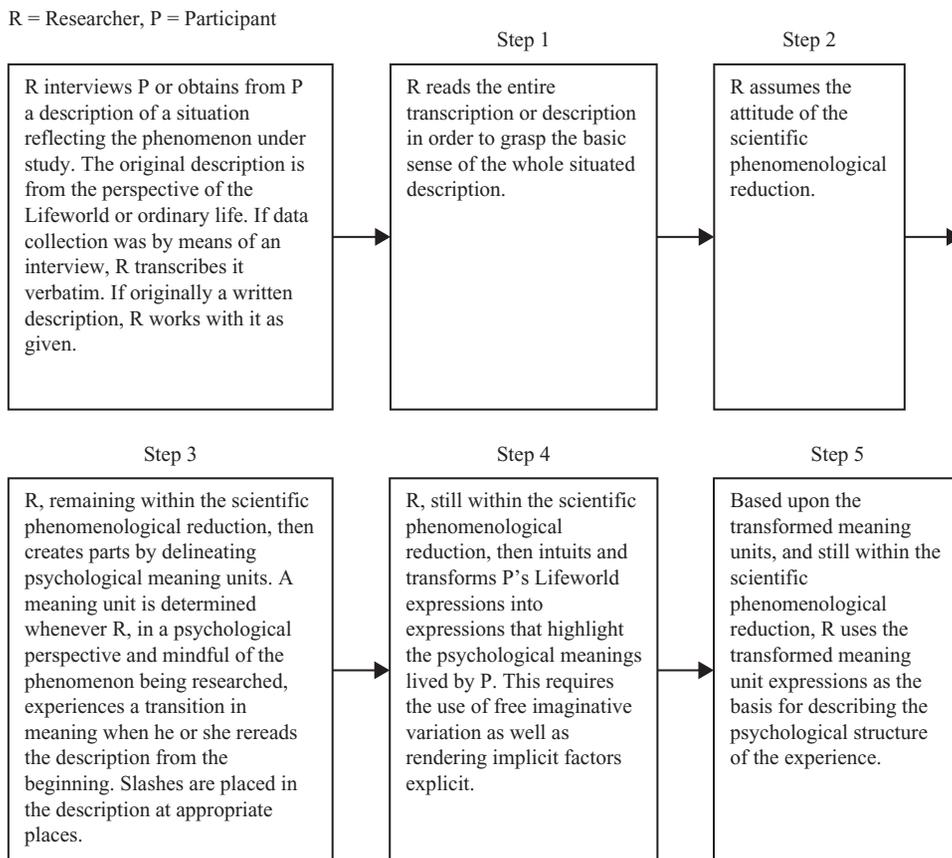
reduction speaks about any possible consciousness but no real consciousness. But as psychologists we are interested specifically in actual human consciousness so we do not bracket the positing of consciousness itself. But we do bracket the co-positing of the physical or any other objectivities that are given thematically to consciousness. But the horizontal space-time world is not bracketed, and that is the second implication. Thus, psychological subjectivity is understood as 'being in the world' and we begin to understand how subjectivity lives the experience of thematic objects. Another way to say this is that the acts of consciousness are not bracketed and are considered to be real, but the thematic objects of consciousness are reduced even if the worldly horizon is not.

But for phenomenological psychology there is also a disciplinary implication: a psychological perspective towards the lived experience must also be assumed (Applebaum, 2012; Ashworth, 1996; Englander, 2016; Morley, 2010, 2011). Just as one must assume a transcendental perspective in order to discover transcendental subjectivity or a mathematical perspective to understand mathematical symbols, so one must assume a psychological perspective in order to understand lived experiences in a psychological way. Philosophers are usually content to acknowledge that any consciousness dependent upon naturalistic factors is psychological, but the analysis of such experiences requires the assumption of a psychological perspective toward such experiences. To assume a psychological perspective means to view the lived experiences as manifestations of the lived meanings and values expressed by concrete human subjects.

The third difference from the philosophical method is the type of result achieved. Because of the assumption of the psychological attitude toward the data, the essences that are apprehended are psychological essences and not philosophical ones. Psychological essences are typical, not universal. It is often understood that psychological results are in a middle range of theoretical achievement which means that there is always a more universal essence (philosophical) above it and most probably, lower level essences below it (e.g. essences belonging to specific individuals).

This completes the discussion of the key steps of the phenomenological psychological method, but not necessarily of the research. Once the structures are gotten, there follows dialogue with the raw data in order to draw out important implications and with the results of similar studies. Qualitative data offer many opportunities for insightful comments.

What directly follows is a flowchart (Figure 11.1) of the five steps involved in the application of the phenomenological psychological method to

Figure 11.1 Flowchart of data analysis process

the analysis of descriptive qualitative data. In previous publications we have referred to this as a four-step process but we now feel it is important to emphasize the scientific reduction by highlighting it as a distinct step thus making it five steps. Next, we will offer a presentation of two descriptions of learning and a sample of a two-column meaning unit analysis of both descriptions. We will conclude with an explication of the five steps used in the analysis and a discussion of the general structures attained through the analysis.

THE RAW DATA

The lead author of this essay began his critique of mainstream quantitative methods in 1966 (Giorgi, 1966) and inaugurated the development of his interpretation of the phenomenological

psychological method in 1970 (Giorgi, 1970a, 1970b) and has pursued that development over the course of several decades (1971, 1975, 1985, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2012). A phenomenon to be analyzed was also required and since psychology was still dominated by behavioristic perspective at the time, he decided to concentrate on the phenomenon of learning. Consequently, when teaching his research classes he asked his graduate students to obtain several descriptions of learning. Eventually he accumulated hundreds of descriptions, of learning some of which have been analyzed (Giorgi, 1985), but many more remain. All of the descriptions were obtained within the context of the ethical rules in force at the time.

The two very brief descriptions that are used as exemplars in this article are also from the 1970s. They were the next two descriptions that were at the top of a pile and were in no way pre-selected for any special purpose. These two descriptions

were chosen in a completely random way. We believe that the choice of descriptions to be analyzed is best left to chance because in that way one can more forcefully demonstrate the power and flexibility of the method.

Data can be obtained by either having a participant write an experience or by interview. In general, people offer fuller descriptions in interviews than they do when writing. By chance, the two descriptions we will be using in this example demonstrate the two choices. It can easily be seen how the written description (Beach description) is much shorter than the description provided by the interview. With interviews, the descriptions are recorded and then transcribed. But it should be kept in mind that there is no ‘perfect description’: there are good ones, adequate ones and inadequate ones. The good ones allow for a rich analysis of the experience, and the adequate ones will allow a structure to be developed, but inadequate ones do not yield significant outcomes and their analyses are usually discarded. So the criterion for data analysis to proceed is that the descriptions are good or adequate. Without further ado, here are the two learning descriptions to be analyzed, exactly as we received them:

P1: Beach Description

Question: Describe a situation in which you learned

Recently I sat on the beach by a river with a friend. We were the only two people there. The river was moving very slowly and the sunlight sparkled on it. While we sat there we saw birds flying and swooping down, skimming the water. I made a remark about the birds bathing in the river. My friend (who knows about birds), told me that they were not bathing, but feeding – scooping insects off the surface of the river. I thought it interesting but said I preferred to think they were playing. Reflecting on the situation I realize that I not only learned a piece of factual information about the feeding habits of birds, but I also learned that I have a very imaginative and fanciful streak which often comes out when I am in contact with nature. I also learned that, at times, I prefer my fancied explanations for things to the so-called ‘real’ ones. Reflecting on the incident also brought to mind memories of past creative or imaginative impulses while spending time in the woods – so I also learned that allowing my imagination more freedom in a natural setting is a pattern of mine since childhood. The incident made me resolve to make room for contemplative time in the country more often.

P2: Rifle Description

Question: Would you please describe a concrete situation from your experience out of which you feel you have learned something?

Well, this is what happened: my twin brother and me, we were sitting down a few years back and there it was – my Dad had his rifle put away in his closet where it was always at. And I looked at it, and I was a young kid, you know, and I wanted to go hunting, and I wasn’t old enough yet, so we’d get it out and aim it at the wall, and we’d pull the trigger there a few times and it would go ‘snap’. Well, I didn’t know exactly what I was doing and well, we wanted to go hunting *so much* you know.

Well, my Dad was going to go out hunting a week later or so, and he took his rifle out, but he didn’t test it you know. It was the first day of deer season and he saw a deer and went to shoot it and it didn’t go off. The firing pin was broke! Well, he came home, and kind of knew what had happened. He had seen us click it once and had yelled at us. Well, he came home and really yelled at us. And I couldn’t understand how he knew that we did it.

R: Question: Could you describe more specifically what it was you did?

What we did – I’d take the rifle out and aim it at something, cock it, and click it. What would happen is that the firing pin would go forward and ram against the rifle bolt since there was no shell, and that would put tension on it – a fissure would form – it would crack and maybe take a little piece of it. So what happened to my Dad is that the pin hit the shell but not hard enough, so the shell didn’t go off but broke a piece of the pin. So it all had to be torn apart and fixed. He (Dad) didn’t know it for sure at first until he asked the gunsmith and the gunsmith told him exactly what had happened. We had been ‘dry-firing’ it. We got paddled for it. But now I know to this day that you just don’t ‘dry-fire’ a rifle. You can do it for a while, but then the stress builds up and it’ll eventually break.

And I remember my Dad. He said: ‘When you’re old enough to go hunting, you’ll never play with a toy weapon ever again – for safety purposes, never point a weapon at anybody unless you intend to use it on him.’ And this was the understanding. If we ever wanted to go hunting we had to understand that. We had to give up our childhood ways. And we wanted to do this, but yet we were not doing it. We were still running around bang-banging each other. But we didn’t get away with it, you know, like we thought.

R: Question: What exactly do you feel you have learned?

Well, in a way, from that experience, I learned that my father knew more about what he was talking about when he told us to do things than we did – that I wasn't so smart after all, and we weren't getting away with anything. Plus, I found out also that a weapon is a bit more of a piece of machinery – it was a little more precise than I had imagined. It's nothing that you can just bang around. I found out that what my father was

saying about toy weapons is right – think about it as a weapon that can kill something: a piece of equipment you don't misuse.

Another thing I learned out of it is that every year, like I do now, I will always test my rifle out to make sure it's working. I just don't go out and assume it'll work right – not to let a deer come up, pull the trigger, and find out it doesn't work. And I think that's what my father learned out of it too. And I sight my rifle in. I don't take it for granted that when I threw it in the truck last year the sight wasn't knocked off.

Table 11.1 Data analysis samples

P1: Meaning unit analysis

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. P states that recently she sat on a beach by a river with a friend. They were the only people there. The river was moving very slowly and the sunlight sparkled on it. While P and her friend sat there they saw birds flying and swooping down, skimming the water. P made a remark about the birds bathing in the river. | 1. P states that she and a friend were alone sitting on a beach watching the sunlight dazzling off the slow moving river. Included in their vision were birds flying low and skimming the water. P commented on how the birds were bathing in the water. |
| 2. P states that her friend (who knew about birds) told P that they were not bathing but feeding – scooping insects off the surface of the river. | 2. P's friend, who was more knowledgeable about birds, corrected P and said that the birds were not bathing but feeding, scooping insects off the river. |
| 3. P thought that it was interesting but said that she preferred to think that they were playing. | 3. P acknowledges the correct version as stated by her more knowledgeable friend but she preferred to think of the birds as playing. |
| 4. Reflecting on the situation, P realized that she not only learned a piece of factual information about the feeding habits of birds, but she also learned that she had a very imaginative and fanciful streak which often came out when she was in contact with nature. | 4. P reflected on her situation and realized that she actually discovered some new facts about the feeding habits of birds but she also became more consciously aware that she engaged a fanciful mode of awareness whenever she was relating to nature. |
| 5. P also learned that, at times, she preferred her fancied explanations for things over the so-called real ones. | 5. P also acknowledged that she had a tendency to prefer fancied and/or imaginative explanations over the factual or realistic ones. |
| 6. P states that reflecting on the incident also brought to her mind memories of past creative or imaginative impulses while spending time in the woods – so she also learned that allowing her imagination more freedom in a natural setting was a pattern of hers since childhood. | 6. P reflected further on the incident and began to recall the times in her past when she also indulged in creative and imaginative impulses when she was present to nature. P rediscovered that it was in fact a habit of hers to allow herself to be fanciful and imaginative whenever she was in a setting with nature. She had been doing this ever since she was a child. |
| 7. The incident made P resolve to make more room for contemplative time in the country more often. | 7. The incident became an occasion for P to resolve that she would allow herself to be more imaginative and self-accepting with respect to her tendency to be in such a mode when in the presence of nature. |

P2: Meaning unit analysis

- | | |
|--|----|
| 1. In response to a Q by R, P describes a situation in which he felt that he learned something. P recalls a time when as a young boy, P remembers. | 1. |
|--|----|

(Continued)

Table 11.1 Continued***P2: Meaning unit analysis***

2. P states that he looked at the rifle and since he was a youngster and not old enough to go hunting on his own, so instead, he + his bro' would get the rifle out of the closet + aim it at the wall and even pull the trigger a few times + he would hear the trigger go "snap"! P acknowledges that he didn't know what he was doing but his desire to go hunting was so great.
2. For P, the dangerous and delicate weapon presented itself as an allure, but because he was too young, P could not use the complex weapon by himself, so instead, he and his brother would nevertheless take the complex weapon out of its resting place and aim it at a safe target and even make it function and he could hear the noise the complex weapon made when it functioned. Retrospectively P acknowledges that he did not fully understand what he was doing to the complex weapon, but his desire to actually use the dangerous and delicate weapon in a realistic setting was too great for P to simply leave the dangerous and delicate weapon where it belonged.
3. P then recounts that his Dad went to use the complex weapon a week later in a real situation, but he didn't test it. It was the first day of the season for hunting deer and he went to shoot it and it didn't go off. The firing pin was broken.
3. P states that a week later his father went to use the dangerous but delicate weapon in a real setting, but he had not tested it prior to its actual use. It was the first day of the season for hunting deer and his father saw a deer and decided to use the dangerous but delicate weapon and it didn't fire properly. A delicate part that had to function when the trigger was pulled was broken.
4. P recounts that his father came home and kind of knew what happened. P's father had seen P and his brother click the dangerous but delicate weapon and yelled at P and his brother. When P's father came home and really yelled at P and his brother and P couldn't understand how his father knew what P and his brother had done.
4. P states that his father returned from attempting to use the dangerous but delicate weapon in the real setting when the weapon failed and P states that his father seemed to be curious of what happened. P's father had seen P and his brother click the delicate weapon once before and yelled at them. When P's father returned he displayed anger at P and his brother but P was puzzled as to how his father knew what happened.
5. P describes what he and his brother did with the rifle. P states how he wanted to take the rifle out and aim it at something and cock it and click it. Then, the firing pin would go forward and ram against the bolt since there was no shell and that would put tension on the bolt – a pressure moved from – It moved crack and maybe take a little piece of it. So what happened when P's father used the rifle is that the pin ... but in hard enough, the shell didn't go off but broke a piece of the pin. So it all had to be torn apart and stripped. P's father didn't know put pressure at first until he asked the gunsmith and the gunsmith told him exactly what happened. P and his brother has had been 'dry pinning it'. They get paddled for doing so.
5. P explains how he and his brother used the dangerous and delicate instrument in a playful way but damaging way and then explains the type of damage that happened to the rifle and how the damaging procedure was explained to his father by the gunsmith. P wrote the name that what he and his brother were doing and stated that they were punished for damaging the dangerous and delicate instrument.
6. But P states that he knows to this day that one does not 'dry pin' a rifle. One can do it for a while, but then the stress builds up and it will eventually break.
6. P states that he knows to this present time that one should not play with a dangerous and delicate instrument the way he and his brother did. P realizes that it may be harmless for a short time, but if one continues the dangerous and delicate instrument would eventually break.

(Continued)

Table 11.1 Continued***P2: Meaning unit analysis***

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| <p>7. P states that he and his brother had to give up their childhood ways. Still, they wanted to do it and yet they were in doing it. They were still running around and bang banging each other. They would aim it at something else, never pointing it at each other. But they didn't get away with it like they thought.</p> <p>8. From that event P states that he discovered that his father knew more about what he was talking about when he told his children to do things that the children did – that P was not so smart after all and that P and his brother weren't getting away with anything.</p> | <p>7. P states that P and his brother realized that they had to give up their childish ways. P describes how they still played with dangerous and delicate instrument, but also how they held back somewhat. P insists that he and his brother never aimed at each other, and while they thought that playing with the dangerous and delicate instrument was of no harm to them, it did harm the instrument.</p> <p>8. P states that he discovered that his father was wiser about matters than he was and that he knew more about certain issues than P had assumed. P discovered that in relation to his father that he was not so bright after all and that he and his brother were not successful in hiding actions from their father.</p> |
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DISCUSSION OF THE STEPS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

Having presented the raw data and its analysis, we shall now more fully explicate the procedure that we have gone through that resulted in the data presented above.

- 1 The first step is to read through the written descriptions provided by the participants all the way to the end. In order to do a proper analysis one has to know how the described lived experience ends.
- 2 While the normal natural attitude is sufficient for the first step, the rest of the analysis requires that the researcher assumes the attitude of the phenomenological psychological (or scientific) reduction. This means that the objects that emerge within the description are taken to be phenomena or simply objects that present themselves to the consciousness of the experiencer but the notion that such objects really exist in the way that they present themselves is not acknowledged. They are always understood to be presences to the consciousness of the experiencer. This attitude is usually described by saying that the positing of the existence of the given object, which is usually performed within the natural attitude, is withheld. The assumption of this attitude establishes the phenomenological psychological perspective.
- 3 Now, since descriptions can be lengthy they have to be broken into parts so that proper analyses of the descriptions can be done. Since

phenomenological analyses are concerned with the discrimination of meanings the separation of the parts of a unified description is based upon meanings, and each part is called a meaning unit and it is determined by a careful rereading of the description with the intention to distinguish parts from a phenomenological psychological perspective. As the researcher rereads the description, every time he experiences a relatively significant difference in meaning he marks the place where the difference is perceived and he continues to read. The sense of the meaning itself is not specified nor interrogated. That is done in subsequent steps. Here the differences are merely noted. It is important to realize that all of the meanings constituted in the analysis are interdependent which means that they cannot exist alone. Husserl calls such parts 'moments of a structure' precisely because of their interdependency.

The first column in the tables represent the meaning units basically in the language of the participants. We say 'basically in the language of the participants' because some minor changes do take place. Since the descriptions are not actually the experiences of the researchers themselves the descriptions are slightly altered in order to reflect the actual state of affairs of the researchers. The researchers are actually analyzing the experiences of others, so in order to avoid fusion between the researcher and the participant's experience, all first person statements are changed into third person statements – but otherwise remain the same. Nevertheless the analysis proceeds by

determining as accurately as possible the meanings lived by the participants insofar as such meanings are expressed in the data. Since the lived meanings are related to the participants' experiences they are equivalent to first person meanings. That is why only third person expressions are found in the first column of Table 11.1.

- 4 Once the meaning units are determined the task of the next step is to transform the meanings contained in the description in phenomenologically, psychologically sensitive ways. Thus the attitude to achieve this task requires one to not only be in the attitude of the phenomenological psychological (scientific) reduction but also that one be sensitive to the *psychological* meaning of what is being expressed. This task often necessitates that the original expressions of the participants be changed so that the psychological meaning of what the participants expressed can be more directly apprehended. In fact, the transformations that take place have a dual function: not only are they meant to express the meanings more directly with respect to the psychology of learning (in this case), they are also meant to generalize the meanings so that integration with other descriptions that may be very different becomes more feasible. Thus with P2, instead of staying with 'rifle' as the main theme throughout the description, we called it a 'dangerous but delicate instrument' because psychologically that is the role the rifle played in the description and also by generalizing to instrument, it would be possible to integrate other descriptions if they were dealing with useful objects other than rifles. It turns out that the other description did not deal with any useful object, but the psychological value of what P2 expressed is not lost in any case. Also, in P2's first meaning unit we described the instrument as 'looming large' to the perception of the brothers. Such an expression is meant to capture the physiognomic experience of the participant because it is psychologically richer. If the desire to use the 'weapon' were not so strong the whole learning experience would not have happened. In such a way we highlight P2's phenomenal or psychological world. As Stapleton (1983: 9) put it, 'The entire spiritual force of Husserl's phenomenology lies in the demand that one see what is meant. Phenomenological speech is descriptive speech, whose purpose is not to generate an accurate image of the original, but rather to make the original itself evident to clear intuition.' (ital-

ics in original). This is done by describing the lived experience of the researcher in the presence of the original description provided by the experiencer. In this way, the third person expressions of the experiencers are shaped in such a way that the manner in which the person experienced the phenomenon is highlighted. By this means it is the first person experience of the participant that is emphasized.

It is important to realize that the phenomenological psychological analysis of the original data is a process. Methodological criteria demand that every step of the analysis be presented as explicitly as possible so that a critical other can follow the analysis as closely as possible. In a way, the explicit presentation of the analytic process is a help to the critic because it allows her to pinpoint the exact spot where disagreement with the analysis might take place. This is part of what makes this method scientific – its transparency to the critical other. In any case, phenomenological analyses are slow, and challenging, but there is no better way to get to know the data well and intuit what is needed.

As can be seen, our analyses were completed with two columns, but that is because the original descriptions were brief. When original descriptions are long, say 25–40 pages, then all the data cannot be handled in only two columns. It should also be noted that not all of the meaning units have to be transformed the same number of times because all meaning units are not equally psychologically rich. Some very rich meaning units may take three or four transformations and impoverished units may be accomplished with a single transformation. It is important to stress that the criterion is the best expression of the psychological meaning of a unit whether it is done once or several times.

- 5 The last step is to get the general structure of the experience. This is done by reviewing all of the transformations written in the second column in order to determine the essential ones. But the essential structure may be expressed in ways that are different from the individual elucidations because the latter are correlated with specific parts and the general structure relates to the whole description. This is an eidetic process utilizing the eidetic reduction. The eidetic reduction requires that the researcher looks at a particular phenomenon and then systematically varies it in order to determine its essence. The structures for the two descriptions are:

P1: General structure of learning for Beach sample
For P1, learning is the acceptance of a permission to indulge in one's imaginative and pleasant inclinations in certain worldly settings, and the resolution to continue to do so, despite a pronounced difference with a more authoritative other.

P2: General structure of learning for Rifle sample
For P2 learning consists in the acquisition of a sustaining, beneficial habit with respect to the treatment of a dangerous but delicate instrument that resulted from an early encounter with an authoritative other whom P2 discovered was correct in his advice as opposed to P2's desires. P2 also learned that an apparently rugged instrument could be damaged by childish play.

The above structures are the results of the study and the fact that there are two structures indicates that the two descriptions could not be subsumed into one structure. The major difference that accounts for that finding is the fact that in the first description learning was a wholly experiential process and the second one was about the handling of a physical object. It is interesting to see that one common denominator between the two descriptions is that both involved a relationship with a more authoritative other. However, in P2's case, he eventually went along with the authoritative figure's viewpoint but P1's learning meant resisting the authoritative figure's perspective.

If we look at the general structures we can see that they do capture what is essential about the two experiences with respect to learning. For P1 it was not a matter of acquiring a skill or being able to do something new, but rather of giving herself permission to do what she already knew how to do. We do not know all of the details of her history so we do not know the specific reasons that she did not allow herself to indulge in fantasy, but we do know that she affirmed this choice despite the preference for realistic descriptions by her friend. And we know that her choice was not situation specific because she resolved to do it more in her future. It was something like a permanent change in her character. I would say that her description was an adequate one: just enough data to intuit a structure.

P2's description, on the other hand, was a good one. There was plenty of detail and even accessory information. But the core of the learning situation was that he is now careful with his rifle because of this particular childhood experience and the way he related to his father at that time. He realized that his playing with the instrument caused his father to fail to achieve what he intended in a vital situation and undoubtedly that helped P2 to change his childish attitude. Today

he acts completely responsibly with respect to the rifle precisely to avoid the situation that angered his father.

We shall now test whether the psychological structures genuinely capture the essential features of the original description. For P1 the structure indicates that what was essentially learning for P1 was that she permitted herself to indulge in depicting certain realistic settings in personally imaginative ways, notwithstanding the presence of a more accurate realistic description by her friend who understood the reality more accurately. In the face of whatever pressure the presence of her friend may have had on her, P1 resisted such pressure and chose to entertain her own preferred way of experiencing natural settings. P1 then recalled that she lived in her imaginative mode rather frequently when in the presence of nature. Perhaps she couldn't understand why she had departed from that mode, and so she made a resolution that she would continue with her preferred mode despite her friends more realistic preference. In a certain sense, she learned that she could indulge in the preferred imaginative mode, that her history told her was important to her, and for some reason she had given up. For her, the experience reflected an important change in her character.

For P2 what he essentially learned was to habitually treat a rifle in a careful way so that it was always ready to be used when one needed it. The circumstances that contributed to the formation of P2's habit are also important. P2 previously had a childish and playful attitude with respect to the rifle and such playful activity actually damaged the rifle so that when his father went to use it in a vital situation, it failed to function. The father correlated the failure of the rifle with his children's play and he scolded and punished them for it. He then advised them on the proper use of rifles, and P2 learned, belatedly, that his father was correct in his advice and that P2's childish attitude was wrong. P2 also learned how a certain type of childish play could damage a rifle and that a rifle was a delicate and potentially lethal instrument that could easily be damaged.

Sometimes, even larger contexts for learning show themselves. In the rifle example, it can be shown that retrospectively P2 appreciated the difference between a child's world of play and the more serious adult world with respect to lethal weapons. As a child, P2 'played' with a real weapon and caused it to malfunction. As an adult he treats it with proper respect and keeps it in functioning condition. He 'learned' to maintain a proper adult attitude with respect to lethal weapons.

More importantly, light is also thrown on general features of the process of experiential learning. P2 as a child, approached the use of the rifle playfully because that was a dominant feature of

his world at that age, even though such an attitude was not appropriate for the weapon. Partially because of that experience, P2 learned to adopt the proper attitude. Interestingly, many descriptions of the experience of learning show how an initial assumption brought to a situation is inappropriate and it is what accounts for failures that ultimately require a change to proper assumptions in order for correct performance to take place. The reason for this is the temporal characteristic of experiencing in general. Husserl (1991) has demonstrated that the experience of the present, now, is not a point but a certain spread. A present moment consists of a now and protentional and retentional threads. Protention refers to the experience of the immediate future and retention refers to the experience of what immediately receded into the past – but both belong within the present. Thus, the most recent lived experience and the most advancing lived experience belong to the present instant. When learning is meant to happen, persons, based on past experience or reasonable projections, anticipate what the experience is going to be like and often are wrong and so learning is required to perform capably. Thus, in a previous research study (Giorgi, 1985), a father assumed that his son loved to play chess, so he gave him a chess set, but then became aware that the son did not after all in fact like the game of chess. So the father had to reorient his understanding of his son's interest in chess. Also, a guest assumed that her past social behavior would be adequate for a new social situation but then discovered that it wasn't. In each case, the meaning protended for the new situation was not adequate, caused difficulties, and had to be changed. It is hard to approach new situations without some anticipatory meaning and if the anticipated meaning does not fit well, then learning ensues.

The determination of general structures is basically a reflective process that tries to determine what is essential to each description. It is more efficient if the descriptions fit under one structure but such a conclusion should not be forced. The discovery of differences is as important as uniformities. As noted above, these structures are typical and not universal. They are determined by going over the transformed meaning units in order to see what the key meanings are and if they relate to the whole description or not. Usually, one has to reword the transformed meanings so that they can be applied to the whole description and not just a part. Most frequently however new meanings have to be intuited to comprehend what is essential to the whole description. But the structure should contain implicitly all of the key meanings that contributed to the determination of the structure. The way to check for this step is to compare the

written structure with all of the transformed meaning units that formed its basis.

Of course, the findings of a study should be compared with the results of other studies. As our purpose here is to only demonstrate a sample of the method, space only permits us to mention briefly that our results here are quite convergent with what Merleau-Ponty described using a different method and different analyses. Merleau-Ponty (1963: 96), in critically reviewing certain animal studies concerned with learning, stated that learning seemed to be 'a new creation after which the behavioral history is qualitatively modified' or that learning is 'a general alteration of behavior which is manifested in a multitude of actions.' Such generality is evidenced in our descriptions. P1 states that after that experience she will allow herself to be more imaginative with nature and P2 says that he now sights his rifle every time before he is going to use it again. Because of the learning the behavioral repertoire of our participants is qualitatively changed with respect to situations encountered in their lives. A fulsome discussion with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of developmental change as a gestalt 'restructuration' would certainly be warranted.

In conclusion we would only reiterate that, because they are so inseparably intertwined, we have explicated the link between phenomenological philosophy and its corollary in phenomenological psychological methodology. At the same time, we have distinguished the psychological adaptation from the purely philosophical method. Again, while what we have presented in this chapter is in no way a completed research project, we hope it has served as a sample data analysis offered for the purpose of illustrating the phenomenological approach to psychological research methodology and how its findings can be related to relevant findings in the literature.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

Our fidelity to Husserl's emphasis on description is a defining feature of this method. While we are fully aware that many contemporary qualitative methodologies tend to accentuate interpretation (see Chapter 16), we feel the descriptive emphasis continues to offer a significant contribution to the increasing repertoire of qualitative methods becoming available to psychologists. In other publications we had presented a full defense of this emphasis (Giorgi, 1970a, 2000, 2012, 2014) on the basis of, not only phenomenology's comprehensive critique of the domination of naturalist methods in

psychology, but also the epistemological *necessity* for a fully and radically qualitative psychology. The descriptive phenomenological method has been time tested over the course of several decades of research and we believe its strong foundations in Husserl's overall philosophy of science can withstand any criticism from experimental psychologists with regard to scientific legitimacy. Though the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* is not exclusively devoted to this particular phenomenological method, many studies using this method have been consistently published in this journal since its inception in 1970. While modifications have been made, and adaptations have been employed for different topics and disciplines, the core essential steps have been shown to be robust and enduring. Applications show a broad spectrum of uses in psychology. We can review a short sample of applications on the following topics: decision making (Cloonan, 1971), social anxiety (Beck, 2013), early emotional memories (Englander, 2007), women's depression (Røseth et al., 2011, 2013), psychotherapy research (Giorgi, B., 2011), Alzheimer's disease (Ekman et al., 2012), being criminally victimized (Churchill and Wertz, 2015), medical trauma (Wertz, 2011) and even studies in law enforcement (Broomé, 2013). This is only a brief sampling of psychological phenomena to which this method is being successfully applied. One recent development by Englander (2012) is the expansion of this overall Husserlian approach into the data gathering interview process. There is every reason to believe that, while staying faithful to the five core steps, this method can continue to be adapted to increasingly challenging phenomena and research topics. The enduring nature of this method gives every indication that it will continue to play a significant and lasting role in the accelerating diversification of methodologies we are witnessing in psychology today.

Note

- 1 We dedicate this chapter to the memory of Barbro Giorgi who was the beloved partner of Amedeo Giorgi and co-author of the previous edition of this chapter. She was a skilled and caring therapist, a promising phenomenological researcher and a dear friend to many in the phenomenological community.

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