

Modeling the *lived experience*

Phenomenology

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Events as they are *perceived*, either through the **senses** or the **mind** (**thinking** or **feeling**)

Essential Nature and Meaning

Based in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), **phenomenology** aims to elicit distinctive features of human experience, capturing and depicting underlying structures and the meanings associated with those structures.

Since Husserl and his followers first elucidated the basic concepts of phenomenological philosophy – such as its focus on the "**appearance of things**" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58), its concern with **multiple views of a single phenomenon**, its assertion that "**the data of experience . . . are regarded as the primary evidences of scientific investigation**" (p. 59), and its diligent application of **creative reflection** – several interrelated research paradigms have emerged. Examples include transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and, noteworthy for this study, psychological phenomenology.

The Duquesne School: Giorgi and Colleagues

Publishing four volumes of studies between 1971 and 1983, Amedeo Giorgi and his colleagues at Pennsylvania's Duquesne University defined two levels of psychological phenomenology: "[On] Level I, the original data is comprised of **naïve descriptions** obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. On Level II, the researcher describes the structures of the experience based **on reflective analysis and interpretation** of the research participant's account" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

The approach advocated by the Duquesne School was initially a descriptive psychology, with its adherents only later recognizing that "**the primary issue [becomes] what one does after the descriptions are obtained**" (Giorgi, 1985a, p.3).

Giorgi's post-data-gathering analytical strategies consist of four steps:

1. The researcher reads and re-reads the descriptive texts to **get a sense of the whole**;
2. The researcher discriminates "**meaning units** within a psychological perspective and with a focus on the phenomenon being researched" (Giorgi, 1985b, p. 10);
3. The researcher reviews all the meaning units to further **extract/express insights**; and
4. The researcher puts together a statement of the structure of the experience by **synthesizing the "transformed meaning units"** (p. 10).

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Moustakas

The phenomenological model proposed by Moustakas (1994) draws on Husserl's work by incorporating the concept and practice of the *Epoche*. *Epoche* is a rigorous period of self-reflection that compels the researcher to "bracket" or set aside preconceptions and biases. The result is a presence that is fully open and receptive, a kind of pure consciousness. *Epoche* is a deeply personal process, one that Moustakas suggested is crucial not only as "preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself" (p. 85).

Through phenomenology . . .
one learns to see naively and
freshly again, to value
conscious experience, to
respect the evidence of one's
senses, and to move toward
an intersubjective knowing
of things, people, and
everyday experiences.
(Moustakas, 1994. p. 94)

Polkinghorne

Donald Polkinghorne (1989) provided perhaps the most useful advice, pointing out that whatever the methods used to obtain descriptive information or the procedures applied to interpret that information, study designs should suit the phenomenon under investigation rather than hewing to a precise procedural format. His is a succinct three-step guide:

Data corpus

Story, throughline, arc, plot

Playmaking

1. **Gather** a number of naive descriptions from people who are having or have had the experience under investigation.
2. **Engage** in a process of analyzing these descriptions so that the researcher comes to a grasp of the constituents or common elements that make the experience what it is.
3. **Produce** a [narrative] that gives an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience. The reader [the audience] . . . should come away with the feeling that 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.' (p. 46)