

# Phenomenological Research: A Study of Lived Experiences

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research paper is to inform the reader about the phenomenological research design. One of the most popular qualitative methodologies used in doctoral dissertation is phenomenology. A phenomenological research design is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Lived experience of a group around a specific phenomenon is the central research question in a phenomenological study. Due to its philosophical and methodological strength it is applied in almost all disciplines. As a method within the interpretative research paradigm, it emphasizes the importance of personal perspective and interpretation.....*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular qualitative research methodologies used in doctoral dissertations is phenomenology. Clark Moustakas is considered the founder of phenomenological research. According to Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010) the primary objective of a phenomenology study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon. The philosopher Immanuel Kant used the term phenomenology in his classic work, *Critique of pure reason*, in which he differentiated between the mental representations of objects, understood as the thing in itself (*a priori* knowledge independent from experience), and objects understood on the basis of experience: *a posteriori* or empirical knowledge (Parodi, 2008). Phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational and nontheroetic :a powerful phenomenological text thrives on a certain irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the perspective spheres of the life world. (Van Manen ,1997))

A phenomenological research design is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Creswell 1998 points that the best criteria to determine the use of phenomenology is when the research problem requires a profound understanding of human experience common to group of people. Phenomenological research is based in a paradigm of personal insight and subjectivity and gives more importance to personal experience and interpretation. Wertz (2005) puts it: phenomenology is a low hovering, in- dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known.

### Classification of Phenomenology:

**1 Transcendental Phenomenology:** It analyzes the essences perceived by consciousness with regard to individual experiences. idea of reduction is the central theme of Husserl an phenomenology. Van Manen (2011) wrote: By transcendental phenomenology we refer primarily to the work of Edmund Husserl and his early assistants Edith Stein and Eugen Fink. Husserl's path breaking work on phenomenology inspired the thinking of many scholars and the development of various movements. Husserl often used the words "transcendental" and "phenomenology" interchangeably to describe the special method of the eidetic reduction by means of which the phenomena are described. Through the method of imaginative variation, (examples of instantiation, and comparative examination) the invariant or eidetic aspects of a particular phenomenon are explicated.

**2 Hermeneutic Phenomenology:** It refers to the study of personal experience and requires a description or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). The way this exploration of lived experience proceeds is where Husserl and Heidegger disagreed. While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on 'Dasein', that is translated as 'the mode of being human' or 'the situated meaning of a human in the world'. Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling, and thinking about the world and human beings were understood primarily as knower's. Heidegger, in contrast, viewed humans as being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate in an alien world (Annells, 1996; Jones, 1975).

The main difference between transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology is individual experiences vs. concept of being. According to reiners for Husserl phenomenology the critical question was what do we know as person? Consequently, Husserl developed descriptive phenomenology, where everyday conscious experiences were described while preconceived opinions were set aside or bracted. On the other hand according to Cristina Lafont (2015) hermeneutic phenomenology is indeed a variety of transcendental philosophy: it aims to show that the hermeneutic conditions of understanding anything as meaningful are the ultimate transcendental conditions of any human experience whatsoever. However, once these hermeneutic conditions are finally revealed, they turn out to be very different from traditional transcendental conditions, since they disclose the radical facticity and situatedness of all human experience.

**3 Exisistential Phenomenology** – It refers to the analysis of the self as a conscious entity. This type of phenomenology appeals to universal consciousness. Existential phenomenologist's all share the view that philosophy should not be conducted from a detached, objective, disinterested, disengaged standpoint. This is because, they contend, certain phenomena only show themselves to one who is engaged with the world in the right kind of way (Warthal,2006). Existential phenomenologist's have included descriptions of the meaning of being (Heidegger), the role of the lived-body in perception (Merleau-Ponty).

### **Sample and Data Collection Strategy in Phenomenology.**

Purposive sampling is the best sampling criteria in phenomenological study. Existing literature also suggested that open interview or semi structured interview used most by phenomenologist. In-depth interviews are a common method used by a phenomenologist for gaining access to individual's life worlds.

### **Data Analysis in Phenomenology:**

The basic method of phenomenological analysis is *reduction*. First, the existence of the object of study must be "put between brackets", not because the philosopher should doubt it but because the conditions around the object of study are subject to various coincidences which may obscure its real essence. Giorgi (1985) relied predominately on the insights of the researcher who worked through all data collected to get a sense of the whole and then discriminated meaning units from the descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. Further analysis would yield a synthesis of all meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the participant's experiences, known as the structure of the experience

Phenomenological analysis is based on discussions and reflections of direct sense perception and experiences of the researched phenomenon. A starting point of the strategy is your ability to approach a project without a priori assumptions, definitions or theoretical frameworks. A key aspect of this method of analysis is phenomenological reduction.

Bracketing and phenomenological reduction: Phenomenological reduction is the process that facilitates this transcendence. Although sometimes described as distinct stages in the reduction process, Husserl used the terms

bracketing, eidetic reduction, and epoche interchangeably to describe the change of attitude necessary for philosophical inquiry (Stewart and Mickunas 1974).

Creswell (2013) describes the following steps to elaborate phenomenological analysis:

1. The researcher describes his or her own experience with the object of study in order to identify personal judgments and prejudices so that they don't affect the process of analysis.
2. The researcher proceeds with the "horizontalization" of data. This refers to the process wherein the researchers lists each of the relevant quotes of the studied topic and gives them equal value with regard to the expressions of the group. This is where the textual description begins: what are the participants saying? What are the relevant topics expressed by the research participants?
3. The researcher groups the relevant topics into units of meaning.
4. The researcher writes the textual description and includes "ad verbatim" quotations.
5. The researcher writes the structural description.
6. Finally, according to the textual and structural analysis, the researcher proceeds to identify the essence of the phenomenon. What are the common elements repeated in each of the researched participants?

Phenomenologist's view phenomena as apodictic which means they speak from themselves and for this we should be prepared to listen. Bracketing also called phenomenological reduction; means setting aside all our usual natural assumptions about the phenomenon. Some phenomenologist emphasize the reduction as a process of rendering oneself as non influential and neutral as possible. Here researchers aim to bracket their previous understanding, past knowledge and assumptions about the phenomenon so as to focus on the phenomenon in its appearing. In phenomenological research bracketing is a method of presentation the validity of the data collection and analysis process.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Phenomenology comes from the academic disciplines of philosophy and psychology, and it is based upon the work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Edmund Husserl which was then later developed by Heidegger. As a method within the interpretive research paradigm its prime aim to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them from his own perspectives. Phenomenological researches are good for in-depth issues and for exploration of hidden voices.

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