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A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing

Mark T. Bevan¹

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Abstract

In this article I propose a method of interviewing for descriptive phenomenological research that offers an explicit, theoretically based approach for researchers. My approach enables application of descriptive phenomenology as a total method for research, and not one just focused on data analysis. This structured phenomenological approach to interviewing applies questions based on themes of experience contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon and its clarification. The method of questioning employs descriptive and structural questioning as well as novel use of imaginative variation to explore experience. The approach will help researchers understand how to undertake descriptive phenomenological research interviews.

Keywords

descriptive methods; Husserl; interviews; phenomenology; research design; research, qualitative

In this article I outline a guided approach to phenomenological interviewing. My approach was developed out of an understanding of phenomenological method applied to qualitative interviewing. From the outset I drew on the phenomenology of Husserl's (1970) descriptive perspective, and am not intending to replace current methods but provide an alternative for phenomenological researchers. To begin, I introduce some important fundamental concepts of phenomenology essential to my interview approach. This is followed by a brief review of sources of phenomenological interviewing approaches, which leads to an explanation of my proposed interview guide. To demonstrate its use, examples are drawn from my study of patients' and nurses' experiences of hemodialysis satellite units (Bevan, 2007).

The interview in phenomenological research is perhaps one of the most underemphasized aspects within the process. There is much discussion related to overcoming the complexities of phenomenological language and the controversies related to polarization between descriptive and interpretative orientations. The particular language and concepts of phenomenology are ever present and complex, particularly to the novice researcher. What is important for a phenomenological researcher is familiarization with and internalization of these concepts for immersion in and application of phenomenological research method. Clearly these debates are important, but they have a tendency to distract attention from practical application, which in turn impoverishes phenomenological research method.

To aid familiarization and help maintain a theory and practice link I begin by outlining the fundamental phenomenological concepts of natural attitude and lifeworld. Husserl (1970) explained the natural attitude as the way in which each of us is involved in the lifeworld. Lifeworld is described as consciousness of the world, including objects or experiences within it, and is always set against a horizon that provides context. Being in natural attitude is effortless, and the normal unreflective mode of being engaged in an already known world. It is precisely the experience of the lifeworld in natural attitude that is under investigation in phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1997). Therefore, a phenomenological researcher is interested in describing a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint.

This epistemological perspective is essentially post-modern, in recognizing that human experience is complex, is grounded in the world which is experienced intersubjectively, and has meaning (Mason, 2002). In this approach I tacitly recognize that respondents are viewed as real, active, and interpreting, and will intend to find meaning in experience—including the research interview

¹Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author:

Mark T. Bevan, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Coach Lane Campus, Benton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE7 7XA, United Kingdom.
Email: mark.bevan@northumbria.ac.uk

(Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; von Eckartsberg, 1986). An additional element related to natural attitude is how phenomena are presented in different ways to individuals. Phenomenologically this is known as modes of appearing. Modes of appearing means that a thing experienced, such as a person, car, idea, emotion, or memory, is experienced in many ways from different perspectives, by one person or by many people. What this means is that a thing has multiple ways of appearing, which provides it with an identity. For example, a car can be experienced by one person as something desired, something observed, something driven, and so forth. A car is experienced from different perspectives, which are then constituted to provide a whole phenomenon of apparently seamless perspectives. The thing is constituted, and as such has a sense of being. It is important to state that there is no objective reality or residual object behind its modes of appearing; an object appears in many ways, which makes up its being.

Errors of analysis of experience occur out of insufficient systematic examination and are deemed incomplete. For example, someone might be easily misidentified because of a glimpsed look in poor light rather than a full gaze in clear light. Therefore it is important to say that systematic interviewing of an individual, as well as many people, will provide important modes of appearing and how an experience is constituted, and will limit the likelihood of incomplete analyses.

The method of analyzing phenomena in the phenomenological tradition is reflective (Husserl, 1967; von Eckartsberg, 1986). In philosophical phenomenology it is the philosopher who reflects on the givenness of a thing, whereas in phenomenological research initial reflection is by the person who has undergone a particular experience, and this reflection is a primary interpretation. It is through thematized verbalization of this reflected experience that we gain access to the thing experienced, its modes of appearing in natural attitude, and its meaning. If we accept the supposition that vocabulary is shared through culture and a linguistic community whereby experience is identified and named in a consistent manner, then interview is an appropriate means of explicating lifeworld experience (von Eckartsberg).

Interview is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research; however, despite this dominance there is very little instruction as to how it should be undertaken. There are many research methods books and articles that provide sound advice for interviewing which tend to adopt a general approach. This might be wholly appropriate given the need for flexibility in the examination of human experience. There is an assumption that general qualitative interview method will suffice for analysis to commence. Indeed, there appears more emphasis on data analysis method than on

how the data are obtained in a phenomenological manner. For example, Moustakas (1994) provided only minor discussion about including examples of questions. He required the researcher to undertake the epoché (explained below) prior to the interview. Moustakas was mainly concerned with phenomenological theory and the analysis of data.

The influential phenomenological researcher Giorgi (1997) stated that “questions are generally broad and open ended so that the subject has sufficient opportunity to express his or her view point extensively” (p. 245), which reflected a generalist approach. Giorgi (1989, 1997) also differentiated descriptions from interviews whereby a description provided content for the interview. Here Giorgi implied that the phenomenological interview approach is a two-tiered method of obtaining descriptions of context followed by an interview for eliciting meaning. Giorgi offered no advice as to how the interview should proceed other than via broad, open-ended questions. What this highlighted was an important phenomenological concept of context, which is the lifeworld of the person, as being necessary for the interview.

Some practical advice was provided for phenomenological researchers by Benner (1994), who recommended that questions be asked in the vocabulary and language of the individual being interviewed. In Benner’s view this approach enabled access to the respondent’s perspective unencumbered by theoretical terms, and would appear to imply a form of phenomenological reduction. Benner also advised the researcher to listen actively, which should lead to areas for clarification and probing. This is sound practical advice but is generalist in nature. She also suggested more than a single interview per person, and the importance of using clarifying questions. Benner used questions on the basis of getting respondents to describe experience, and structural questions for clarity.

The often-cited Colaizzi (1978) provided some indication of application of phenomenological theory by stressing the importance of uncovering and interrogating presuppositions, implying use of the phenomenological reduction by the researcher. However, for Colaizzi, elicited presuppositions provided a thematic basis for question development, leading from personal experience to a broad themed question. In Colaizzi’s approach the researcher applies personal understanding to the phenomenon prior to interview. This runs the risk of covering the phenomenon’s modes of appearing with preconceived interpretations and not letting an experience be articulated as it is experienced by the experienter.

More recently, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) outlined phenomenology as a basis for their approach to qualitative research interviewing. Kvale and Brinkmann considered research interviewing to be a craft that required a researcher to obtain descriptions of aspects of experience

of people in the lifeworld. The authors clearly attempted to structure the interview via phenomenological theory by including what they called “deliberate naiveté,” which is another way of stating the phenomenological reduction. Kvale and Brinkmann also accepted a phenomenon as it was, which included ambiguity and respondent reinterpretation of experience, and stated that questions should aim to describe specific situations and actions and not general opinions. Both Giorgi’s (1985) context description and Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) deliberate naiveté are important structural elements of phenomenological interviewing.

A detailed description of phenomenological interview method was provided by Seidman (2006), which is based on Schutz’s (1967) interpretation of Husserl’s (1960) phenomenology. Seidman’s (2006) method required three interviews per person, wherein the first is a focused life history that provides context, followed by an interview aimed to reconstruct the experience with its relationships and structures, and finally an interview that allowed the respondent to reflect on the meaning of his or her experience. Seidman explicitly constructed context to provide meaning, which enabled behavior to be put into context. Seidman also adopted the phenomenological reduction and stated that the interviewer should recognize it is not his or her ego that is important but to stay focused on the person being interviewed. Additionally, he recommended the use of open-ended questions developed from the context-building process, and if a guide is used it should be used with caution and flexibility.

Seidman (2006), like Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), used phenomenological theory to guide the phenomenological interview, with the intention of providing a structured interview approach to exploring phenomena. This is wholly appropriate for phenomenology and is congruent with descriptive phenomenology. As a starting point, general qualitative interviewing method provides a useful basis for undertaking phenomenological interviews. Qualitative interviews are generally deemed to be semi-structured or unstructured (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996). Mason (2002) made the point that alleged unstructured interviews provide an inaccurate picture of the process because even the most unstructured interview will have some underlying structure to remain focused on the phenomenon under investigation. Accepting the existence of underlying structures in interviews, no matter how vague, is an important starting point for a qualitative interviewer.

Applying Phenomenological Structure to the Interview Process

Understandably there will be those who consider structure in phenomenological interviewing as its antithesis, but they should not be alarmed because structure does not

necessarily have to tell you what to ask but rather how to manage the process of questioning. In support of structure within phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur (as cited by Ihde, 1971) claimed emphatically that “phenomenology must be structural” (p. 5) and has no universal method. Therefore, a phenomenological researcher is free to structure his or her interview in a way that enables a thorough investigation. Phenomenological theory has sufficient structure to examine an experience through interview in an explicit way, which can be done flexibly. Phenomenological interviewing should remain faithful to phenomenological method but should be kept practical. This is also important for maintaining methodological consistency and increased trustworthiness.

Structure in the phenomenological interview method to be explained here is provided by the following key concepts: description, natural attitude, lifeworld, modes of appearing, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. It should be remembered that phenomenological method is a total method in that one is immersed in it from the start and not only at the point of data analysis. By integrating the points identified by the authors mentioned above, I developed a phenomenological interview method with a structure for phenomenological interviewing consisting of three main domains: contextualization (natural attitude and lifeworld), apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing, natural attitude), and clarifying the phenomenon (imaginative variation and meaning). For an outline of the structure of phenomenological interviewing, see Figure 1.

It is important to note that each of these three structural interview domains is undertaken in the phenomenological reduction on the part of the researcher. The reduction is the means of thematizing people’s conscious experience of phenomena (Husserl, 1970). To undertake the phenomenological reduction a researcher is required to abstain from the use of personal knowledge, theory, or beliefs, to become a perpetual beginner (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) or deliberate naiveté, in Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) terms.

To abstain from the use of personal knowledge is what Husserl (1970) called “bracketing,” which is a setting aside of what we already know about a given phenomenon. It is worth acknowledging that total abstention is impossible, but that is not the point. Bracketing or abstention requires a researcher to become aware of his or her own natural attitude, immersion in their lifeworld, and how it is taken for granted (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Essentially, bracketing is an attempt to overcome the uncritical dogmatism of the natural attitude. What abstention amounts to is a dialogue with the self, to become reflexive when asking questions. Interview questions are posed with self-consciousness of one’s own natural

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	“Tell me about becoming ill,” or “Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit.”
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	“Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit,” or “Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis.”
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	“Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times.”

Figure 1. A structure of phenomenological interviewing.

attitude and, for example, to avoid asking theory-laden questions, as Benner (1994) suggested.

By undertaking the phenomenological reduction the researcher has attempted to remain faithful to the descriptions of experience of the people interviewed, and has accepted that this was how they described their world, which maintains a fundamental level of validity. The phenomenological reduction is a commitment to adopting the phenomenological attitude, also known as the epoché. The epoché is to be seen as a critical-position-taking attitude that requires the phenomenologist to adopt and accept a resolve to take nothing for granted. Only through the epoché does the phenomenologist engage in the resolve to perform the reduction (Zaner, 1975). Hence, the epoché is an attitudinal shift that is directed at moving the phenomenologist out of his or her natural attitude and adopting a critical stance. This critical stance requires the phenomenologist to question his or her position regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Critical self-questioning is a reflective process that remains self-conscious. Self-consciousness requires a critical view of bracketed knowledge that includes beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes that present themselves in relation to the phenomenon, and is maintained throughout the interview.

By undertaking the epoché there is a change in attitude toward the phenomenon under investigation, which is situated in reality but it does not attempt to exclude this reality (Zahavi, 2003). When a researcher embarks on the attitudinal shift of the epoché he or she will undergo new ways of experiencing, of theorizing, and of thinking about a phenomenon, and this is where phenomenological research becomes radical. Radical in this sense means both original and changing.

Contextualization

Objects or experiences of the lifeworld stand out against a backdrop of context or horizon, with a personal biography that provides meaning to that object or experience (Husserl, 1970). Therefore, to examine a person’s particular experience a researcher must consider the context and biography from which the experience gains meaning. For example, in the case of examining a patient’s experience of a hemodialysis satellite unit, questions could not have started directly at the experience of a dialysis satellite unit because this would have isolated it from the patient’s lifeworld context and rendered it meaningless. Instead, the interview must develop from a point of providing context in which the experience is situated (Seidman, 2006). For example, the fact that a patient had kidney failure provided context for his or her experience of dialysis. Therefore, a person’s context can be made explicit through asking descriptive questions about such experiences as becoming ill or how he or she came to be dialyzing at the satellite unit.

Contextualizing questioning enables a person to reconstruct and describe his or her experience as a form of narrative that will be full of significant information. Further detailed context descriptions can be developed by asking him or her to describe accounts of places or events, actions and activities (Spradley, 1979). The method of context elicitation provides some degree of narrative, which gives context but also highlights areas for further questioning. This method is congruent with Giorgi’s (1989) description and interview process and Seidman’s (2006) focused life history. The following interview transcription is an example of an initial context question from a patient’s experience of becoming ill:

Interviewer (I): Can you describe to me about becoming ill with kidney failure?

Patient (P): It happened over a period of say, six weeks. I caught flu. This is how I found out. I caught flu and I were at work and I were getting tired, you know, during the day. Well, I'm a wagon driver and at dinnertime you stop for your break, and I'd have something to eat and then sleep for a while, you know, because I was really tired. I had cold and that knocks hell out of you anyway. I were like that for a week or so. I thought take a couple tablets, shake it off, and kept on working and working, and I couldn't shake it off. And then I came home from work. Well I got into the yard [work] and I was feeling rough, and the boss just said to me, "Get yourself home and get yourself sorted out," you see. So I went home and I went to the doctor's and I told him I weren't feeling well, and he said, "It's just a bit of cold you've got," so he sent me home. Now the same day about half eleven at night [11:30 p.m.] I couldn't breathe; fluid were building up inside. I didn't know it were fluid building up at the time, but I couldn't breathe. So wife phoned for an ambulance and rushed me into hospital, and they did some tests on me when I was there and that's when I found out it were my kidneys that were failing.

The above description of experience demonstrates what the patient went through that provided context for his dialysis. In this instance illness presented itself as an accumulation of fluid, the distress it caused, and its impact on work. Naturally this does not give the whole context, but it demonstrates contextual elements that provided meaning to the experience. Description begins to show the complexity of experience and significance of interrelatedness of elements of experience. It is these relationships that begin to offer the researcher insight into meaning of experience and how it is constituted. Application of the method also requires flexibility on the part of the interviewer to develop questions that are relevant to the individual. It is important that as an interviewer one doesn't start analysis, although notes can be made of issues or elements that might be useful for clarification questioning later.

What is important is that asking context questions allows a presentation and examination of a phenomenon under investigation as it stands out against context, but is intrinsically part of it and informs meaning. To examine another mode of appearing of experience, additional context questions can be asked. For example, returning to the dialysis satellite unit study, most patients attended a central or main dialysis unit before moving to a satellite unit. The context question example below demonstrates a context experience of a main dialysis unit as one of constant change and illness, which shed light on how patients interpreted the dialysis satellite experience.

I: Please describe to me about being at the main unit.

P: At the main unit it was different staff and different faces at times, swapping and changing all the time, because at the main unit they [patients] are mainly ill people compared to here [satellite unit], but well, I'm ill but, I mean they were older and they had more symptoms than I had, and needed more looking after and that.

Apprehending the Phenomenon

The next phase in my approach for a phenomenological interview is an apprehending of the phenomenon. This directs focus on the experience the researcher is interested in. The researcher begins to explore that particular experience in detail with more descriptive questions. Phenomenological method posits that the identity of a thing or experience has modes of appearance and is experienced in many ways (Sokolowski, 2000). For example, a patient might experience a dialysis satellite unit in many ways, such as for the first time, taken for granted, in the winter months, or when feeling ill. The experience is not limited to one person but each person experiences the satellite unit, and thus we find the unit is experienced in many ways by many people.

In view of many modes of appearing, interviewers need to consider exploring many experiences not just of one individual but by others, too. The implication here is that a single question is inadequate to present the many aspects of an experience, and therefore the researcher should be prepared to ask more questions, which should remain descriptive. An example of this kind of question used in the dialysis satellite unit study was to ask participants to describe a typical day for them at the satellite unit or to describe what happened when they were not feeling well. Here the researcher will begin to see how the person interprets his or her experience through descriptions of events and activities.

Although the goal is to get participants to describe experience, one cannot control how people choose to express their experience. It is not unusual for people to describe experience in terms of a narrative account, to use analogy, chronology, or significant events. These expressions are interpretations of experience that assume immediate understanding on the part of the listener. In this descriptive approach the researcher should not accept these interpretations as already understood, although this is not to negate their existence. The researcher needs to investigate these interpretations to elicit clarity. To achieve this goal, descriptive questions are supplemented with structural questions that aim to show how individuals structure their experiences (Spradley, 1979). Structural questions can be repeated but should be adapted to each individual. Descriptive and structural questions complement each other and add depth and quality to information (Spradley).

An example of a descriptive structural question used in the dialysis satellite unit study was to ask what a person did to prepare for dialysis. When an interpretative statement is offered by a participant then a structural question is used to unpick what is meant by it. The following example demonstrates how the method works in practice. The example is an excerpt from a nurse, who described a concern for the health of the patient during dialysis treatment. This was her feeling and meaning making of that experience, but what was also needed was a structural question to expand on it. The first question was descriptive, which was then followed by structural questions to illuminate the aspect under inspection:

I: You mentioned that you had a concern for your dialysis patients. Could you please describe what you mean by concern?

Nurse (N): Yeah. I think as a nurse in dialysis you have a responsibility to look after them [patients] to the best of your responsibility, and you provide the facilities for dialysis. You provide the extras such as advice. You provide a service, basically, and that to me is, is, if you have done your job right and the patient walks out with a smile on their face, saying, "See you in two days," "See you after the weekend," and leaves well [not ill] . . . if they leave well or you are walking through a bay and everyone is nodding [sleeping] or watching TV but someone doesn't look very well, I think it is my responsibility to say, "Are you all right?" They might be feeling fine or they might be going off [having a hypotensive episode] but not wanting to say anything, or frequently the buzzer doesn't work [laughs]. It is just thinking, "They're all right or they're quiet. What are they up to?" Just thinking, "You don't look very well," and "Are you all right?" And sometimes patients just don't complain even if they have got chest pain or they are feeling like they are going off, but they don't want to bother you because you are busy.

I: You mentioned that you were concerned about the patients. Can you describe what you do when you are concerned?

N: Erm, I enjoy what I do. Silly things like having a laugh and joke with the patients, being serious when you need to, making the place comfortable for them, and being approachable so that they can say, "Can I have a word?" Whether it is your patient or not, whoever is on that shift. I take that as a compliment if a patient can confide in you, and I don't find it trouble if I find some says, "Would you mind getting me a blanket?" or "Can I have an extra cup of tea?" You know, it is part of their comfort, so long as they are not drinking gallons of tea and haven't got twenty-five blankets and everyone else has got none. I think it is part of caring, the little things as much as the big things. You don't just connect them up and say, "Hi" and "Bye," and leave them for four hours. You have got one eye out and thinking, yeah, feel all right, feel okay. They have got to be able to say that they don't feel well. That is what nursing is all about.

Here the nurse offered several descriptive structural aspects of concern and concrete examples such as comfort and engendering trust. She finished by attributing

these aspects to nursing. The nurse provided a wealth of information for later analysis. It is not required at this point of the discussion to enter into data analysis, but to demonstrate how the use of structural descriptive questions enabled detailed apprehending of the phenomenon. It would have been easy to accept the word *concern* at face value, particularly as a normal nursing concept wherein concern for patients is an important value. If the researcher accepted the expression of concern without structural questioning this would have meant accepting natural attitude interpretations, as valid as they might be, and would not have demonstrated commitment to phenomenological attitude. Descriptive and structural questions provide a basis for maintaining the phenomenological reduction as well as a configuration for examining experience and avoiding explanatory questions or premature interpretations on the part of the researcher.

Clarifying the Phenomenon

This domain involves the use of elements of experience, or experience as a whole, while exploring the phenomenon itself. Clarification of the phenomenon is undertaken with the use of imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is not normally used in the interview process but is used in the analysis of interview data in its transcribed format (Giorgi, 1985). It seems that imaginative variation is not used at all by some phenomenological researchers. Their rationale is unclear, but what is clear is that the likes of Husserl (1970) and Heidegger (1962) not only emphasized the use of description but explicitly applied imaginative variation in analysis of phenomena. In general, the accepted methodological placing of imaginative variation is a part of data analysis as a form of phenomenon reduction in relation to removal of variant parts and phenomenon clarification.

Speigelberg (1971) placed the imaginative variation earlier in the process of examining a phenomenon. Spiegelberg's reasoning for the early placement was that it provided stepping stones for the apprehension of the general essences; in other words, it helped provide clarity for the presentation of phenomenon. Imaginative variation is applied when the researcher is conscious of an element of experience, which is then put through the process of imaginatively varying its structural components to uncover invariant parts and thus clarifying its structure (Husserl, 1960). This does not negate variant parts, as they offer an opportunity to explore idiosyncratic elements of experiences. To be clear, at the outset a researcher is not looking to develop a general theory of essences of a particular phenomenon; rather, he or she is attempting to add clarity to explicating experience. Essentially it is about the stability of presentation of the phenomenon under investigation. It is not unusual for a phenomenon to

have a multistable presentation; in other words, it can be interpreted in different ways, such as a nurse's experience and a patient's experience, but remains stable in its structure (Ihde, 2009).

A phenomenon should be examined actively (Husserl, 1967), and therefore imaginatively varying aspects of experience makes an interview more dynamic. This is perhaps a novel approach to phenomenological interviewing, but it can be justified on the basis that each person's experience is an experience in its own fullness, but by no means complete. It also adds consistency to method in the examination of phenomenon, which in turn adds dependability to the research process. This means each person's experience can be examined for modes of appearance and clarification. An advantage to applying imaginative variation at this point is that it remains grounded in original context and avoids the quick and cheap use of obscure or absurd variations, and remains close to the original experience.

An additional advantage is potentially important in relation to validity claims. If the phenomenon is varied with the respondent then the structure remains real and context-bound from the perspective of that person, which in turn improves research credibility. By taking the person through the imaginative variation of his or her life-world experience, he or she provides adequacy of structure. This imaginative process also has the benefit of explicitly demonstrating questions of structural variation. Benner (1994) used a form of imaginative variation to examine what she called paradigm cases to identify similarities and differences, although this was undertaken as part of the analysis, and not during the interview.

One of my initial concerns was how to implement imaginative variation in the interview structure. Reflection on the phenomenological method meant I could not impose predetermined variations because that would lead to clarifying a researcher's unbracketed knowledge. My solution was to generate variational questions from the interview itself. The generation of variation questions was developed through active listening and a reflexive approach of a participant's descriptions of experience. Following multiple interviews there might be the possibility of using commonly experienced phenomena as variation questions. The method required a person to describe his or her experience, which was grounded in context and enhanced claims of trustworthiness (Seidman, 2006).

Context and experience descriptions provide suitable material for variation because it is context that provides meaning for the experience. The process is active for the interviewer and the respondent. The interviewer must listen to what is being said; however, it does require that a judgment be made to identify an aspect of structure of experience for clarification. The method is fruitful; for

example, returning to the dialysis satellite unit study, patients described that in their experience doctors were present on a main dialysis unit but not on a satellite dialysis unit. Once this distinction was identified, variation questions could be asked, such as, "Describe how the presence of a doctor on the satellite unit would change the unit." Questions can be asked in this manner because they aim to make the person identify invariants by describing how the experience would change. The following example demonstrates how variation questions can be applied from context description. Using the frequently cited absence of doctors at satellite units by dialysis patients, the following question was asked:

I: If there was a doctor here all the time, would that change the unit?

P: I don't know. I mean, if you are through here it means you are not as ill as the other ones who are poorly at the minute. I think the nurses have to spend more time with the ones who are really ill, do you know what I mean? They seemed to be always rushing about through there [the main unit]. You do see the staff, but I mean they are trying to care for the ones that are really sick at the moment, aren't they? But if there is something the matter with somebody they would still do the same here, but it's because we're pretty fit but, do you know what I mean? With being on here, we don't need to see the doctor all the time.

The above variation began to show clarity of meaning of experience. It also identified additional areas for clarification, such as the presence and absence of illness. There is no guarantee that a complete structure will be elicited, but this is not the aim of phenomenological method; rather, it is adequacy that is important. The method provides an adequacy that is borne out of real experience that is verified by the person, and as such adds credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness. Individual structures can then be compared with those of other participants to provide an intersubjective experience structure. The practical application of the method is a form of experimenting with phenomenon to identify invariants. The method is not unlike Ihde's (1986) approach of using hermeneutical devices to alter phenomenon to identify invariants of experience. This method is dynamic, practical, and would form part of what is called experimental phenomenology (Gallagher & Sorensen, 2006; Ihde, 1986). Experimentation is with experience in situ with the person present, rather than removed to a transcript and idealized by abstraction.

Conclusion

The approach to phenomenological interviewing outlined in this article is built on the phenomenological theory of Husserl (1970). Its focus is one of accurately describing

and thematizing experience in a systematic way. It uses themes of contextualizing experience, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarification of the phenomenon. Questioning requires the use of descriptive and structural questions along with the novel use of imaginative variation for descriptive adequacy. Phenomenology is complex and its research approach has much variety, which unfortunately allows for obfuscation and methodological criticism. My proposed interview structure offers an explicit, theoretically based approach for researchers. It enables application of phenomenology as a total method for research, which in turn adds to clarity and is not focused only on data analysis. This method blends general qualitative interview techniques and phenomenological methods to provide an alternative approach to phenomenological interviewing. Its aim is to provide an explicitly phenomenological influence to interviewing.

The method has a structure that is not restrictive and enables a researcher to examine a person's experience both actively and methodically. The design has a deliberate descriptive approach to enable phenomenal clarity that produces a sound basis for interpreting experience grounded in the origin of the material. My approach also enables a researcher to demonstrate consistency, dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness, which is essential for the quality of research. Furthermore, my approach might be particularly helpful for novice phenomenological researchers, to enable development of understanding phenomenology and their interview technique. This approach does not contravene the need for freedom necessary for phenomenological interviewing, and is built on essential skills of interviewing. Overall, this method of phenomenological interviewing will add to the consistency of qualitative approaches.

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Author Biography

Mark T. Bevan, PhD, RN, is a senior lecturer in nephrology nursing at Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom.