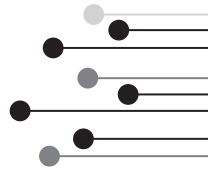# Methodology

In Chapter 3 of the dissertation, students will present the plan for research as well as provide philosophical grounding. Students need to present a solid presentation of their understanding of the phenomenological tradition being used (transcendental or hermeneutic) and why the chosen phenomenological method is best for answering the research questions. The purpose of phenomenological research is to generate the lifeworld experiences of a certain population. Even though there is no fixed set of methods to conduct phenomenological research, there are methodological guidelines to follow and expand upon. A study is written well when readers can replicate it by reading the methodology.

Introduction

Just like all chapters of their dissertations, students will begin the third chapter with a brief introduction. Students will briefly restate the purpose of the study along with a short summary of Chapter 3. This is written straightforwardly as follows: *In Chapter 3, I present the research methods design and rationale and my role as the researcher. I discuss the selection of participants and instrumentation along with research procedures. In addition, I explain . . .*

Design and Rationale

In this section, students should restate their research questions exactly as they wrote them in Chapter 1 of the dissertation. Central concepts of the study should be presented and defined along with the research tradition, which is phenomenology. Rationale should be provided for the phenomenological study. Students should discuss why phenomenological method is most appropriate for the chosen topic. One effective way to do this is to compare and contrast phenomenological method to other methodologies. For example,

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For this study, I aim to use phenomenological methodology because it allows me to illuminate rich descriptions and personal meanings of lived experiences related to [insert topic here]. While the method of ethnography is used to identify shared patterns of a cultural group, it is not appropriate for my study since culture is not the focus of this research. A case study approach, which allows the development of detailed portrayal and case analysis of a single case or numerous cases, was considered but did not fully meet the requirements of focusing only on experiences as lived.

Essentially, this section is for students to summarize the phenomenological methodology that will be used and give reasons for why it is a good strategy for the study. Students will typically include the following:

1. The specific research methodology that will be used (transcendental phenomenology or hermeneutic phenomenology)

2. Background information about either transcendental phenomenology or hermeneutic phenomenology, which would include how it is defined and applied

3. The intended outcome for using phenomenology (focus is on illuminating lived experiences and only lived experiences)

4. The suitability of the chosen phenomenological method for the study (this would be a good place to compare and contrast other methods)

Researcher Role

In this section, students will need to explain their roles as observers and as participants in their phenomenological research studies. If there are any personal or professional relationships with participants, they should be noted here. Perhaps a researcher works with some participants at a hospital or previously supervised participants, for example. The aim is to disclose any relationships and to assure that any positions of power are avoided between researcher and participants. How personal biases are addressed need to be included in this section as well as any other ethical

issues and a plan to address those issues. If a student is working on a transcendental phenomenological study, the process of bracketing will be addressed here. In hermeneutic phenomenological studies, students will discuss the hermeneutic circle. These explanations should be general and succinct.

Participants

Dissertation students need to describe the population of interest, providing demographic information about the population to be sampled. Information can include age range, gender, job title, ethnicity, and geographical location, for instance. In short, anything that is relevant to the study in terms of demographics should be noted. For example, if a student is writing a dissertation about the lived experiences of teenagers working with support animals, she might want to include participants' ages, genders, support need, and the type of animals. Students will also need to discuss how they will sample participants. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling are great to use together since students may receive referrals from participants about other potentially interested participants. While the sample size is certainly something to consider, saturation (reaching a point where no more new data are being obtained from participants) is the key focus in qualitative work and should be noted as the goal rather than including an estimated sample size. To summarize, students will include the following elements in this section:

1. Participants—Include demographic information such as age range, gender, job title, ethnicity, geographical location.

2. Sampling—Usually purposive, criterion, or snowball sampling (or a combination) is advised.

3. Sample size—Students can state a range of participants needed for the study (typically between 8–15 depending on the text referenced), the rationale for that number, and need to, most importantly, describe the relationship between saturation and sample size and that saturation is the goal rather than a number of participants.

4. Criteria—List specific criteria for participants to be able to participate in the study.

5. Recruitment—Explain detailed procedures for how participants will be identified and how they will be contacted and recruited. Perhaps a flyer will be posted in classrooms or an e-mail will be sent to a listserv that has subscribers who fit the research study demographic. If a flyer is used, students should attach the flyer in the appendices of the dissertation.

Instrumentation

In phenomenological research, instrumentation typically includes some combination of interviews, follow-up interviews (to address any gaps in data like misunderstandings, missing information, unclear information, etc.), focus groups, field notes, journaling, audio recording, and video recording. A combination of instruments is ideal rather than one so that findings are rich, but dissertation students should also be realistic about choosing various instruments so that they do not overwhelm themselves with unrealistic expectations. When students present their research instruments, they should be specific about the strengths and weaknesses of each type of instrument to be used and need to discuss how the chosen instruments are sufficient to answer the research questions. Here is an example using interviews and follow-up interviews as instruments:

Follow-Up Interviews

It was expected that many of the descriptions provided in the initial individual interviews will need further extrapolation. Forgetfulness, limited or inferior vocabularies, and limitations in subjects' fully expressing themselves all contribute to subjects' deficient explanations (Kruger, 1988, p. 152). Follow-up individual interviews allow me to clarify the preliminary information gathered or gather additional data that may not have been expressed in the initial interview. After my first reflection on the data, something relevant is often discovered where further clarification is needed, and the clarifications are obtained through

follow-up interviews. The data are then further analyzed until the meaning is completely clear (Giorgi, 1985).

Procedures

In this section, students need to discuss the "what, when, where, and how" of the study. What will be done? When will each step happen? Where will each step happen? How will each step happen? It is important to note that this section should be written so that another researcher could read the procedures and replicate the study. An introductory paragraph is appropriate to begin this section before another heading is introduced. Here is one example:

This research highlights important elements of this phenomenon as it is lived and how it is experienced. This focus on how something is experienced informs the lived aspects of human phenomenon. Descriptions of lived experiences are essential in order to avoid methods of investigation that are indirect (Giorgi, 1985).

Data Collection

This section will detail each data-collection instrument and how it will be utilized. In most cases, this will include interview protocols or focus groups along with either field notes, journaling, or both. Important points to include the following:

1. From where will data be collected?

2. Who will collect the data?

3. How often and how much will data be collected? (focus is on saturation here)

4. How long will it take to collect data?

5. How will data be recorded? (ex: transcriptions, video recordings, audio recordings)

6. What are the follow-up procedures? (these might be follow-up interviews)

Follow-up plan of recruitment results in too few participants. Below is an example of how to write this section in a step-by-step fashion so that it can be replicated by the reader.

A semistructured interview is used for the initial individual interviews to permit the essential methodical spontaneity of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985). Individual follow-up interviews are used to fill gaps that exist in the data collected. Gaps consist of either excluded data or areas that are implicit or deficient in any way (perhaps the participant did not finish a narrative for one reason or another) (Giorgi, 1985). This method of collecting data first allows the lived essence of circumstances to operate spontaneously through the first interview and then are assessed more precisely (Giorgi, 1985). The preliminary individual interviews, the follow-up interviews, and the observations of the researcher are the key methods of collecting data in this study.

Every participant is notified of possible threats and potential benefits of research participation and provides written consent for participating in the study. Confidentiality is protected by giving each participant a code (ex: P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, and P8). Codes are used in analyzing data, and I am the only person who knows the identities of the participants.

Interview Questions

When constructing an interview protocol for a phenomenological study, students can choose a structured, unstructured, or a semistructured interview process. Structured interviews allow researchers to choose specific questions that cover a range of topics specific to the research question(s) but limit the ability to deviate from specific content, which does not allow sufficient opportunities for the research participants to share unanticipated information that is relevant to the research topic. Unstructured interviews allow for plenty of deviation from the chosen interview questions but students run the risk of failing to address all the elements relevant to their research topic if participants digress to other topics. A semistructured interview protocol is recommended, allowing students to construct interview questions relevant to the research question so that key aspects of the research study are sure to be covered while allowing for participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant to the study. Semistructured interviews allow students to keep a balance between focusing on

the research topic and allowing for a disciplined naturalness in phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985).

When constructing interview questions, students must only ask about experiences and not about thoughts, feelings, or perceptions, for example, "When did you first feel like you had a best friend? What happened?" When interviewing participants about their lived experiences, participants may often provide opinions and descriptions as answers because they are the cognitive tools they have to describe those experiences. However, those answers would not be relevant because experiences are different from thoughts and are analyzed differently. For example, did you ever have an opinion about someone or some situation and later discovered you were wrong when you thought or felt about it more or talked to someone else about it who gave you a different perspective or as you moved forward in life and had different experiences that changed your mind? This is why thoughts and opinions are not relevant or reliable at getting at the essence of a phenomena. Just because a participant thinks something happened a certain way may not be the case when the experience is discussed. Researchers would ask participants to talk about an experience when they had a certain opinion to try to uncover the essence of that phenomenon. For instance, "You stated that you were unfairly treated by your employer. Can you discuss an experience in your life when you felt unfairly treated like that?" The participant may say, "I was late a few times at work, and he just flipped out and fired me. I mean, it was ridiculous!" The experience may not indicate that the employer was unfair at all.

When interviewing participants, students can give participants a brief introduction about the focal point of the research to set the tone and then ask participants to describe their lived experiences as if to someone who had never heard of the phenomenon being studied. In the example below, the phenomenon being studied is sexual addiction and religiosity. Yes or no questions are fine to use to avoid assumptions about experiences or to clarify, but most questions should be open ended (and, of course, about experiences).

Interview guide

1. *Describe the nature of your sexual addiction.*

2. *Has your religion had an impact on your sexual addiction?*

3. *If not, discuss how your religion has remained separate from your sexual addiction.*

4. *If so, give an example of a time where your religion had an impact on your sexual addiction.*

5. *Has your religion had an impact on your views about sexuality in general?*

6. *If not, give examples of how your religion remained separate from your views about sexuality.*

7. *If so, give an example of a time where your religion had a helpful impact on your views about sexuality.*

8. *If so, give an example of a time where your religion had a harmful impact on your views about sexuality.*

Follow-Up Questions

After the initial interviews, students should transcribe and review the written transcription. Whether students transcribe their own interviews or hire someone to do it for them is simply a decision of preference. However, it is important to note that transcribing an interview and listening to participants' voices during transcription can be an important part of the process of analysis. After all, many things may not be noted while merely reading a transcript when the spoken word is omitted. Certain inflections, tones, accentuation, tempo, acceleration, modulation, and things that may go "unsaid" are all part of the data. It is very difficult to determine what percentage of communication is nonverbal in nature. A big part of communication is also *how* things are said rather than *what* is said. One estimate is that "no more than 30 to 35 percent of the social meaning of a conversation or an interaction is carried by the words" (Birdwhistell, 2010), meaning that 65% to 70% of communication is conveyed through nonverbal cues. In that regard, I encourage students to transcribe their own interviews, but if time is an issue and the service is hired out, listening to the recording along with reading the transcript is recommended. Students can take notations on the transcript if they hear certain things in spoken word that are not reflected in written word (tones of anger, sarcasm, etc.). After reading the initial transcript, students will find that, in many cases, there

is incomplete, unstated, misunderstood, missing data or any areas that seemed unfinished or implicit. This is where follow-up interviews are employed to fill in these gaps in information. Students will construct follow-up for each participant solely based on the gaps in the descriptions given. Those follow-up interview questions should be written down and used for each follow-up interview.

The data collection method of using semistructured interviews and follow-up interviews allows the lived sense of participants' situations to function spontaneously in the initial interview with more detailed assessment of descriptions utilized later. Students need to also remember that the phenomenological study is about illuminating experiences, and this delineation is important to remember during interviews. Often, participants will discuss viewpoints about something rather than experiences. Viewpoints are not the focus of a phenomenological study. If participants discuss views rather than experiences, students can easily redirect the participant by asking, "Can you give me an example of when you have experienced this?" For example,

Participant: I think my mom resented me because she blamed me for my father leaving.

Researcher: Can you give me an example of an experience you had when you felt this resentment or blaming?

Participant: Let me think, yes, okay, one day when I was about 10 years old, I overheard my mom on the telephone talking to one of her friends. She was complaining about how difficult it was to be a single mom, and she said that if she didn't have us kids to raise that our dad would never have left. She said something specific about me too. She said that I was the most challenging of all of us kids and that it's hard to control her temper around me. I agree with that. She would yell at me more than at my siblings, and when I grew up and we would argue, she would say, "If it wasn't for you, your dad would never have left."

Students are encouraged to change their interview questions as appropriate. As participants are interviewed, new interview questions will surface, and others will change for upcoming interviews. Students should note how their interview process has developed throughout the study in their journals or in other notes and include this information in their Results chapter.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are also an option for collecting data and offer some distinctive benefits over individual interviews as well as place some limitations. In groups, people behave differently than individually or with only one other person (in this case, the researcher). Focus group interviews can challenge participants to reconsider or intensify personal views. Confrontation happens in groups and is mostly absent in individual interviews. Participants can feel validated or conflicted by others depending on what is said in the group. The dynamics are very interesting in focus groups, and completely different kinds of data can emerge. Focus groups can also be used in combination with individual interviews, perhaps meeting with a focus group to discuss a certain topic and then meeting with each participant individually to build on the information discussed in group. If a research topic is considered sensitive or traumatic, focus groups are actually beneficial data-collection methods because many people are more willing to share their sensitive experiences within a group and feel more supported among people who share similar experiences that are typically difficult to discuss. Confidentiality and ethical considerations are always part of the decision-making process on whether to use groups or individual interviews, and students should discuss any ethical considerations with using focus groups with their committee members.

Journaling

The decision to journal in phenomenological research may or may not be suitable depending on the type of phenomenological study that is chosen. If a student is completing a hermeneutic phenomenological study, using Heidegger's philosophy, personal biases need to be made explicit. Journaling would be a good way to do this. Students could write down any of their biases, their pre-understandings about a phenomenon prior to analyzing data. In this way, they could deliberately put their biases in front of them, fully expecting that they could be revised as data are analyzed. They could journal as they analyzed data in order to keep track of the revisions in their thinking about a phenomenon.

In transcendental phenomenological studies, using Husserl's philosophy, bracketing is necessary. Hence, all personal understandings are irrelevant. The researcher is approaching the data as if he or she is a stranger in a strange land. Biases are suspended

by not taking anything for granted. There is no reason to journal and place biases in the forefront since they are unconnected to the phenomenon being studied. Journaling is not necessary when approaching bracketing or epoché in this way. However, some students may choose to journal about their biases in order to know what to suspend. This is, of course, an option. However, people have so many personal biases, and many emerge as they experience new things and have conversations, and as researchers as they analyze data. To journal about every personal bias about a phenomenon prior to data analysis so as to know what to bracket is unrealistic. Hence, I contend that journaling does not typically correspond with the process of bracketing. However, transcendental phenomenology requires that researchers think about their thinking in an effort to position themselves in a way that they are not dependent on their subjective minds. Journaling would be a very good exercise for reflecting upon one's thinking in an effort to see the phenomenon more objectively. The more transcendental phenomenological researchers think about how they think, the more they can think proactively and contemplatively about a phenomenon. More about journaling strategies using either method of phenomenology is discussed further in the data analysis section.

Data Analysis

The term *data analysis* is not completely in line with phenomenological inquiry simply because *analysis* means to "break into parts," whereas phenomenological inquiry seeks to understand a phenomenon as a *whole*. In transcendental phenomenology, the goal is to illuminate the essence of a phenomenon, the entirety of it, without the corruption of personal bias. In hermeneutic phenomenology and the use of the hermeneutic circle, the parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts. If something is broken into parts alone, the phenomenon is lost as a whole. Hence, other terms are more appropriate in phenomenological research. *Explication* is one such term, which means an "investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (Hycner, 1999, p. 161). Of course, not all dissertation students may have the ability to change headings depending on their universities' dissertation standards, so the decision to change "data analysis" to "explication" is posed as an option and certainly not
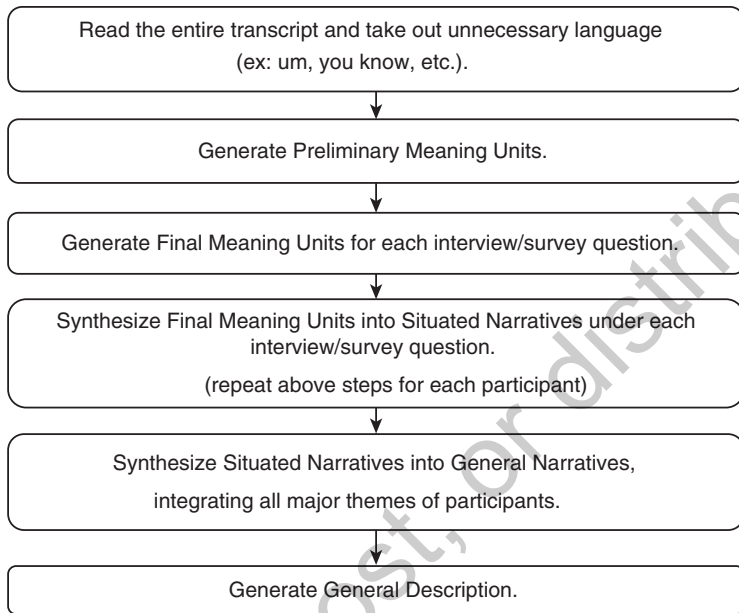
a requirement. For the purposes of clarity and uniformity, "data analysis" will be used throughout this book.

Since the goal of phenomenological research is to illuminate the lived experience of a phenomenon, the method of analyzing data is emergent. What this means is that data emerge and change during analysis. In a narrative, a lot of characteristics make up the story: characters, social interactions, cultures, objects, time references, beliefs, and more. If any of those characteristics changed within a narrative without changing the fundamental meaning of that narrative, then those characteristics would not be essential themes in a phenomenological data analysis. For example, in a narrative about "the lived experience of urban farming" vital themes could include matters of working in city and city-adjacent areas, using creative spaces (like rooftops for gardens and the use of national parks), working within restrictions on raising animals (chickens vs. rabbits), and zoning issues. One could not replace *urban farming* with *rural farming* and keep the essence or meaning of "the lived experience of urban farming." The themes would change completely. Hence, the goal of phenomenological data analysis is to present a description from essential themes of an experience in a way that is comprehensible and identifiable to anyone who has had that particular experience. It should be apparent how one experience of a phenomenon differs from other experiences that are similar.

When analyzing phenomenological data, students should immerse themselves in the descriptive world in an empathic way. They need to live through their participants' descriptions as if they were their own. Students need to slow down and dwell on each narrative, not passing over any details of the account as if they understood them but dwelling on the details of each situation that is described. Each description should be magnified and amplified; even what may seem like a minute explanation for the participant needs to be of great importance to the student researcher. In summary, phenomenological data analysis is the process of transcending the mundane nature of each description to reveal the essence of the phenomenon.

General steps for phenomenological data analysis are provided below to give students a foundation to write a thorough data analysis section capable of being replicated. When using these steps, students need to also highlight transcendental or hermeneutic explanations in their analysis to demonstrate their use of their chosen phenomenological method. Suggestions for delineating chosen phenomenological methods follow the data analysis steps. A flowchart is also recommended and pictured below.

Figure 3.1   Data Analysis Flow Chart

Read the entire transcript and take out unnecessary language
(ex: um, you know, etc.).

↓

Generate Preliminary Meaning Units.

↓

Generate Final Meaning Units for each interview/survey question.

↓

Synthesize Final Meaning Units into Situated Narratives under each
interview/survey question.

(repeat above steps for each participant)

↓

Synthesize Situated Narratives into General Narratives,

integrating all major themes of participants.

↓

Generate General Description.

General Data Analysis Steps

Step 1: Reading and deleting irrelevant information

The initial step in data analysis is to read the individual interview transcript in its entirety to discern the participant's complete story. This step also consists of deleting any information that is irrelevant or unnecessary, like repetitive statements or filler linguistics like "um," "uh," "well," or "you know."

Example of Step 1

ORIGINAL TRANCRIPTION:

Student: "So, I actually have um this my regular full-time job
             and I also have . . . Well, now I have two other jobs
             as well. So, the um, my, my ability to engage with
             the program as much as I'd like is limited. That's . . ."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Student: ". . . I do, I do engage with bits. So, because we
have the reporting requirements in terms of the, I
think it's minimum of three per week as well as the
two assignments per week."

REVISION:

Student: "I actually have my regular full-time job, and I also
have two other jobs as well. So my ability to engage
with the program as much as I'd like is limited. I
do engage with bits because we have the reporting
requirements in terms of its minimum of three per
week as well as the two assignments per week."

Step 2: Preliminary meaning units

The second step in this method is to create preliminary
"meaning units" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10) while concentrating on the
research topic. A meaning unit is the allocation piece of data that
reveals a feature or trait of the phenomenon being investigated.

Example of Step 2

The first meaning unit describes F3's view of his or her role as
a facilitator, and the second meaning unit is viewing his or her role
as one who stimulates discussions.

"My role as (1) facilitator is to (2) provide prompts."

Step 3: Final meaning units

Next, I broke down all the preliminary meaning units to final
meaning units (or themes), which were informed by my deepened
understanding of each participant's description.

Example: Step 3

Question 6:   Please describe how students are interacting and
connecting with each other in the classroom.
F3

Preliminary meaning unit 1: Students share similar experiences
among culturally similar students to support each other.

Preliminary meaning unit 2: Students support each other professionally and personally.

Final meaning unit: Students support each other.

Step 4: Situated narratives

This situated narrative was a reiteration of each participant's story where I organized specifics and experiences thematically under the specific interview or survey questions. The meanings of each participant's experience were highlighted thematically through direct quotes from the interviews and surveys.

Example: Step 4

Remind Students of Assignments Due
F1
"Let's say the discussion ends on Sunday; I remind them Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday that is [an] individual project and if they have problems. So just reassuring that they are aware of the submission day."
F4
"If we're coming toward the end of the week, I check if there are important requirements that students should have fulfilled. And if not, then I usually put out an announcement. I put out an announcement at least once a week, and toward the end of the week."
F5
"Then at the end of it, for instance, they now have to do summaries, so I try to make sure I guide them timewise on everything. One instance, you know, 1 or 2 days before the summary, or this is what you should be looking at. It's almost time to submit. Are you getting your groups together?"

Step 5: General narratives

I created general narratives from the situated narratives, unifying participants' accounts into a general description of all the participant's narratives. The goal was to organize the data from the situated narratives while highlighting all of the participants' meanings of their experiences.

Each narrative was organized by the interview or survey questions.
"Most" = saturated theme
"Many" = 50% theme

"Some" = theme that was unsaturated but relevant when unity was not established on a certain question

Example: Step 5

Q1: What do you consider to be your role and responsibilities in the classroom as a student?

Most students thought their primary role was to be a learner and considered their responsibilities in the classroom to be attendance and participation, being prepared with required readings, and engaging in the discussion forums. Many also added that they were responsible for completing course assignments, learning from other students, and being respectful to others online.

Q6: When teachers talk about "critical thinking" or "higher order thinking," what does this mean to you?

Most students differed on their thoughts about what critical thinking meant. Many thought that providing references to back an argument and critical analysis were both indicative of critical thinking. Some thought that application and synthesis were elements of critical thinking.

Step 6: General description

The final step of the analysis was the general description, which moved away from the participants' everyday perspectives. The aim was to discuss the themes that were implicit in all or most of the participants' descriptions of their experiences ("Some" was used at times when needed to address a topic where participants varied in responses). The aim was to unite the major phenomenological themes into a cohesive general description.

Example: Step 6

During a typical week in the online classroom, faculty check their messages and address student concerns. They read students discussions in the discussion forums and post their own responses to students, and they grade students' submissions. Many faculty post a summary of each week's discussion or a wrap-up announcement of the week's lesson at the end of the week for students. Most faculty also post reminders for students

about due dates and spend their time providing students with extra resources in the classroom.

Delineating Transcendental Phenomenology in Data Analysis Steps

In transcendental phenomenology, the process of bracketing through phenomenological reduction needs to be highlighted in the data analysis steps. This can be done by writing something about your process of journaling to bracket, inserting a step between Steps 2 and 3, or a combination of both options.

Journaling

If students choose to use journaling to bracket their biases, they may journal about their role as students and the experiences they had with their faculty facilitating a discussion. After noting their experience, they will then separate their experience by examining it and exploring it in terms of varying experiences other students have with the same phenomenon. Then, they either confirm their suspended experience as authentic to the phenomenon studied or remove it from their analysis as biased information. The goal is to note a bias and then suspend it in an effort to look at it from various alternative angles so that students can verify it as true to the essence of the phenomenon or a belief to exclude. Students need to think about the way they are thinking about the phenomenon in order to be less dependent on their subjective mind and to see the phenomenon for what it is, the thing itself. This thinking about thinking is often termed *metacognition* and students can search for different activities on metacognition to help them create a journal suitable for transcendental phenomenological work. Activities like concept mapping and metacognition note-taking skills are two great activities (Vancouver Island University, 2018).

Follow-up interviews

The researcher must be preoccupied by the concrete to understand and explain the essence of a phenomenon. To demonstrate this concept, consider the game of chess. Chess can be described as a game, a sport, a gift, an heirloom, among other descriptions, depending on the context. By discussing chess as a sport, a context of competition and risk may come to mind. The word game, on the

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other hand, may change the meaning of chess altogether, despite the synonymous grammatical understanding of both (Giorgi, 1985). Since subtle nuances in descriptions have the potential to alter meanings, the interpretation of participants' descriptions into meaning units, which is a practice that requires shifts in terminology, must be performed with great attention to detail.

In reflecting on and then interpreting the narrative, researchers must consider the context of the situation in order to carefully choose wording to express the meaning unit. Often, they will need to modify a vernacular that is used in narrative into more understandable dialect. They should consistently confront language as if they were strangers in a strange land and not depend on preconceptions as a way to understand the phenomenon. Students need to note each meaning unit literally and within the discussed context, as it is stated by each participant in terms of the research question. Then they will compare and contrast meaning units. Combine meaning units that are similar into final meaning units. If a concrete interpretation cannot be obtained (for example, a participant may use colloquialisms or slang to explain concepts), researchers will follow up with the participant for clarification in a follow-up interview rather than assuming they know what the participant meant. (What did you mean when you said, "After the discussion started really rolling, I was just riding the wave of excitement with the other students.") This would be an extra step inserted into the general data analysis between Steps 2 and 3:

After Step 2, I had to collect additional data through individual follow-up interviews. After I discovered any gaps in the data (such as omitted information or confusing statements) in the transcript of each initial individual interview, I prepared additional interview questions for each participant to fill in those gaps. I interviewed each participant for further explanation of each identified gap. I then transcribed the individual interview, read it, and integrated it into the original analysis of meaning units.

Delineating Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Data Analysis Steps

In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is a focus on the interaction between the researcher and the data. Each participant's experiences are translated through the researcher by comparison

and contrast of accounts with the accounts of other participants discussing their experiences of the same phenomenon. This is, of course, done through the hermeneutic circle by modifying the nature of understanding by a constant process of renewed understandings of the phenomenon. In the data analysis steps, students using hermeneutic phenomenology need to illustrate their use of the hermeneutic circle. This can be done by writing something about your process of journaling and follow-up interviews as a way to record and revise your experiences, assumptions, and interpretations about the phenomenon studied.

Journaling

The researcher must make personal biases explicit, anticipating projections in the quest for understanding, and this can be most easily done through journaling. Hermeneutic phenomenological researchers discuss how they use journaling to concentrate on the data during ceaseless distractions and biases that are continually created within. They want to note that the goal is always to replace their current conceptions with more fitting ones through reflection (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269). Through journaling, they necessitate the revision of personal biases, as those personal biases create the questions necessary for thought revision (the hermeneutic circle). Every revision of a preconception has the ability to develop a new projection of meaning. Contending projections can arise alongside one another until an agreement of meaning is clarified (Gadamer, 1975).

Follow-up interviews

In hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, follow-up interviews are often needed to clarify researcher preconceptions so they should be incorporated in the data analysis steps (between Steps 2 and 3). Interpret meaning of what is stated by each participant within the context of the situation with an openness to revisions of current understandings. The context of a situation is crucial in interpreting phenomena; it guides researcher in staying faithful to "the things themselves" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 153) but can sometimes be misunderstood due to personal biases or understandings. Ask questions through your biases and current understandings to capture each participant's authentic meaning. An example of what this might look like is illustrated below:

A research participant discussed his frustration over his recent poor academic performance. Because I, the researcher, knew that the participant had parents who demanded high academic performance, my preconception was that the participant felt frustrated due to his strict upbringing and that he would disappoint his parents. This preconception directed my clarification question. After the follow-up interview, a clarification was made, and my new projection of meaning was that the participant felt guilty because of his helplessness to fix the problem on his own without the help of a tutor.

Participant: *I would often think, "I can do this. I can solve this on my own. I can do better and get my grades up. I had to, but I couldn't. It was so frustrating!"*

I: *Did you feel frustrated because you thought you would disappoint your parents?*

S6:   *No, it was because I felt like a failure, and I knew that I couldn't do it on my own.*

Using Software

Qualitative data analysis software is used to organize data through coding so that researchers can illuminate themes about a phenomenon. Although qualitative data analysis software can make some qualitative data analysis easier, phenomenological studies do not fall in this category. There are significant concerns among researchers about using data analysis software for completing quality phenomenological analyses. Some phenomenologists state that the process of coding is unwarranted because the goal of reading transcripts is to familiarize oneself with the transcript. When using qualitative data analysis software, researchers can view transcripts as *data* rather than dwelling on what was said in the interview texts to ascertain the essence of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative data analysis software can limit a researcher's ability to dwell on a text because it essentially separates the researcher from the data (Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, & Brintnell, 2012), hinders abductive reasoning (van Manen, 2014), and instrumentalizes a process that should be intuitive (Cross, 2011).

I encourage students to hand code their phenomenological dissertations because the using software in a phenomenological

dissertation requires more work than coding by hand if a quality phenomenological dissertation is the goal. However, it can be done, and it is worth the discussion here so that students know what is involved in qualitative data analysis software use.

How a researcher uses qualitative data analysis software makes all the difference in producing a quality phenomenological research study. Brian Kelleher Sohn (2017) is one such researcher who advocates the use of qualitative data analysis software when appropriate and shows how to use qualitative data analysis software within the phenomenological tradition. Here are some things students may need to discuss in their phenomenological dissertations to support their use of qualitative data analysis software. Many of these steps can also be used to enrich manual coding of phenomenological data:

1. When coding or memoing, consistently remember that the words being read were uttered by a human being who lives in a certain context in the world with others.

2. Analyze data with a goal of staying immersed in the information and the entire experience rather than using it to cut data down to smaller, more manageable parts.

3. Keep memos to help track personal reactions to the data being analyzed. These memos will help bring you back to a point where a certain part of the data created a personal revelation or provided you with a certain frame of reference.

4. Listen to the participants' voices from the video or audio recordings so that you can sense their experiences on a deeper level and stay immersed in the experience of what is being stated. This process supports abductive thinking in phenomenological analysis. Do this anytime you are feeling distant from the participants due to reading and organizing codes.

5. Reread the entire transcript at any point when you feel distant from the stories uttered or the contexts of the participants.

6. Every few weeks during the analysis, utilize a group of other researchers or students to read the participants' transcripts (with all identifiers omitted) and discuss what stands out for them in reading participants' experiences. These sessions will serve to help you look at experiences that you may have missed through allowing software to code and organize your data and will challenge you to understand the phenomenon in terms of others' understandings. It will also validate some understandings you have about the data analyzed. If you are using bracketing, this process will help you suspend personal judgments by viewing data through the eyes of others and can broaden your horizon of understanding. If using the hermeneutic circle, this process will help to revise current understandings through others' feedback, which may differ from yours.

7. Read and reread phenomenological studies and works of relevant phenomenological philosophers and discuss them with the research group in terms of the transcripts and data analysis. This will allow you to stay within the phenomenological tradition and let the theoretical lens help you gain unique insights about the phenomenon you are studying.

8. Take breaks from data analysis to interrupt it, something van Manen (2014) terms "passive activity" (pp. 345–346). This will allow you to gain further insights into the phenomenon that you may miss with consistent immersion in the data.

9. Use the data analysis that you compiled in the software as an assistant to your final written narrative of the lived experience. Do not simply cut and paste the themes that emerged. You must vividly portray the phenomenon through experience in written word, and qualitative analysis software will limit this ability. You will need to discuss what moved you in the analysis and prioritize the findings in relation to what was illuminated for you as the researcher and in terms of what you presented in your literature review about this population and phenomenon.

Validity and Reliability

When discussing how to address threats to validity and reliability (or qualitative rigor if different terms are allowed by the university), students should be realistic about what they can reasonably accomplish in a dissertation as sole researchers. Below are eight procedures by Creswell and Poth (2017) a student may utilize to assure validity in the dissertation. Some are practical for a dissertation study, and some are not. Students should choose appropriately.

1. **Prolonged engagement and observation in the field of study—**spending extensive time with participants in their natural environments and building trust with them to gain a better perspective of their context and situation, to warrant more depth in the data analysis, and to limit misrepresentations in the data because of the presence of the researcher. Students will also explore details of the phenomenon to a depth that will allow them to establish what is important and what is irrelevant.

2. **Triangulation—**using numerous sources of information, methods of data collection, or several researchers in analysis. This could be a research team of colleagues within a field of study wherein each researcher analyzes the data with the same data-analysis protocol. The different findings would create a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Most forms of triangulation are time consuming, and it requires greater planning, organization, and resources that may not be available to dissertation students. While triangulation is one very common technique for addressing validity in a study, it may not be realistic.

3. **Peer review—**meeting with a neutral colleague who asks questions about the methods, results of the study, and any other emerging conclusions in an effort to create accountability and honesty. Modifications made due to peer interaction should be noted in the dissertation. Much of this sounds like what is routinely done with one's dissertation committee, but committee review is not always enough to establish validity and reliability.

Students should not assume that committee review is peer review with the goal of validity and reliability as a result.

4. **Negative case analysis—**Hypotheses are developed about a phenomenon after extensive fieldwork, and then instances are sought that contradict the hypotheses. If researchers do not find any conflicting situations, the hypotheses that were developed are considered reliable. If contradictions arise, the hypotheses that conflicted are modified. Negative case analysis continues until all hypotheses are modified until there are no more contradictions. This type of analysis is utilized for multiple studies of the same nature rather than solitary studies such as dissertations.

5. **Explanation of researcher bias—**revealing personal biases and preferences in journals, field notes, and data analysis protocol. Much of this process is discussed throughout this chapter, depending on the phenomenological method used. It is important to note that if a student only verifies everything that was already believed about a phenomenon at the end of the study, the method of inquiry was probably inappropriate, or bias overshadowed proper data analysis. Phenomenological studies should always end with discovery to be credible.

6. **Member checking—**Transcripts are typically reviewed by participants who provided the information for accuracy. In member checking, there is usually an expectation that participants should also review the interpretations of their experience and agree that the conclusions are credible. However, some participants may not agree with the results, and that does not mean that the results are inaccurate. Hence, I advise students to ask that their participants verify the accuracy of the transcripts but not the accuracy of the interpretations.

7. **Rich descriptions—**providing a detailed account of participants' experiences where pattern and themes are put into context. Context is key in rich descriptions, showing the complexity of the lived world of participants.

8. **External audits**—having a researcher who was not involved in the *research* process assess the data analysis procedure and the findings to determine whether the findings accurately represent the data.

Ethics

This ethics portion of the dissertation is largely aimed at institutional review board (IRB) expectations. Students should address any ethical concerns they have about recruitment plans and how to address them as well as data collection strategies and how to address any issues that arise. Perhaps participants choose to leave a study or refuse to participate at some point. There may need to be a response on how to address participants' potential adverse effects, for example. Ethical concerns related to confidentiality is important to discuss here and how confidentiality will be protected. In most cases, this is done through assigning participants codes and omitting any identifying information. Data storage is also important to discuss here, who has access to the data, and when and how they will be destroyed. The focus is always on protecting the participants, although in some cases it is important to note the researcher's protection. For example, if a student was exploring the lived experiences of a group of prisoners of a certain dynamic, a student may want to discuss boundaries set into place to protect both parties. Perhaps setting up a separate research-oriented e-mail to enable participants to initiate contact with researchers would be appropriate instead of providing a personal e-mail. Other ethical issues might be conflicts of interest, using incentives, and any power differentials that may present an ethical concern.

SUMMARY

As in each chapter summary, students should keep it brief with purpose. Discuss the main points of Chapter 3 and transition to Chapter 4. Always keep this portion of the chapter a succinct paragraph.

WRITE THE ABSTRACT _____

The proposal of the dissertation consists of the first three chapters, and if students have followed my book step by step, they are now at the end and ready to submit the proposal. After a dissertation proposal is submitted for formal review by the committee (and any other reviewers, depending on each student's university process), an oral defense follows. But before submitting these first three chapters, students need to write an abstract to introduce the document. The word count for a dissertation proposal varies by university, which means students need to find out expectations and stay within maximum word count. Typically, an abstract looks like this:

Abstract

This is the abstract, which is typed in block format with no indentation. It should be accurate and concise. Your abstract should also be written in a self-contained way so that people reading only your abstract would fully understand the content and the implications of your proposal. Write this section last when you have collected all the information in your proposal. Your abstract is a short summary of your entire proposal and is not a statement of what readers should expect to read in your proposal. Your committee members should be able to read the abstract and know what your proposal discusses. Avoid sentences like this: This dissertation proposal will . . .

Keywords: research, literature, methods, limitations

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