Chapter 9 – Phenomenology

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Introduction

Phenomenological psychology has been growing rapidly in popularity in European psychology over the last twenty years but is rarely classified as a 'critical' perspective. To some extent this is understandable, given that the majority of phenomenological psychologists do not directly engage with power and politics or any explicit notion of critical social theory in their work. However, I argue here that this risks us missing the ways that phenomenological psychology offers a powerful alternative to mainstream psychology, with considerable emancipatory potential. First, the phenomenological focus on description of 'the things in their appearing' allows us to attend closely to 'lived experience' such that we prioritise the voices of our participants in a truly ethical relationship between researcher and participant. And secondly, the focus on description of the 'lifeworld' in phenomenology can be supplemented by social theoretical critique if we engage with ideas from hermeneutics. All phenomenological methods work with the former whilst the latter is the product of some recent attempts at developing the field.

In this chapter I will first introduce the fundamental principles of phenomenological psychology. A number of key concepts underpin all phenomenological methods, including the notions of intentionality, epoché and the phenomenological reduction. This is presented in the context of the development of the earliest systematic phenomenological methodology in the Anglophone world. Giorgi (1970, 1976; see also 2009) and colleagues sought to offer a radical theoretical and methodological alternative to mainstream psychology. I will then explore the ways that extant methods of phenomenological psychology might be understood as 'critical'. Building on developments in hermeneutics, I also introduce my own attempt at theoretical development that seeks to enable phenomenological researchers (and practitioners) to better engage with a critical perspective within their work.

This primarily concerns the use of a 'moment of critique' that draws on hermeneutics from critical social theory. Finally, I discuss two examples of phenomenological research that differently show how phenomenological methodologies might be considered 'critical' approaches to qualitative research (Bhavnani, Chua & Collins, 2014).

Fundamentals of phenomenology

Phenomenological psychology concerns a form of psychology in which there is a systematic application of phenomenological philosophy to psychological research (and practice). Phenomenological philosophy is most associated with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), with its formal foundation at the very beginning of the 20th Century. He was particularly inspired by the work of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), who sought to develop a philosophical foundation for a descriptive psychology based on the apodictic (demonstrable) self-evidence of consciousness itself. Husserl took on and transformed Brentano's focus on consciousness, and particularly the concept of *intentionality,* to produce his 'science' of the essential structures of consciousness (with accompanying method of investigation).

Phenomenology has been described by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur as a series of deviations from Husserl. That is, whilst Husserl founded phenomenology proper, and elaborated its unique methodology, his own project failed to convince those that followed and was subsequently transformed. Arguably the most important of the figures that followed Husserl was Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), whose transformation of the Husserlian project inspired a generation of philosophers including the existentialists Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, amongst others. The intersection of phenomenology and existentialism formed the basis for the development of *existential psychotherapy* that might be considered the practical arm of phenomenological psychology. This therapeutic perspective emerged with the work of Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and Medard Boss (1903-1990), two psychoanalysts who drew on ideas from phenomenology and existentialism (principally the work of Heidegger) in the 1930s to forge a new approach to psychotherapy. This psychotherapeutic

perspective is alive and well today, albeit relatively marginal, with 'The British School' a particularly vibrant branch. The British School has built on the critical work of R.D. Laing (1927-1989) amongst others, and continues to engage with ideas from critical social theory (Langdridge, 2013).

Phenomenological psychology was first systematically developed as a research methodology by Amedeo Giorgi in the 1960s, with his major publications emerging in the 1970s. Giorgi (1970, 1976) set out to offer an alternative to the methods of positivist mainstream psychology that would provide a foundation for a new human science. The aim was to focus on qualitative description of the *lifeworld*, the world as lived by any person in a particular historical and cultural context, as a systematic means of investigation. With no prior method to build on, Giorgi created his own method of descriptive phenomenological psychology that drew directly on the philosophy of Husserl (1913/1931, 1936/1970), along with a number of other phenomenological philosophers (e.g. Gurwitsch, 1974; Merleau-Ponty, 1942/1963, 1945/1962, 1963). Giorgi's (2009) method remains the most significant form of phenomenological psychology worldwide, with numerous people continuing to use this approach in their research. Since Giorgi's foundational work there has, of course, been further development and innovation in phenomenological methods in psychology and the human sciences in general (see Langdridge, 2007) that are discussed further below. There are also other forms of descriptive phenomenology comparable to that of Giorgi, such as the methods of Colaizzi, (1978) and Moustakas (1994), which similarly draw heavily on Husserlian philosophy. All of these classic phenomenological methods rely on a set of concepts that are described in turn below.

Intentionality
The fundamental concept of intentionality concerns the idea that all acts of consciousness relate to an object of consciousness: that is, we are always conscious *of* something. This deceptively simple idea was first introduced by Brentano (1878/1995) but was refined and developed by Husserl to become a foundational concept underpinning phenomenology. This idea speaks to a

longstanding problem in philosophy that Sokolowski (2000) refers to as the egocentric predicament. This revolves around the dualistic idea that if we have minds inside bodies, then how is it possible for minds to reach out into the world and engage directly with it. This problem is predicated on an idea that derives from Descartes (1641/2003) that there is 'mental stuff' that is not extended in the world (*res cogitans*) and 'material stuff' that is extended in the world (*res extensa*). That is, our thoughts are mental stuff (that do not extend in space) whilst our bodies are physical stuff (that does extend in space). And this is where we face the egocentric predicament: if we want a drink to quench our thirst such that we decide to get a glass of water (a mental act) then how does this mental act 'speak' to our body to make it reach for the glass and fill it with water from the tap? How does 'the mental' interact with 'the physical'? It is here where the concept of intentionality helps, as it allows us to neatly sidestep the egocentric predicament. If we subscribe to the notion of intentionality then there is no inherent separation of mind and body (or thinking and acting), for all acts of consciousness are already connected to the world through their intentional relationship to an object in the world. Every act of consciousness intends something, whether it is a real object in the world or something in our memory or imagination. Consciousness (mind stuff) is not a free-floating realm of thoughts and ideas contained within the physical vessel of our bodies but is something turned out in the world in an intentional relationship. The focus of phenomenological investigation therefore becomes the investigation of 'intentional acts or experiences' (*Erlebnisse*). In analysing the intentional structure of an act, it makes no difference to the experience whether the object exists or not. The object of consciousness is *as given*, hence the famous rallying cry of Husserl (1900-1901/2001: 168) that we must turn "back to the 'things themselves'", and focus on the way things are actually given in experience. This radical stance is why there is a focus on experience in phenomenological research, for it is only through a description of experience that we gain access to consciousness.

Noema and noesis

Two terms in phenomenology that relate directly to the notion of intentionality are *noema* (the object of consciousness) and *noesis* (the manner in which

4

one is aware of the object of consciousness). They are controversial in phenomenological philosophy (see, for example, Bell, 1990) but still often prove useful for human scientists engaged in phenomenological analysis. In very simple terms, noema refers to the 'what' of experience and noesis to 'how' it is experienced. They are inherently correlated and not separate concepts, with Husserl (1913/1931) deploying them in an attempt to ensure that intentionality was not understood as 'inside' (e.g. inside a person's head) whilst always related to something 'outside' (e.g. a real object). That is, the notion of intentionality is much more radical than suggesting a simple link between cognition and world, and the noema-noesis correlation is an attempt to move us away from any idea of cognition occurring inside some inner realm, separated from the world. For Husserl, phenomenology must therefore involve the description of both aspects of the noema-noesis correlation, both the 'what' of awareness and 'how' it appears to us. Human scientific research stays close to this principle through a fundamentally descriptive stance in which we seek to investigate the 'what' and 'how' of experience.

Three structures – analysing part and whole
Husserl (1900-1/1970) elaborated three structural forms that recur repeatedly in any phenomenological analysis. Sokolowski (2000: 22) describes them as follows: "(a) the structure of parts and wholes, (b) the structure of an identity in a manifold, and (c) the structure of presence and absence". These structures not only describe the method of phenomenological analysis but also offer a radical alternative to more traditional methods and modes of understanding in psychology and the human sciences more broadly. I will detail all three structural forms below.

The structure of *parts* and *wholes* involves us attending to the way that parts relate to wholes in any intentional act. Any *whole* can have two different parts: *pieces* and *moments*. Pieces are parts that are independent and can be separate from the whole, whilst moments are parts that cannot be understood separately from the whole. To give an example, a person in a group (if the group is 'the whole') is best understood as 'a piece' in that they can exist independently of the group whilst also playing a part in constituting the group

itself. In contrast, an emotion is a *moment* if the phenomenon in focus is human experience, as emotions can only exist through the whole of person experiencing the emotion. A further distinction concerns the way that parts and wholes may be understood as *concretia* or *abstracta*. A whole is a *concretum* as it is something that can be experienced as a concrete individual thing. A piece can become a *concretum* and be experienced as a concrete individual thing, like a person in a group, whilst a moment, on the other hand, cannot become a *concretum* but is instead an *abstracta* in that it exists only as blended with other moments. We may talk about a particular emotion, like anger or sadness, as if it were a concrete thing but in reality it is a moment that can only be understood in relation to the other parts making up the whole. This theoretical stance has profound implications for how we might conduct psychology and the human sciences, with a need to think carefully about the appropriate mode of investigation in any situation such that we resist artificially reducing the complexity of human experiencing to individual variables.

Identity in a manifold refers to the multi-faceted nature of our perception of the identity of some aspect of the world we inhabit. To give an example, imagine we are seeking to understand a person's identity. Someone may present as her profession on first meeting (a doctor, for instance) and this reveals one facet of her identity. We may then come to know them as a mother of three children with our understanding of their identity further enriched by this knowledge. Over a glass or two of wine we may come to know that they want more out of their sex life and we gain another perspective on their identity. The phenomenological research project is very much about the way that we seek out the rich array of identity manifolds of any object of study. Context helps frame our perception of the identity for any object and there are invariably (with human beings at least) endless new facets to explore in our investigations.

Finally, there is *presence* and *absence*, sometimes referred to as filled and empty intentions. A filled intention is where the intention is bodily present before the one who intends, whilst an empty intention concerns something

that is absent. A filled intention would be the experience of fighting with our partner in the moment, whilst an empty intention might be the memory of such a fight. People tend to concentrate on the present in phenomenological research and may, as a consequence, neglect absence. This risks us gaining only a very partial perspective on any phenomenon. For instance, if we are away from home and feeling lost and homesick then this empty intention reveals much of what is important to us. Phenomenological analysis should therefore involve us looking out not only for what is present to us in the experience being presented in the interview/text but also what is absent.

Epoché and the psychological phenomenological reduction
Phenomenological description is achieved by attempting to set aside our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, to move away from the *natural attitude.* Phenomenology approaches any object of study in a systematic way, with an attempt to encounter the object in a fresh and unbiased way. That is, we seek to elaborate a description, in which we put aside our preconceptions and biases. We achieve this through the *phenomenological reduction* (Husserl, 1913/2012). The phenomenological reduction requires that we avoid all abstraction, theorizing, and generalization. Husserl (1913/2012) described two procedures that are central to the *reduction* called *epoché* (pronounced '*epokhē*', from the ancient Greek). The aim is to gain access to 'the things themselves', Husserl's famous rallying cry for phenomenology, meaning a focus on how things are given in experience itself. The first epoché involves setting aside prior (natural) scientific understanding, something that is particularly important for psychology as so many aspects of our discipline are shrouded in a natural scientific (often medical) understanding. This is regardless of whether we think there is value in these theories or not. The key is that we need to approach the phenomenon in its own terms, rather than through the lens of the various theories of science.

Setting aside scientific understanding does not mean that phenomenology simply returns us to the uncritical and unreflective stance on the world of the *natural attitude* (in which we take the reality of what we experience for

granted). Instead, the second epoché involves us moving from the natural attitude to a *phenomenological attitude* in which we focus on experience itself and hence the subjective meaning of the *lifeworld*, the historically and culturally situated world that any person inhabits. In effect, we move our focus from the 'what' to the 'how' of the intentional relationship with an object. The question is not does X exist, but rather how does X exist *for a given concrete person* or, to put it differently, how does X exist within the lifeworld of the participant under investigation (Husserl, 1936/1970), This focus on the meaning of any phenomenon for the person who has experienced it serves to reduce the field of investigation to something properly *psychological*. That psychological field of experience is brought to life through an analysis designed to shine a light on its subtle details.

The essence of the message above is the need to put any natural scientific preconceptions to one side when investigating a topic and to seek out a person's subjective experience of that phenomenon, trying to understand how it appears to them and what it means in their own terms. The epoché is necessarily quite philosophical but it translates into a relatively simple practical method. Ihde (1986), drawing directly on Husserl's work, provides a helpful guide to how we might achieve a phenomenological reduction where we approach the phenomenon with a phenomenological attitude. This involves three processes: description, horizontalisation, and verification. Description is at the heart of the phenomenological method and the central process in getting close to 'the things themselves' in their appearing is to engage in rich description of the experience itself, resisting any temptation to draw on existing psychological theories. In order to help with this we need to horizontalise the phenomenon and treat all elements equally, resisting our natural tendency to put things in hierarchies of meaning or importance. It is only when we have the meaning confirmed by the person him- or herself that we can start to do this. Until that point we remain agnostic about everything we encounter. The way that we can check on meaning is through the process of verification where we repeatedly check our understanding of the meaning of someone's experience back with them and/or the data (e.g. through the transcription of an interview). In phenomenology we have to stay close to the

data, repeatedly checking that we understand the meaning of any unit of analysis in context, and not rushing off beyond the data making wild interpretations.

An important thing to note is how the phenomenological reduction will require continual effort throughout the analytic process: it is not a once and for all operation. Of course, it is never possible to achieve perfection and view the phenomenon with a 'God's eye view', with nothing of us present in our analysis (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). But this does not mean we should not try as best we can to bracket our own preconceptions and engage a phenomenological attitude to the best of our ability. Our focus must be on the experience of the participants in a research project, seeking to understand it in *their own* terms, as it is lived by them in their lifeworld.

Eidetic intuition
For Husserl (1913/1931) the goal of phenomenology is to identify the *essence* (invariant structure) of the phenomenon we are interested in. We are seeking to intuit the *eidos* (the form) of the object of consciousness *as given*. The process is, therefore, termed *eidetic intuition*. In any phenomenological analysis we therefore seek to separate out the invariant (the essence) from that which varies across experience. Most analyses will not ignore the material that varies but rather use it to inform the meaning of the invariant structure as a product of particular social and cultural contexts. One strategy for gaining access to the essence is to engage in maximum variation sampling where we actively seek to recruit a set of participants with a common experience but varying background features (e.g. in terms of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity/race, class, disability etc). The idea is that these different perspectives on an experience will enable the analyst to identify those elements that are common to all the participants and those which vary according to some demographic factor.

In addition, when engaging in a phenomenological analysis we might seek to employ the *free* or *variational method* (sometimes also called *imaginative variation*). The idea here is to explore alternative analytic possibilities for any

phenomenon, to engage in thought experiments where we consider the impact of background variables on the phenomenon. So, for instance, we might think through the implications of class on a phenomenon and imaginatively vary the class of the participants (in our heads) to see if this would fundamentally change our analytic understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. That is, if we changed the class of our participants, would we still understand the structure in the same way? It is possible to work through (imaginatively) multiple aspects of the lifeworld until we feel we have reached saturation and can be confident in the essence of the particular phenomenon being researched.

Empirical traditions in phenomenological psychology

As mentioned above, Amedeo Giorgi devised the earliest systematic method of phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University, USA, in the 1960/70s. This method continues in widespread use today, particularly in the USA, along with a group of other similar methods that includes van Kaam (1969), Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994). These methods are often categorised as *descriptive* or *Husserlian phenomenological methods* (Langdridge, 2007). All of these methods work with the core phenomenological concepts outlined above, producing rich descriptions of phenomena that seek to identify the essence. Some researchers (e.g. Ashworth, 2003) further interrogate their data through a variety of dimensions of the lifeworld such as temporality, spatiality, embodiment, intersubjectivity etc. These dimensions, that are thought to be universal across the lifeworld, are used as a heuristic to further analyse the data. A considerable body of work has grown up that has used these methods on a very wide variety of topics, from the experience of being a victim of crime (Wertz, 1985) to the experience of feeling anxious (Fischer, 1974).

The other primary group of phenomenological methods in common usage are often described as *interpretive* or *hermeneutic phenomenological methods* (Langdridge, 2007). These phenomenological methods draw more heavily than those mentioned above on what might be termed the *hermeneutic turn* in phenomenology. The hermeneutic turn in phenomenology began with the

work of Heidegger (1927/1962) and built on the earlier work of the hermeneutic philosophers Friedrich Schleirmacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), amongst others. Hermeneutics has been traditionally concerned with textual interpretation and particularly biblical exegesis. The concern is with the interpretation of texts in order to discern their meaning. Interpretive phenomenological methods tend to draw on the work of Heidegger (ibid) and more recent hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer (1975/1996) to produce a more interpretive form of analysis. These methods vary enormously in how much they adhere to the principles of phenomenology detailed above. As a result, there is some controversy here about whether these methods should be classified as phenomenological methods at all (see Giorgi, 2011).

There has been a significant growth in the popularity of methods that are interpretive or that are a blend of descriptive and interpretive methods. Methods derived from the Dutch Utrecht School have gained enormous popularity across a variety of disciplines (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker & Mulderij, 1984; Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000; van Manen, 1990), as have varieties of Scandinavian hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g. Dahlberg, Drew & Nyström, 2001). In the United Kingdom, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: note the arcane spelling of 'interpretative') has assumed almost hegemonic status, with many people unaware of the many other and earlier traditions of phenomenological psychology. This approach was formulated in the 1990s with a very clear (teachable) method that has led to widespread use in psychology and health research in particular (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009). These interpretive methods vary considerably in method but all tend to engage with some sort of thematic analysis, as is common in much qualitative research. The aim is for the researcher to work reflexively with the data to discern patterns and themes across the experience: the focus remains on understanding lived experience in context, with the themes a description of the invariant structure of the phenomenon being studied.

A final group of phenomenological methods also draw on hermeneutic philosophy, particularly the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), to understand

the lifeworld through the stories people tell of their experience (Langdridge, 2007). This group of *narrative phenomenological methods* is founded on the central idea that we must focus on story telling to gain insight into a person's world: "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am." (McAdams, 1993: 11). This work has the potential for greater engagement with language, power and politics and is arguably the most 'critical' of all phenomenological methods, though is much less commonly used than the methods above, probably due to the demanding nature of the methods. Narrative phenomenological methods include the work of Freeman (1993), McAdams (1993, 1985), Polkinghorne (1988) and my own development of Critical Narrative Analysis (Langdridge, 2007, 2009), amongst others.

Phenomenology as a 'critical' methodology

The need for description

A common complaint about phenomenological methods is that they are *too descriptive* and do not provide enough analytic depth/theoretical development for psychology. This criticism needs to be unpicked further as there are a number of responses to this charge. First, we need to understand what is meant by a method being *too descriptive* and what this implies about the perceived needs of psychology as a discipline. Phenomenological methods are primarily descriptive if by that we mean a descriptive stance opposed to an explanatory one. That is, there is a theoretical resistance to explanation and the search for causes and instead a focus on description and reasons. Description can also be contrasted to interpretation and it is here where there is more variation. The descriptive phenomenological methods discussed above are, of course, focused on description of the essence of the phenomenon. However, the more interpretive methods move – in different degrees – away from description. Even here though there is a general resistance to the importation of external interpretive frameworks such as those derived from psychoanalytic theory, as these would undermine the focus on the 'things in the their appearing'.

Key to understanding the charge that phenomenological methods are *too descriptive* is a critical examination of the kind of psychology that is being invoked with this position. The resurgence in psychoanalytic methods in critical psychology (and the broader social sciences) suggests the presumed alternative. These methods are an anathema to phenomenological psychology for the way that they invoke an external theoretical framework to 'uncover' hidden meaning. Such attempts to engage in an archaeological excavation of the unconscious necessarily undermine the phenomenology, as the contents of consciousness are subsumed by the allure of material assumed buried in the hidden depths. These methods also serve to construct a subject that is limited by the normative developmental theories that underpin these methodologies (see Langdridge, 2008). The phenomenological project, in contrast, is concerned with describing the world of another *as lived* such that we can come to understand more about human experience itself. Such acts of illumination have enormous potential for effecting change, from the gains made through individual insight to an understanding of the social processes at play in any experience.

Giving voice

The notion of 'giving voice' is a central feature of critical work in psychology and the human sciences more generally. This feminist principle underpins a considerable body of work that has illuminated the interplay of power and politics across a wide variety of phenomena (Davis, 1994). The voices of women have been systematically silenced with early feminist research seeking to address this failure through the notion of 'giving voice'. These ideas have been taken up further by researchers working with other people (often minorities) affected by oppression. This mode of research is at the heart of the phenomenological project with the focus on engaging the epoché such that we can gain insight into the lifeworld of another person, and thus hear their 'voice'. The focus on experience *as lived* is central to phenomenology, with researcher and participant working together to gain insight into the lifeworld as it relates to a particular phenomenon.

Concerns have been raised about the notion of 'giving voice' and methods designed around this concept (see McHugh, 2014). Whilst there has been recognition of the value of research that has prioritised women's voices (rather than the default work privileging the voices of men only), there have been complaints that this work risks essentializing women (and men), suggestive of an 'authentic' womanhood that is fixed rather than constructed (Davis, 1994). In addition, there have been concerns that work in this tradition may involve particular groups of women (often those with other lines of privilege e.g. around race/ethnicity or class) speaking for other women and actually obscuring different voices (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Tavris, 1994). There is a risk of producing 'universalising spokespersons' that seek to speak for others, which may lead to further oppression. This is, of course, true not only for women but also many other groups, particularly oppressed minorities.

The concerns that have been raised about researchers privileging particular voices, speaking for the other, and the need to attend to different voices are - at least in part - addressed by the strong descriptive stance of many phenomenological methodologies. Of course, there remains the question of who decides the focus of the investigation and who reports the findings, but the desire to get maximum variation in the sample and the strict focus on description helps ward off the charge that the researcher is imposing their agenda. The phenomenological attitude also involves the researcher seeking an ethical - open and honest - engagement with participants. There is no deception involved or analytic moves that might undermine the standing of the participant (that we might see with psychoanalytically informed critical research). In addition, there are many examples of phenomenological research that are thoroughly collaborative, with people engaged in groups as participant-researchers or researchers working together with participants to formulate projects collaboratively from start to finish.

Power and politics
Beyond the focus on description and the value of this mode of investigation in 'giving voice', there have also been attempts to engage with hermeneutics from critical social theory in order to examine the interplay of power and

politics with particular phenomena (Langdridge, 2007). My own work in phenomenological psychology has been specifically focused on bringing power and politics directly into phenomenological research (and practice). To this end, I draw primarily – though not uncritically - on the extensive hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (e.g. 1970, 1976, 1981) to develop a new form of critical narrative analysis (CNA). This work is located within the narrative tradition of phenomenological psychology, described above, in which there is an explicit focus on the stories that people tell of their experience. This focus on story telling not only reflects our everyday way of communicating experience (particularly concerning selfhood) but also recognises the way that we mostly understand experience through language. Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) was created to serve a specific purpose in my own research programme on sexualities and also resolve some of the epistemological tensions that I saw with other similar methods (Langdridge, 2007).

The distinctive element to this method is the inclusion of a moment of critique, in which hermeneutics of suspicion are deployed. To be more precise, this method engages with two analytic moments in a hermeneutic arc. The first moment is what Ricoeur would refer to as a 'hermeneutic of empathy', and is that descriptive mode of understanding common to all phenomenological methods. The second moment involves the use of specific methods of interpretation - or in Ricoeur's terms 'hermeneutics of suspicion' - to critically interrogate the social imaginary, the world of stories into which we are all immersed and that allow and limit our ability to understand and narrate our experience. Ricoeur (1970) identifies Freud, Marx and Nietzsche as the 'three masters of suspicion' but here I depart from Ricoeur and argue that we need to turn to different critical social theories for our critique. That is, if we take Freud as our example, by engaging in an archaeological trawl through the unconscious for hidden meaning, we undermine the phenomenology of our participants. For me, the key to using hermeneutics of suspicion is to draw on critical social theories such as queer theory or post-colonial theory as 'imaginative hermeneutics of suspicion' turned out on the social world of the participants such that we might open up new ways of understanding. This

enables us to critique the ideology of the social worlds of researcher and participant alike for how it allows and limits understanding and narrative expression.

Arguments about the place of hermeneutics in phenomenological research continue, some productive and others less so. The productive arguments raise interesting questions about the possibility for phenomenological research to be more attuned to language, power and politics. There are, however, many phenomenological psychologists who would see the explicit incorporation of hermeneutics from critical social theory as incompatible with phenomenology. This is true if we limit our understanding of phenomenology only to that informed by Husserl. I am less concerned, however, about philosophical purity or boundary setting than seeking to work with methods that are intellectually coherent *and* meet our practical needs as human science researchers. I see a place for multiple members of the phenomenological psychological family in contemporary critical psychological research, the debates will continue and that is healthy.

Applying critical phenomenological methods

I shall briefly discuss two examples of phenomenological research here that offer insight into the value of this methodology for critical psychology. The first example concerns the work of one of my former doctoral students, Simon Wharne, on the experience of decision-making in mental healthcare. This work employed a fairly traditional phenomenological method, in the spirit of the Utrecht School, to gain greater insight into the way that mental health service users and others make sense of decision-making processes concerned with mental health treatment and care. The focus in this work was - to some extent - on 'giving voice' to people who are often silenced. The second example involves a case study that I conducted in which I used a critical narrative analysis to make sense of the experience of someone living as a sexual lifestyle slave. This study involved me working with a psychotherapy client who had been struggling with his sexual identity and relationships to generate data for a phenomenological analysis. The study

involves me working analytically through the ways that the social world might oppressively limit a person's understanding of their own sexual desire.

Wharne, Langdridge & Motzkau (2012) reported a part of a larger study into decision-making in mental healthcare. Decision-making in mental healthcare is complicated through the ways in which decision-making is constructed by mental health professionals as rational calculation, which is often at odds with the lived experience of mental health service users. This article describes the experience of three men who have been users of mental health services that have been diagnosed as suffering from psychosis and detained in hospital repeatedly under mental health law. What emerged from this work were the tensions between the lived experience of these men and the desire amongst mental health professionals to 'empower' them in their own healthcare through incarceration and medication. That is, the current focus in contemporary healthcare in the UK on 'empowerment' (Fitzsimons & Fuller, 2002), whilst well intentioned, often resulted in conflict with the desire of these men to escape from the struggles of existence. This phenomenological work does not provide ready solutions to the almost impossible 'management' of mental healthcare, but only rich and respectful description of the lifeworld of people who are rarely heard. As such, it offers a small contribution to improving the processes of decision-making in mental healthcare.

In Langdridge (2009) I describe a piece of case study research with a psychotherapy client in which I seek to work with the client to critically interrogate the prevailing pathologising stance around BDSM (bondage, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism). This work involved me conducting a research interview with a long-standing psychotherapy client about his experience as someone struggling with his identity and relationships as a (wannabe) 24/7-lifestyle slave. My client had spent much of his adult life secretly visiting professional dominatrices. Late in life he had decided to explore his sexual identity more fully and he had been living with a Mistress as a 24/7-lifestyle slave in the USA until this relationship had broken down. The critical narrative analysis of his biographical interview involved me drawing on ideas from critical sexology studies and queer theory to explore

Brian's (the client-participant) lifeworld through the stories he told me in a biographical interview. Consensual BDSM has been subject to continued pathologisation, with some recent progress, and so it was necessary to critically engage with how this socio-cultural context framed much of Brian's experience. When this material was stripped away it became apparent that many of Brian's pressing concerns were similar to many other people struggling with the end of a relationship. His experience was, however, framed through two primary narratives: the first concerned his 30 year history of visiting professional dominatrices, and the second his love affair with his Mistress as a 24/7-lifestyle slave. Whilst his story was inflected with shame, it was less about the external pathologisation of his sexual identity (though he did not escape the impact of this entirely) and more about the perception that paying for sex might be exploitative of women. His move away from paying professional dominatrices to a love affair with a dominant partner was reflected in a rupture in his *narrative identity* (Ricoeur, 1992), such that this became a story of progress from control through uncertainty to belief in the possibility of living happily with his minority sexuality. This work served both to highlight the individual needs of one person and also the ways that a BDSM sexual identity, which is frequently subject to profound oppression, has the potential for ethical relating similar to any other relationship.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an introduction to the fundamentals of phenomenological psychology and also argue that this perspective is 'critical'. Whilst few self-identified phenomenological psychologists would adopt an explicit critical position, I have sought to show that phenomenological methods are *inherently* critical. The strong descriptive stance and deeply contextual nature of these methods, which emerges from the philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger and others, offers huge potential for those us seeking to understand the interplay of power and politics and effect social change. A fundamental principle of phenomenological methodologies is the focus on 'giving voice' to the other, seeking to illuminate their lifeworld in rich detail. I have also briefly discussed contemporary developments in phenomenological methodologies that show how it is possible to work directly with critical social

theory. Such developments offer considerable promise for researchers working on topics that are deeply inflected by oppression or that feel a need to engage more directly with the interplay of power and politics in the research process.

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