The Changing Nature of the Phenomenological Method: Lessons Learned from Dialogical Psychotherapy Research

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The human science or qualitative approaches to research have always argued that methodology must be determined by the subject matter under study. Yet the same approaches to data collection (i.e., the qualitative interview) and data analysis have been utilized by these approaches since their inception. The most essential lesson of van den Berg's metabletics is that no phenomenon is static or absolute. If human phenomena are ever-changing, then the methodologies we use to study them must also change and adapt, so that we can more fully and authentically capture their meaning structures. This paper will develop this argument, and demonstrate the limitation of interviews for the study of the changing nature of human phenomena, utilizing psychotherapy research as an example.

The scientific status of psychology emerged in the middle to late 19th century as it sought its independence from philosophy as well as the other sciences. At that time, a variety of diverse schools and methodologies arose, which included introspection, experimentation, and phenomenology (Giorgi, 1970; Karlsson, 1993). These methods had divergent ontological views of human nature and, as such, divergent epistemological concerns. Dilthey (1977) classified the various methodologies under the categories of *natural sciences* and *human sciences*. The natural science approaches are founded upon the ontology and epistemology of the Enlightenment's empiricism in the 17th century and logical positivistic philosophy in the 19th century, along with the corresponding emergence and development of the "hard" sciences of physics, chemistry, and biology. Utilizing the hypothetico-deductive method, they avoid introspective methodologies, and strive for empirical verification through experimentation, with its requirements of variable operational definition, quantification and measurement, normalization, and mathematical analysis. The human science approaches, on the other hand, are founded upon the ontology and epistemology of rationalist and phenomenological philosophy. They have been extensively utilized by the arts and social sciences, and to a lesser extent psychology, to examine human phenomena, sometimes as the primary approaches and at other times as complementary approaches to the natural sciences (Giorgi, 1970). They utilize ethnographic, descriptive, interpretive, and collaborative methodologies (commonly referred to as qualitative methodologies), with

their focus upon understanding the totality of experience as it is lived and presents itself preceding its formulation by the scientific community.

Bohman, Hiley, and Shusterman (1991) criticize positivistic philosophy for its limited view of the unity of science, which demands a reduction of all sciences, including the social and behavioral sciences, to the ontology and methods of physics. This approach presupposes the neutrality of observation, the "givenness" of experience, the independence of empirical data from theoretical frameworks, and the ideal of a univocal language. As such, it clearly demarcates the scientific enterprise from qualitative and interpretive disciplines, and implies that its view is the privileged one regarding knowledge. However, beginning in the 20th century within the natural sciences themselves, positivism has been critiqued extensively. With theorists such as Einstein and Heisenberg, the fundamental influence (and indispensable bias) of the observer entered into natural scientific inquiry (Kuhn, 1970). Natural science theorists (e.g., Kuhn, 1991) began to argue that contemporary science has forgotten its foundation as residing in experience, and has become a world of idealized mathematics. Even natural science belongs to a meaningful field of human activity, with a significance that cannot be disentangled from its meaning and history (Kuhn, 1991). As such, understanding of the natural world, our culture, and ourselves sometimes raises interpretive problems:

> recent directions in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of language are merging with the hermeneutic tradition and developments in the various interpretive disciplines to bring questions about interpretation to the center of philosophical discussion (Bohman, Hiley, and Shusterman, 1991, p. 4).

Understanding of the natural world can therefore be termed singularly hermeneutic, since the natural world cannot interpret back. But there is a dialogical relationship between researchers and their human subject matter which is doubly hermeneutic, because human beings can and do interpret back, which creates an interpretive loop (Bohman, Hiley, & Shusterman, 1991; Kuhn, 1991).

As a further critique, these theorists argue that the natural sciences do not have special access to the truth about ultimate reality. Even if it is assumed that the reality of the natural sciences exists "in itself" and independent of its apprehension, it can only be known through encountering it

and can be explained and made intelligible only through those individuals making it intelligible:

> the understanding of being establishes what can count as a fact in whatever domain, but it does not determine what the facts are ... intelligibility is not a property of things; it is relative to Dasein. When Dasein does not exist, things are neither intelligible nor unintelligible (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 31).

As such, progress in the natural sciences does not imply that their knowledge and methods are the "correct" ones, and their approach to reality is not necessarily the ultimate or privileged one.

Advocates of the human science approaches argue that, despite their differing methodologies, both the natural and human science approaches are committed to the basic principles of science, striving to be methodical, systematic, and critical in pursuit of knowledge. They both exist, in one form or another, today in psychological research. However, psychology generally adheres to the natural scientific approaches to research; for it was by imitating the natural scientific methods that psychology hoped to become as successful as the natural sciences (Giorgi, 1970). However, the methodology one uses should be determined by the subject matter under study (Giorgi, 1970; Karlsson, 1993, Polkinghorne, 1989). The fact that psychology has not been able to match the success of the natural sciences has often been blamed on the complexity of the subject matter, as well as on the youth of psychology as a science. But this argument presupposes that the essence of the subject matter of psychology and the natural sciences is the same, and that the difficulty lies in a difference in complexity as opposed to a difference in structure. Proponents of the human science approach to psychology argue that we have not achieved the success of the natural sciences because our mainstream has not recognized that its subject matter is distinctly different from that of the natural sciences, and thus has not integrated the potentially highly fruitful contributions of human science methodology. Salner (1989) makes a coherent argument for the need of these multiple epistemologies:

> ... when we accept the inevitability of limits and constraints on human understanding ... then we can accept the reality that all epistemologies and the methodologies that flow from them are human and thus partial.

We can go even further and say that each partially adequate epistemology needs other, differing, though also partially adequate epistemologies; it is in confronting the very differences and conflicts between them that our human understanding is enlarged and advanced .... no set of epistemological assumptions can be judged from within those assumptions; we must step out into a meta-epistemological framework in order to judge the epistemology, and so on into an infinite regress leaving us with the impossibility of ever arriving at a "complete" epistemology. This is not to say that there is no "true" reality; it is simply to recognize that reality appears to human beings in the briefest of temporary glimmers, captured by language ever so inadequately to generate the conflicts of interpretation that compromise reasonable human discourse (pp. 58-59).

Habermas (1971) distinguished between three different knowledge interests which guide the sciences: *technical*, *hermeneutical*, and *critical/emancipatory*. All of these forms of knowledge are essential and legitimate depending upon the nature of the subject matter that is studied. The technical interest of knowledge has as its goals manipulation, control, and prediction of nature. This interest is prevalent in the natural sciences and mainstream psychology, and is fruitful depending upon the topic of study. It provides great practical aid for society, but is not the only one that is legitimate. According to Habermas, such research can easily become divorced from human life and its ethical implications, and as such no longer serve human beings. Human science, with its qualitative and phenomenological research, can be said to follow the hermeneutical interest of knowledge, which provides a deeper and a self-reflective understanding of a phenomenon. It is as essential and it provides a great compliment to psychology's mainstream technical interest (Karlsson, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1983). The third knowledge interest, the critical or emancipatory, holds social action and social liberation at the core and purpose of its methods. In arguing for the appropriateness of multiple methods of research, Polkinghorne (1983) writes:

... the researcher must try to select the research system that is appropriate for answering the particular questions he or she is addressing. The availability of various systems also means that many more kinds of questions can be addressed by the researcher. These increased possibilities place greater responsibility on researchers, requiring that they

becoming something more than mere technicians, that they become, in fact, methodologists (p. 280).

The Phenomenological Method as the Champion of Human Experience and Meaning

As one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century, Husserl introduced and developed phenomenology as an alternative epistemology and methodology for the natural and human sciences. Husserl's (1970) philosophical aim was to develop an epistemology which can be applied to all fields of knowledge, founded upon the primacy of consciousness and the argument that there is an epistemological priority to "the essence of what something is and how it comes about" in contrast to "the reason that (or why) something is," and thus explanation requires the "what" and "how" of the phenomenon (Karlsson, 1993). Husserl defined *consciousness* as an *intentional act* of revealing which is fundamental to human nature. He argued that, when we examine a particular phenomenon, we should let the phenomenon "speak for itself" and allow it to reveal or manifest itself in consciousness. Phenomenological psychology, as perhaps the oldest systematic human science or qualitative approach to psychological research, was developed on the basis of the argument that the unique nature of human subject matter must begin with this primarily descriptive stance: to let human experience speak for itself. Giorgi (1970; 1975; 1985) developed, systematized, and popularized phenomenology for the study of psychological phenomena on this basis. Thus phenomenology was developed to study the meanings of psychological phenomena for participants through their rich descriptions of their lived-experiences. The qualitative interview or protocol is the manner in which this is classically conducted.

Proponents of the phenomenological approach within psychology argue that the natural scientific methods of inquiry are limited in their ability to capture the nature of lived experiences and understand their patterns of meaning (e.g., Giorgi, 1970; Husserl, 1970; Karlsson, 1993; Kruger, 1979; Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Nature is to be captured at an explanatory level, but for the human *life-world* to be fully captured it must also be understood (Dilthey, 1977). In psychology research one attempts to capture the nature of a being who is also trying to understand and interpret his/her world, as opposed to the beings one attempts to capture in natural science research, which are inanimate and non-conscious: "for

the *objects* of such enquiry are the product of *subjects* capable of action and understanding, so that our knowledge of the social and historical world cannot be sharply separated from the subjects who make up that world" (Thompson, 1996, p. 361).

Human beings have an intentional relationship with their world and consciously and meaningful interrelate with it. As the "objects" of study, human beings are subjects being studied by subjects, both of whom meaningfully intend their "objective world." Human beings interpret their worlds and themselves (they are self-interpreting), and their actions are always bound up with beings-for-whom they are meaningful. Assuming that it is the intentional responses of participants (rather than determined reactions) that are examined (Giorgi, 1971), the goal for phenomenology is to grasp what these meanings are for their agents (Taylor, 1980). As such, the subject matter of the human sciences must consist of meanings and signifiers, as opposed to non-intentional causal events. Phenomenology attempts to understand that being, which complements the natural science's attempt to explain its existence. As Karlsson (1993) put it, "psychology should instead ground itself in line with an unprejudiced analysis of the *psychological* in our experience and not proceed from natural science and its methodology" (p. 13). Phenomenological psychologists distinguish themselves from the natural scientific approaches by attempting to "bracket" their scientific presuppositions and rely on methodologies that respect the inherently experiential and double hermeneutic nature of their subject matter. In that sense, they have championed the battle to place human experience and meaning first and objectivistic methodology second. As Lyotard put it, "... the value of phenomenology lies in its effort to recover humanity itself, beneath any objectivist schema" (1986, p. 136).

The Changing Nature of Human Phenomena

Theorists from various fields have argued that one of the major sociocultural trends witnessed in the Western World since the end of the 19th century is the increase in complexity of all facets of human existence and the resultant sense of increased isolation and fragmentation experienced by human beings (e.g., Durkheim, 1964; Elkind, 1994; Mook, 1999a; Shorter, 1976; van den Berg, 1974). In fact, the emergence of psychiatry and psychology as formal and independent fields of study and treatment was arguably in response to these sociocultural trends (van den Berg, 1961). The rise and

rapid increase of consumerism, mechanization, and technology, and the "fumes" of the Industrial Revolution, leave human beings with increasing feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness - becoming increasingly invisible to themselves, their past and their future - while others have little time to console them. Furthermore, as we move through time into the late 20th century and now early 21st century, this increase in complexity is becoming more dramatic and rapid. In the past 20 years, we have witnessed more technological, sociocultural, and global changes than any other period in Western human history. The rate of complexity and change that we have witnessed is reflected in one of the most recent, predominant, and defining intellectual movements of our time: *postmodernism* (Bohman, Hiley, & Shusterman, 1991).

Postmodernism is exemplified by its themes of the constancy of change, the complexity of all scientific endeavour, the rejection of reliance on universal foundations and the "deconstruction" of previous foundations, and the relativity of knowledge. It can be said that postmodernism, which can be viewed as a cultural and intellectual revolution, broke down the previous structures of modernity, but instead of building up new structures, it developed an acceptability of multiple structures. Thus the rapid social fluctuations, developments, and instabilities are so prevalent in the late 20th and early 21st century that, for example, intellectuals argue that we need to speak of the *permeable postmodern family* as the primary family structure (Bly, 1996; Elkind, 1994; Mook, 1999a). The postmodern family is a response to and a reflection of the *postmodern human* living in a *postmodern society*. Thus we enter the 21st century as human beings dealing with constant and rapid flux, at personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural levels. The constant increase of complexity, inaccessibility, invisibility, and incoherence of society leaves its members with the stress of constantly trying to cope with change.

In our contemporary times, society has become increasingly complex and divided leading to anomie and incoherence, while simultaneously increasing our multiple social selves and social groups which are often not connected and may in fact be in conflict. Sass (1998) refers to Nietzsche in arguing that we live in an age of "madly thoughtless fragmentation and fraying of all foundations, their dissolution into an ever flowing and dispersing becoming;" we are exposed to "much too bright, much too sudden, much too changeable light" (p. 288). This condition is further aggravated by such societal factors as industrialization, materialism and hedonism, high mobility, mass society, the disappearance of intimate communities, the weakening

of nuclear and extended family ties, the loss of a shared vision for a certain future and a better life, the undermining of authority and respect in human relations, and the meaningless work that is not personally fulfilling beyond "paying the bills" (i.e., employees who find no meaning in manufactured products) in which the individual is made an object who sells him/herself (Fromm, 1976; van den Berg, 1971). These contemporary sociocultural and historical factors, which deeply impact the ever-changing nature of human phenomena, must be taken into consideration by the methodology one uses to study those human phenomena. As van den Berg put it, "… [knowledge of a phenomenon] must be sought in the continuously changing nature, structure, form and organization of that country, of that time, and briefly, of the temporally and geographically conditioned society of which each individual constitutes a part" (1971, p. 348).

The Epistemological Plight for Changing Methodology

In critiquing the manner in which mainstream psychology conceptualizes its subject matter, van den Berg wrote that "the whole science of psychology is based on the assumption that man does not change" (1961, p. 7). This presumption is highly problematic, particularly at a time in our sociocultural history which is characterized by change itself. As we have seen, the human science or qualitative approaches to research were founded upon the argument that methodology must be determined by the subject or phenomenon under study. They have promoted themselves as the champions and protectors of human lived-experience, arguing that it should take primacy over the method one uses to study it. In reflecting upon this dilemma in his aptly titled book *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1994, p. 23) writes,

> the central question of the modern age is how our natural view of the world - the experience of the world that we have as we simply live out our lives - is related to the unassailable and anonymous authority that confronts us in the pronouncements of science.

Yet has phenomenological method been altered to reflect the changing nature of the human phenomena that it researches? If "man arrives at every age of life as a novice" (van den Berg, 1961, p. 237), does not every researcher arrive at every age a novice, having to develop and modify his/her methodologies to truly suit the subject matter s/he is examining? If the human sciences

do not take up the reigns and alter themselves to better reflect their subject matter, then what other methodologies will?

The primary principle of van den Berg's *metabletics* (1961; 1999) is that no phenomenon remains static. As he put it, "the word 'metabletics' is derived from a Greek verb, meaning 'to change,' so that metabletics means theory of change. Another term for it would be historical phenomenology." (1999, p. 48). It concerns itself with the analysis of changing phenomena as they present themselves historically within their sociocultural context. Metabletics integrates but transcends the principles of phenomenology:

> Things are always more than physical science allows. That is something phenomenology establishes. Phenomenology is the discipline that searches for this "more" and describes it. Not only is a thing always more than what physical science can indicate as its basis or condition, it also constantly changes, as things in the house of the deceased have changed. We live in a world of ever-changing things (van den Berg, 1999, p. 48).

If the human sciences are to remain true to their commitment of utilizing methodologies that most fully and authentically capture the meaning structures of the phenomena they are studying, then their methodologies must change to correspond to these phenomena. As researchers we must remain openly willing to alter our manner of studying phenomena, and allow them to evolve and adjust to the phenomena we are examining. The manner in which phenomenology must evolve to suit the phenomena it is examining of course depends upon a contemporary review of that phenomenon within its sociocultural and historical context. Following the general 20th and 21st century trend of increased complexity presented above, it is likely that the methodology must be modified to accommodate the increasingly complex nature of the experiences presented by participants. The study of psychotherapy will be taken as an example of some of the methodological changes that may be necessary to accommodate increasing complexity.

The Changing Nature of Psychotherapy

As with any other human phenomenon, psychotherapy has undergone and continues to undergo dramatic changes in the manner in which it is conceptualized and utilized for treatment. Over the past few decades, the three

major psychotherapeutic orientations (i.e., psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, humanistic/existential, cognitive-behavioural) have conceptually moved away from the theoretical purity of their origins and closer to each other (Norcross & Goldfield, 2005; O'Leary & Murphy, 2006). This movement is true for many aspects of psychotherapy, including the manner in which they conceptualize and utilize the therapeutic relationship (Zayed, 2006).

As they developed new approaches, the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychotherapies have gradually moved from a drive-structural or conflict model of psychopathology to a relational-structural or developmental deficits model of psychopathology (Pancheri, 1998; Tosone, 1998). In the conflict model, interventions begin early in treatment and focus on transference and unconscious dynamics. They ultimately work with material that is distant from the patient's observable experience, and countertransference is used to understand the patient. The developmental deficits model, on the other hand, emphasizes the value of the therapeutic relationship. Change at least partially occurs through the relationship, characterized by caring for the patient through holding and providing a sense of security, and counter-transference is used as an instrument of change. The value and importance of the therapeutic relationship in analysis was reconsidered and re-evaluated beginning with Klein and Ferenszi (Pancheri, 1998) but highly elaborated by Sullivan (e.g., 1953). These theorists reassessed the impact of subjectivity on the understanding of patients, the nature of the mutual engagement of patient and analyst, and they questioned the analyst's authoritative stance as an external observer and scientific interpreter of the patient's "intrapsychic world" (Raphling, 1997). They marked the beginnings of the interpersonal movement and "relational" theories, which moved from the *intrapsychic* to the *interpersonal* (Josephs, 1992; Crits-Christoph & Connolly-Gibbons, 2002), and reconceptualized analysis as a profoundly intersubjective dialogue between two universes (Stolorow, 1993): "The superordinate goal of analysis - to know one's own mind - can be achieved only in relation to the mind of another" (Raphling, 1997, p. 245). According to these theorists, traditional psychoanalysis conceals interpersonal reality and leads to mystification. Transference and countertransference are inevitable and together form a dyadic intersubjective system of reciprocal influence, to which the organizing activities of both participants make ongoing co-determining contributions. According to Stolorow and Atwood (1997), the classical stance

> ... serves to disavow the vulnerability inherent in the awareness that all human experience is embedded in constitutive relational systems .... it disavows the deeply personal impact of the analyst's emotional engagement with his/her patients and denies all the ways in which the analyst and his/her own psychological organization are profoundly implicated in all the phenomena he or she observes and seeks to treat (pp. 439-440).

Aron (1992) similarly critiques the concept of analyst neutrality: "only the most hackneyed and barren of interpretations could be so (secondary) 'processed' that it would be a rational bit of information devoid of the humanity and subjectivity of the analyst" (p. 478). Furthermore, these theorists criticize the view that interpretation reconstructs the past, on the basis that the actual past is less important than the individual's current living of it.

For Sullivan (e.g., 1953) and his successors, the scope of conscious awareness is mediated by the *interpersonal or analytic field*. Founded in dialogue, this interpersonal field brings two separate subjective experiences into mutual interaction, limiting their individual subjectivity and creating a shared terrain (Raphling, 1997). As Lichtenberg (1999) put it, "through the spoken word - heard and given back - the two individual fields open the way to that confluence which will lead to the creation of the *analytic field*" (p. 94). In this approach, the analyst must establish him/herself as a subject participant-observer in the analytic field (Aron, 1992; Lichtenberg, 1999; Merendino, 1997). Unless s/he is actively enacting an artificial relationship, the analyst inevitably enters into participation and enacts with the patient various relational patterns as a response to relational demands (rather than out of a therapeutic strategy). The analyst's subjective otherness provides a sustained and emotionally intense contrast to the patient's sense of reality and inner experience. By objectifying his/her experience through an interpretative frame of reference, the analyst overcomes the resistance represented by the patient's defensive belief that his/her reality is the only possible one. This provides perspective and insight, introducing new awareness of self-experience, self-reflection, and possibilities. As a corrective emotional experience occurs for the patient, transformation occurs within the patient's *self-system*, which was forged within the child-caregiver system of reciprocal mutual influence.

The humanistic/existential approaches provide similar intersubjective conceptualizations of the therapeutic relationship. From a humanistic and

existential-phenomenological perspective, the psychotherapeutic relationship can be seen as an intersubjective phenomenon existing between subjects (Barclay, 1992), a meeting between individuals which recognizes their difference or otherness, mediating a dialogue of self and other which forms an intersubjective realm between them. It can be said to exist in the *realm-of-the-in-between* (Friedman, 1985). Each participant brings his/her own private meaning-context within which the other is understood, but experiences his/her stream of consciousness and the other's in "a single intentional Act that embraces them both" (Schutz, 1967). As such,

> the world of the We is not private to either of us, but is our world, the one common inter-subjective world which is right there in front of us .... It is only from the face-to-face relationship, from the common lived experience of the world in the We, that the inter-subjective world can be constituted (pp. 103 & 171).

Each selects his/her words with a view of what has been understood by the listener, with an intentional reference to the other's meaning-context. As such, it is a dynamic interaction, influenced in its process of meaning-establishment by memories of what has been said and anticipations of what is yet to be said. It is not grasped reflectively by the participants but is lived through their experiencing of it together.

Based upon the existential philosophy of Buber, Friedman (1985) argues that genuine understanding can only arise in the encounter *between* the patient and the therapist, in *the realm of the interhuman*. He argues that empathy occurs when the other is able to understand the subject from the point of view of the subject. As such empathy, receptive listening, is necessary but insufficient to bring about self-understanding. It is based upon the assumption that people know themselves at a deep level, which rests on the essentialist view that there is a real, core "inner self" within the individual that only needs to be tapped. It relies on a direct fidelity between words and underlying experience, assuming that, when the two match, healing occurs, and it does not appreciate the constitutive nature of therapeutic dialogue and understanding. In contrast, Friedman argues that dialogue, as a genuine encounter with an otherness who resists as well as empathically reflects and confirms, is the healing function of therapy.

The cognitive-behavioural approaches have not traditionally reflected upon the role of the therapeutic relationship in their conceptualizations of

psychotherapy. However, more recent theorists have begun to emphasize the essential role of the relationship in treatment. Although the therapeutic relationship is typically viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition for therapeutic change, there is a meaningful shift towards considering rapport and engagement, and the manner in which the patient-therapist relational dynamics impact treatment (Leahey, 2003; Tarrier, Wells, & Haddock, 1998; Westra, 2004). These conceptualizations, while not intersubjective, are beginning to consider the role of intersubjectivity by addressing resistance and alliance ruptures, the manner in which therapist and patient assumptions may impact psychotherapy, and emotional and metacognitive processes.

Finally, the move towards intersubjectivity in conceptualizing the therapeutic relationship can be seen in the relatively recent emergence and dramatic growth of systemic approaches to treatment. Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed the widespread development and acceptance of couple and family approaches to treatment, both of which conceptualize both psychopathology and treatment as existing and occurring in the inter-subjective realm between members of a system (Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Thus, across orientations and modalities, there is a definitive and fairly universal movement towards conceptualizing psychotherapy as an intersubjective and dialogical phenomenon. However, the full theoretical implications of these conceptualizations have not been realized, particularly the textual implications of a dialogical approach to psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy as a Dialogical and Textual Phenomenon

Applying the concept of the *hermeneutic circle* between reader and text advanced by Gadamer (1994) and Ricoeur (1970) to the psychotherapeutic situation, one could conceptualize the therapist as the reader, and the patient's narrative and in-session expressions as the "text" s/he is attempting to read (Bouchard & Guérette, 1991; Mook, 1994; 1999b). As Ricoeur (1970) argues, the patient-subject's discourse is comparable to a text which is to be deciphered. Of course, the patient him/herself is also engaged in a process wherein s/he is a reader attempting to read the "text" that is his/her life-narrative as well as the therapist's expressions in the sessions. As such, the therapist and patient are engaged in a dialogue and attempting to understand and interpret each other's living textual meanings in service of the patient's well-being.

What then is the relationship between the dialogue and the experience of those engaged in the dialogue? Kelly (1994), in addressing this issue, asked: "if a dialogue is experienced, in what sense is it an 'experience' and in what sense can an experience be something that occurs not within but between people and then who is it experienced by?" (p. 68). To resolve this dilemma, existential-phenomenologists (e.g., Friedman, 1985) would argue that a dialogue is lived through experience. But in a truly engaged therapeutic encounter characterized by openness and belonging, such experience is present at a shared level in a realm-in-between the participants. It is only in this encounter that the fusion of the therapist's and patient's horizons could occur, leading dialogically to therapeutic understanding and interpretation. Psychotherapy is not the exploration of unique and private subjectivities, and meaning is not a determinate inner object residing in the mind of the speaker. Therapeutic meaning is shared and resides in dialogue. As Sass put it,

> the hermeneutic view of insight would see it as an exploratory, dialogic interpretive process in which therapist and patient play closely analogous roles - each in a nondogmatic way bringing to bear habitual preconceptions in order to illuminate meanings that lie, in a sense, not in the patient's mind but in the text-dialogue they have before them, i.e., the patient's actions and reported experiences (1988, p. 262).

Furthermore, self-reflection depends greatly upon gaining *distanciation* from one's experience and behavior to be able to re-engage it and *appropriate* it in a new light (Ricoeur, 1985). The immersive nature of the life-world makes it difficult to see beyond. As such, subjectivity does not have total clarity and transparency to itself, but rather is partially unable to see itself through introspection. The subject, particularly one with psychological problems, does not have a privileged access to self-understanding (Sass, 1988). The distant perspective one can take towards one's self is better at allowing one to reflect on and perceive the patterns of experience and behavior and meaningfully integrate them. Dialogue, through engaging one with an other and creating a realm-in-between, is capable of providing that distance. The other in a dialogue provides disclosive possibilities through the distanciation which his/her otherness allows. Friedman (1985) similarly argues that the therapist's opposition, as a unique and genuine otherness, creates a dialogical tension which enables the patient's self-understanding to evolve far beyond empathic receptive listening. When the presenting problems of the patient

are discussed in therapy, they exist in that shared realm of belongingness created through dialogue, which allows their examination in a different light to illuminate their implicit meanings and to find new understandings and meanings with respect to them.

Thus psychotherapy could be conceptualized from a phenomenological hermeneutic perspective as involving the therapist and patient encountering each other and entering a dialogue, creating a realm in-between them to which they both belong. Throughout the therapy, they would distantiate and reflect upon the text that emerges in-between them, and re-engage each other anew (through a fusion of horizons) and share the explicated and novel meanings and new ways of being which are illuminated. As such, different ways of feeling, behaving, and thinking become possible. However one must always remember that psychotherapy is a specialized form of dialogue, to which the therapist brings therapeutic expertise to heal the patient, and to which the patient brings expertise regarding his/her life-world and seeks to be healed (Bergsma & Mook, 1998).

As psychotherapy can be viewed as a dialogical phenomenon occurring in the shared experiential space between two individuals, it arguably presents us with a *textual experiential structure* aside from the participants' individual involvement in it. Ricoeur (1979; 1985) drew an analogy between texts and the nature of human experience and its expression. Human life follows the structure of a narrative. It is rooted and *prefigured* in temporal action and experience. The activity of emplotment, the story we tell about our lives, organizes or *configures* these actions and experiences into successive events and intelligible and synthesized temporal wholes. This synthesizes the themes, characters, and situations of the story. Finally, the act of reading the text *refigures* the narrative, as it involves the reader's application of the text to his/her own world of experience and action. Thus, for Ricoeur, the temporal characteristics of everyday actions and experiences possess a pre-narrative structure.

Mook (1989; 1999b) takes up this analogy and argues that we can speak of a therapeutic-text and its inherent textual structure. The therapist and patient are readers of the patient's life as a text, of which they are the audience, and they enter into a dialogue with it and each other in an attempt to understand and interpret it. Human experience is analogous to a text because it is also taken up with the understanding and interpretation of "signs" and "objectivations," which call to be rendered meaningful. As such, the therapeutic-text, and the therapeutic acts occurring within it, can be studied as an entity that presents itself to us as a text experienced between

the patient and the therapist, which includes aspects of the subjective.

The question then becomes how a researcher can study this "socially fixated" meaning structure which presents itself intersubjectively in the shared experiential space of the patient and therapist.

Beyond the Qualitative Interview

The qualitative interview has always been the primary methodological tool of qualitative psychology research, with the rationale that it is the best method for studying the meanings of psychological phenomena for participants through their rich descriptions of their lived-experiences (Giorgi 1975; 1985; Karlsson, 1993; Kvale, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1989; Robbins, 2006; Robbins & Parlavecchio, 2006). Some variations of that method have been widely used, including simultaneous interviews of multiple participants, focus groups, couple interviews, and family interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However, the dialogical nature of psychotherapy described above necessitates alternative and creative methodologies for its study.

The qualitative interview remains essential to capturing the individual perspectives of patients and therapists. But, as has been argued above, due to its dialogical nature, therapeutic phenomena do not exist "in" the experiences of the therapist or patient, but rather in a realm of experiencing shared between them. From the perspective of this argument, therapeutic phenomena as dialogical textual structures should ideally be observed and studied in the dialogue itself as it unfolds and is experienced by its participants. If psychotherapy can indeed be conceptualized as a dialogical phenomenon occurring between the patient and therapist, then the dialogical events of therapy present us with an experiential textual structure. Thus there may be a way of merging the individual, or more subjective, interviews of participants' experiences of the in-session events with an analysis of the session material, which captures the shared or intersubjective dimensions of their experiencing.

Rationale for Utilizing the Phenomenological Method to Study Psychotherapeutic Phenomena

There are a variety of human science or qualitative approaches to psychological research. However, the phenomenological method is arguably best suited for exploring therapeutic events as they present and reveal

themselves as dialogical phenomena in psychotherapy. It is capable of conducting that exploration by studying the meanings of the individual and the intersubjective experiences of the patient and therapist. Phenomenology is a philosophically and epistemologically grounded, systematic, well developed, and widely used methodology (e.g., Giorgi, 1970; Karlsson, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1989). It is a descriptive, qualitative, and reflective approach which analyzes the implicit meanings that characterize a phenomenon, and seeks the interrelationships between these meanings in the form of a meaning structure. Notably, there are other plausible and well established qualitative approaches, including Elliott's (e.g., 1984; 1986) interpersonal process recall approach and comprehensive process analysis approach (e.g., Elliot & Shapiro, 1992), Mahrer's (e.g., 1988; 1996) discovery-oriented approach, and Rennie's (e.g., 2002) grounded theory approach. However, these methods capture different aspects of a phenomenon in comparison to the phenomenological approach.

Elliott's approaches accesses the experience of the patient and therapist, but are much more focussed upon a structured analysis of the in-session significant process events and do not provide a way of analyzing the session itself in addition to the experiencing of the individuals in it. The proposed methodology, in its aim of accessing the experience of the individuals as well as the dialogue between them, is interested in this intersubjective dimension of experience and its meaning for the participants. Mahrer's approach is focussed upon discovering significant in-session moments identified by a team of judges. As such, it does not explicate the meaning of the experience of a particular phenomenon as it reveals itself in a session, which is the interest of the current methodology. Rennie's approach comes closer to fulfilling the purposes of this methodology. However, its method of analysis would break down the session into semantic units and removes these units from the session transcript to thematize and categorize them, which does not allow for the necessary *interweaving* that will be proposed as part of the presented methodology. The current methodology is interested in the individual and intersubjective dimensions of experience, which are believed to be foundational to dialogical therapeutic phenomenon. These can only be accessed by studying the session itself as well as the individual experiences of the therapist and patient, and then being able to clearly interweave them at equivalent points in the session, a process which is described in greater detail below.

Towards a Dialogical Phenomenological Methodology for Psychotherapy Research

Giorgi (1975; 1985) systematized the phenomenological method of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty into a phenomenological psychological method of analysis, which is consistent with traditional philosophical phenomenology but is adapted to suit psychological research. Psychotherapy can be studied both subjectively and intersubjectively using the Giorgi method, and this method was successfully utilized by Zayed (2006) to examine the phenomenon of interpretation in psychotherapy.

The first step in data collection involves recording psychotherapy sessions that meaningfully capture the therapeutic phenomenon of interest. A necessary intervening step may require the researcher to identify the therapeutic phenomenon within the sessions in preparation for interviewing the patient and the therapist regarding that phenomenon. To capture their individual experiences of the phenomenon while containing the impact of the other in the pair, it is essential they be interviewed separately. The researcher interviews them by walking through the recording with them and stopping the recording at significant points. This process is, of course, intended to re-evoke the participants' experiences of the session, since retrospective description of experience is never as powerful as re-evoking it or examining it as it is lived. The interviews are aimed at exploring and clarifying intended meanings as experienced by the patient and the therapist. They enrich, illuminate, and amplify the recorded data, as well as potentially provide new data from the perspectives of the patient and the therapist. Whenever instances of the therapeutic phenomenon emerge in the session, it is recommended that the recording be stopped, rewound for a few minutes to provide preceding context, and replayed past the instance of interest to provide succeeding context (providing a sense of temporality to the instance). Then, the therapist or patient is interviewed regarding that instance. The interviews are recorded and transcribed in full.

After following this procedure, there are three sources of data available to the researcher from each patient-therapist pair. The first is the transcript of the session, the second is the transcript of the therapist interview regarding the session, and the third is the transcript of the patient interview regarding the session. After precise transcription of each therapy and interview recording, the phenomenological method utilizes the following four essential steps as outlined by Giorgi (1985) to qualitatively analyze the transcripts.

These steps will be stated below and modified to allow the methodology to accommodate the dialogical nature of the data and maintain the holistic gestalt of the transcripts during analysis.

The first step involves reading the entire transcript a number of times in order to achieve a *General Sense of the Whole*. This process is repeated until the researcher feels s/he has a good understanding of what was being expressed in the data for each session. The intention in this step is to familiarize oneself with the recording so that the next steps can be conducted more easily and fruitfully. The second step involves *Discrimination of Meaning Units Within a Psychological Perspective Focussed on the Phenomenon Being Researched*. All human phenomena are highly complex and rich with various layers of meaning and significance, and require the researcher to approach them with a particular perspective and focus. Since our interest lies in a specific therapeutic phenomenon or event, the transcripts are broken up into *meaning units*, which are chosen based on a focus upon psychological phenomena in general and therapeutic phenomena in particular. Meaning units are based upon meaningful shifts, noted directly in the text, which allow us to manageably analyze the text. They are spontaneously perceived discriminations within the data emerging when the researcher adopts the above mentioned focuses. The meaning unit discriminations are noted directly on the data whenever the researcher becomes aware of a shift or change in the meaning that appears to be psychologically sensitive, thus breaking up the data. The purpose of this process is to help facilitate the next step in the analysis.

As previously argued, a dialogue is a meeting of two worlds of experience, and, as an event, its structure supersedes the experience of each specific party. The discrimination of meaning units in the analysis of the therapy transcripts should attempt to remain faithful to the dialogical nature of the phenomenon. Giorgi's more classical phenomenological approach would typically delineate a shift in meaning whenever there is a shift in the dialogue from one party to the other. However, to remain faithful to the dialogical nature of the therapy-text, the researcher should break down the actual therapeutic dialogues into discrete meaning units from their naturally occurring therapeutic structures. Thus the patient and therapist statements in the session should not be kept separate, but rather should be included in the meaning unit if they represent a meaningful continuity. As a result, both patient and therapist statements would often be present within a single meaning unit.

The third step is the *Transformation of Subject's Everyday Expressions into Psychological Language with Emphasis on the Phenomenon Being Investigated*, which involves elucidating the essential aspects of the meaning unit in light of the themes of interest, namely its psychological meaning and relevance to the therapeutic phenomenon. It is a transformation from the participant's concrete expressions into psychological language that is as descriptive and atheoretical as possible. This is done in order to make explicit the psychological meanings implicit in the life-world of the participants. The transformation is not a translation into abstract psychological terms associated with particular psychological perspectives, but rather it is a jargon free transformation into a common sense language enlightened by a phenomenological perspective. This process eliminates repetitions and redundancies, while maintaining the essential sense and context of the meaning. The reflective phenomenological stance that is used to come to that transformation is a *disciplined reflection* that involves *bracketing* one's own theoretical and personal preconceptions as much as possible, in order to be open to the essential meaning of the experience provided by the participants. Ultimately, it is faithfulness and fidelity to the phenomenon itself, and the meaning of it for the participants who experienced it, which prevents the researcher from tangentially distorting or adding his/her biases to the data. Through this disciplined phenomenological stance, followed by an analysis and reflection upon the phenomenon, the essential structure or the most comprehensive invariant meanings of the phenomenon can be revealed (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

The process of transformation involves entering into a dialogical relationship with the text of the meaning units, going into them to grasp their meanings as lived, and then withdrawing to reflect upon them. The process of *imaginative variation* also facilitates the emergence of essential features of the phenomenon. It involves exploring the limits of each unit's meaning by varying its constituents and themes (both temporal and spatial). Thus, through these processes, the researcher asks what is truly essential about each meaning unit with respect to the psychological phenomenon.

Finally, in the *Synthesis of Transformed Meaning Units into a Consistent Statement of the Structure of the Phenomenon*, the meaning units of each transcript and their interrelationships are described in the form of a dialogical situated structure. This is a synthetic process, different from induction or generalization, which requires an intuitive "grasping" of the whole in order for the constituents to be understood. It involves a synthesizing and integrating of the insights contained in all of the transformed meaning units

into a consistent description of the psychological structure of the phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty (1962) described these psychological structures as a network of relations that define how an event is lived. They articulate the most fundamental organization of the experience and the relation between the parts of the experience. While engaging in this process, the researcher returns to the original untransformed data to further verify the transformed meaning units. This step should be conducted for each session and interview transcript.

The *Specific Description of the Situated Structure* of each transcript is developed, resulting in three different structures for each patient-therapist pair: the therapy session, the interview with the patient, and the interview with the therapist. Ultimately, these three structures should serve as a means of reaching a dialogically integrated formulation of the therapeutic phenomenon for each patient-therapist pair. The three structures, representing the individual experiences of the session and their dialogical dimensions, should first interfaced or interweaved. This process involved taking the parts of the structures which meaningfully refer to the same point of therapy, from the session and the interviews, and bringing them together in a meaningful manner in an *integrative summary*. The meaning structure of the experiences of both individuals, along with the corresponding dialogue, should thus be integrated. This creates a flow to the three structures, and allows the research to more easily manage the structures as they refer to each corresponding point in the therapy session. Such a process allows the researcher, in the next step, to include in the analysis the intersubjective and dialogical dimensions as well as the individual dimensions of experience regarding the phenomenon of interest. This process of interweaving could theoretically be conducted at the level of the meaning units. However, this proved untenable practically in the Zayed (2006) study. The researcher found that the amount of content within the interviews regarding specific parts of the session, when integrated into the session itself at the level of meaning units, fragmented the flow of the session and made it very difficult to analyze as a coherent whole.

After the interweaving process, the integrated summaries of the three situated structures of the interviews and the session should be analyzed. This allows the researcher to achieve a *Description of the General Structure* of the therapeutic phenomenon for each patient-therapist pair. This involves the articulation of a general psychological structure of the therapeutic phenomenon by comparing and reflecting upon the three situated meaning structures of the sessions. More specifically, this involves reading the situated structures with the aim of identifying those features which transcend the individual

presentations and manifest at a more general meaningful level, while maintaining the individuality of the patient and the therapist experiences and highlighting their commonalities. This allows the researcher to formulate a general description of the therapeutic phenomenon by integrating what is essential from the three situated structures, while eliminating redundancy and unnecessary detail.

General structures of the therapeutic phenomenon for each patient-therapist pair are the result of the previous stage of analysis. A final *Description of the General Structure* of the phenomenon can then be developed by analysing across general structures from each therapist-patient pair in a search for common themes. Wertz (1987) argues that general insights may not have been made explicit in the previous stages and need to be found when examining all of the cases. Thus the process of formulating this general structure is more than simple cross-checking of converging statements, but rather was a reflective penetration of implicit commonalities which requires a movement between the original descriptions and transformed descriptions. This analysis is conducted across the structures of the data sources to explore and discover any potential commonalities in their presentation of the therapeutic phenomenon. The previous meaning structures are carefully examined for similarities across them, determined by returning to the original situated structures, and even to the meaning units within all of the situated structures (and to their original transcripts). This final analysis produces a coherent common structure of the style, pattern, and process of the therapeutic phenomenon as exemplified by therapists and patients, as well as identifying their specific variations. Note that the "patient" referred to in this methodology need not be an individual patient. This methodology could be used in the context of couples therapy, family therapy, or group therapy. However, under those circumstances, the researcher may wish to conduct interviews with the couple or the family as a unit as well as interview each member separately. The researcher may similarly wish to interview the group as a whole (using a focus group format) and then interview individual members of the group. Additional steps will then need to be taken to create integrative summaries for these interviews.

Conclusions

The methodology presented above is but one simple example of modifying the manner in which we approach and study phenomena to suit their

ever-changing nature. Phenomenology has been used extensively to inform psychotherapy, but phenomenology and other qualitative approaches can also learn from the various psychotherapeutic modalities (sensory and otherwise) which are used to re-evoke and deepen experiencing. This principle can be used to explore further alternative methodologies, always depending (of course) upon the phenomenon under study and attempting to capture it as fully as possible in its current sociocultural and historical context. Retrospective description of experience is never as powerful as re-evoking it or examining it as it is lived, which is the rationale for playing back recordings of experience, or utilizing play or art to re-evoke experiencing. Perhaps various other therapeutic experiential techniques can also be used to re-evoke experiencing.

When researchers embark on a research endeavour they must always remember to neither be passive recipients of methodology nor dogmatic in their methodological choices. The human science approaches evolved from a sense of duty and care to faithfully capture experience as it is lived in the world. This *care*, in the Heideggerian sense of the word, that the human science approaches showed for experience must be remembered and respected. The Heideggerian (1962) sense of care is ontologically characterized by a true and genuine openness towards being-in-the-world. Van den Berg's greatest contribution was to throw a flood light upon the changing nature of all human phenomena, situated as they are in time and space, and by implication their sociocultural and historical context. In following his insights, and generalizing them to the methodologies we use that we claim capture those phenomena, perhaps we can become true methodologists worthy of the ever-changing nature of the phenomena we attempt to study. As researchers, we must always remember van den Berg's (1999) following metabletic warning, particularly in the context of our methodological assumptions (and occasional dogmatism):

> There is no progress in the sense of going from less true to more true. If there were such progress, we would always have to say in looking at the past that our ancestors erred, and forget that in the future we, too, will be ancestors" (1999, p. 57).

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