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Existential Phenomenology and Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of how existential phenomenology has influenced qualitative research methods across a range of disciplines across the social, health, educational, and psychological sciences. It focuses specifically on how the concepts of "existential structures," or "existentials"—such as selfhood, temporality, spatiality, affectivity, and embodiment—have been used in qualitative research. After providing a brief introduction to what qualitative research is and why philosophers should be interested in it, the chapter provides clear, straightforward examples of how qualitative researchers have used existentials to analyze qualitative data and design qualitative studies. The chapter is intended to introduce philosophers to existential approaches to phenomenological qualitative research, with the aim of facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being founded as a philosophical research program, phenomenology had an almost immediate influence on a range of empirical disciplines. Today, we find phenomenological subfields across the social, health, educational, and psychological sciences, as well as in art and design. Many philosophers are familiar with at least a few of these fields, such as phenomenological psychopathology, phenomenological sociology, and phenomenological applications in the cognitive sciences. But phenomenology has also had a significant influence on the development of qualitative research methods in psychology, nursing, anthropology, education, and sport science, among several other disciplines. Many contemporary philosophers are now familiar with how Edmund Husserl's phenomenology has influenced qualitative research, owing in part to debates between philosophers and qualitative methodologists over the proper interpretation and application of Husserl's epoché

(Giorgi 2010, 2011; Smith 2010, 2018; Van Manen 2018, 2019; Morley 2019; Zahavi 2019, 2021; Zahavi and Martiny 2019; Barber 2021). This chapter, by contrast, considers how existential phenomenology has influenced qualitative research.

While there may not be an agreed upon definition of existential phenomenology, I use the term to refer to phenomenological approaches explicitly concerned with human existence, or the human condition—including the work of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others. Of these, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have arguably had the most significant influence on qualitative research methods. Moreover, while qualitative studies often explore broadly existential themes—such as freedom, responsibility, authenticity, or death—I here focus on a more specific way that existential phenomenology has informed qualitative research. Some qualitative researchers draw directly on what the existential phenomenologists call “existential structures” or, simply, “existentials”. There’s no exhaustive list of existentials—but they include structures such as selfhood, temporality, spatiality, affectivity, and embodiment, among other features of experience and subjectivity. Phenomenologists typically consider these structures to be essential or universal features of human existence. Heidegger, when introducing his “analytic of Dasein,” or analysis of human existence, explains that he aims to exhibit “not just any accidental structures, but essential ones which, in every kind of Being that factual Dasein may possess, persist as determinative for the character of its Being” (Heidegger 1962: 38). Put simply, if these structures constitute the essential features of human existence, they should be constitutive of any experience that we might consider. Every experience includes some sense of selfhood, some affective attunement, some temporal flow, and so on. Whereas the existential phenomenologists articulated these structures themselves, qualitative researchers have found them to be useful guides for studying a range of human experiences.

To explain how existentials are used in qualitative research, the chapter proceeds in three sections. Section 1 briefly introduces the basics of qualitative research. Section 2 motivates why philosophical phenomenologists should be interested in qualitative studies, providing examples of how such studies are already influencing philosophy. And section 3 shows how qualitative researchers have drawn on phenomenological accounts of existentials to inform their approaches to both data analysis and study design.

1 WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

It's difficult to determine a precise moment that qualitative research methods emerged. One might argue that it goes back over two centuries, originating with the field of hermeneutics, understood as a method of textual interpretation. However, qualitative research methods—at least when understood as involving the generation of new empirical data—were developed over the course of the twentieth century, initially in the fields of anthropology and sociology. From the 1970s, many of these methods were formalized, and qualitative research spread well beyond the social sciences (Brinkmann, Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2014). Today, any discipline concerned broadly with human experience or culture is likely to employ qualitative methods to study beliefs, concepts, social norms, or cultural practices, among many other aspects of human life.

In contrast with quantitative approaches, qualitative research involves the generation and analysis of non-numerical data. Often, this data takes the form of interview transcripts, observational notes, open-ended surveys, or other texts, such as diary entries. Some qualitative approaches even analyze non-textual objects, such as human artifacts, images, or artwork. The data can be analyzed in various ways, although most approaches involve some kind of coding, where words or phrases are labeled so that they can be grouped or organized into common categories. Moreover, an analysis can be conducted inductively or deductively.

An inductive approach is bottom-up: Data are analyzed on their own terms, without bringing in outside concepts or theories to facilitate interpretation. A deductive approach is, by contrast, top-down: Data are analyzed with outside concepts or theories, which frame or guide the researcher's interpretation.

In some disciplines, such as psychology and nursing, approaches to data generation and analysis tend to be quite systematic—in some cases, even formulaic. Methodological textbooks provide explicit guidance on which kinds of questions should be asked, how an interview should be conducted, how transcripts should be analyzed, and so on. In other disciplines, such as anthropology, methodologies tend not to be so formalized. Ethnographic methods, for instance, often involve long- or short-term fieldwork, where the researcher both participates in and observes a range of activities and practices. Interviews might be brief and informal. And the interview transcripts and observational notes are often analyzed in a more holistic way.

It's difficult—if not impossible—to provide an overall characterization that accurately represents all approaches to qualitative research. Methods can differ considerably across disciplines, and even within disciplines. This diversity is also reflected in how qualitative researchers take up and apply insights from existential phenomenology. There's not one "existential" approach to qualitative research. Rather, in most cases, insights from existential phenomenology are incorporated into the broader methodological norms of the respective discipline, adding a new layer of depth, nuance, and sensitivity to existing approaches.

2 WHY SHOULD PHILOSOPHERS BE INTERESTED IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

On the face of it, the aims of philosophers and the aims of qualitative researchers move in opposite directions. Whereas philosophers have traditionally been concerned with essential

and universal truths, qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with contingent and particular aspects of human life. For example, when a philosopher asks questions such as “What is beauty?”, a good philosophical answer is one that is true in all times and all places. If their account turned out to be true only of some cases of beauty, then it wouldn’t be a good philosophical answer. By contrast, when an anthropologist studies beauty, they’re more likely to ask, “What does this particular cultural group find beautiful?” or “How does this community conceptualize beauty?” They’re interested not in some universal conception of beauty, but in how beauty is experienced and understood within specific cultural contexts.

These two kinds of inquiry move in opposite directions. But this doesn’t mean that they’re necessarily in conflict. In some cases, they can be mutually informative. An anthropologist might rely on a philosophical concept of beauty to determine whether the experiences someone describes should be classified as experiences of beauty in the first place, or might be better classified as some other kind of aesthetic experience. And a philosopher might test their concept of beauty by considering whether it adequately captures how beauty is understood across various cultures.

While qualitative researchers have always appealed to philosophical and theoretical literature as foundational for their methodologies, philosophers haven’t always shown as much interest in qualitative research. Among the existential phenomenologists, engagement with qualitative research has been quite mixed. Heidegger, despite making concerted efforts to spread his ideas in the field of psychiatry (see, e.g., Heidegger 2001), paid relatively little attention to the results of psychiatric research and didn’t seem to consider how—or even whether—phenomenological accounts of mental illness might inform his own philosophical thought. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, developed his philosophical work in critical dialogue with the sciences, including with studies in the psychological, social, and health sciences (see, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 1964, 2010). While much of this engagement was with

experimental research, he also drew upon individual case studies from psychiatry and neurology, which often included qualitative descriptions of experience and behavior.

Today, philosophers have become even more interested in drawing upon and critically engaging with scientific research, including qualitative studies. This is motivated, in part, by a growing concern contingent and particular aspects of human life. For example, rather than inquire into the nature of shame as a universal human experience, feminist philosophers explore the distinctive features of feminine shame (Bartky 1990; Mann 2018). And rather than develop an account of the essential structures of embodiment, philosophers of race consider the distinctive bodily experiences of racial minorities (Alcoff 2006).

When philosophers inquire into these experiences of particular groups or populations, rather than into the nature of experience as such, they tread into a domain that has traditionally belonged to qualitative researchers. But most philosophers haven't been trained to conduct their own empirical studies. Instead, many philosophers simply draw upon and generalize from their own first-person experiences without engaging with relevant work on qualitative research methods, such as the extensive literature on autoethnography (e.g., Chang 2016). When philosophers do rely on the experiences of others, they often draw on texts such as memoirs or diaries, which are not typically produced with the primary aim of providing detailed descriptions of experience. In some cases, these methodological differences might be justified by the differing aims of philosophers and qualitative researchers. In other cases, philosophers might do well to incorporate qualitative methods into their work.

Over the last few years, we can see the start of a “qualitative turn” in philosophical phenomenology, evidenced by more explicit engagement with qualitative research methods. Today, some philosophical phenomenologists not only draw upon and engage with the results of qualitative studies, but also conduct their own qualitative studies—usually in collaboration with researchers from other disciplines. These kinds of collaborations take various forms:

Sometimes philosophers collaborate on the initial design of the study, helping to formulate research and interview questions that might inform philosophical discussions. In other cases, they contribute to a later phase of a study, collaborating on data analysis or on writing up the results and explaining how they contribute to philosophical and theoretical debates.

How do these studies contribute to more traditional forms of philosophical inquiry? What do philosophers gain from qualitative research? At the very least, these studies have the potential to add a degree of concreteness or nuance to philosophers' more generic or abstract analyses. Consider, for instance, Jenny Slatman and her colleagues' study of how women experience scars after undergoing surgery for breast cancer. By interviewing women who had this procedure and analyzing the interview transcripts with a combination of qualitative and philosophical methods, they were able to identify a range of bodily experiences that a traditional philosophical study might not have anticipated or adequately characterized. For example, immediately after the surgery, some women adopted a clinical or biomedical perspective, appreciating the skillful suturing of their own body (Slatman, Halsema and Meershoek 2016: 1618). And, when it came to concealing their bodily asymmetry, women reported quite different experiences of using a prosthesis. One woman explained that she didn't wear the prosthesis to restore her original appearance for herself, but to ensure that her appearance didn't bother others (Slatman, Halsema and Meershoek 2016: 1619). Without concrete empirical examples, philosophical descriptions of these kinds of experiences might come off as merely speculative or lacking in nuance. Empirical material can make philosophical accounts of the dynamics of embodied experience more concrete, fleshing out the often oversimplified examples that we find in philosophical texts.

But qualitative studies aren't limited to fleshing out philosophers' more generic and abstract accounts of human experience and subjectivity. The results of empirical qualitative research can also challenge philosophical concepts, motivating philosophers to clarify or even

revise their accounts of human existence. Susanne Ravn and Simon Høffding exemplify this kind of contribution through their studies of expert dancers and musicians (Ravn and Høffding 2017; Ravn 2021). Ravn, drawing on her studies of elite sports dancers, argues that they can experience their bodies as simultaneously individuated and extended, such that the feeling of togetherness they experience with their dance partner doesn't override or supersede their sense of individuation (Ravn and Høffding 2017: 63). Høffding, drawing on the experiences of expert musicians, argues that they don't necessarily fall into a pure flow state, or what Hubert Dreyfus calls skillful coping (Dreyfus 2005, 2007). Rather, the musicians are often quite reflective and self-conscious, even while expertly performing. This suggests that skillful coping and reflective thinking are not polar opposite experiences, but often occur simultaneously (Ravn and Høffding 2017: 64).

Whether an individual qualitative study will help to flesh out or even challenge phenomenological concepts and theories is often difficult to anticipate. We can't know in advance precisely what we're going to observe, or how our informants are going to describe their experiences. However, when qualitative researchers explicitly incorporate phenomenological concepts, such as existentials, into their data analysis or even the design of their study, it's often easier to determine whether and how their findings relate to the broader philosophical literature.

3 INFLUENCES OF EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Existential phenomenology has informed qualitative research in various ways, and to varying degrees—from general inspiration to specific methodological guidance. Some Heideggerian approaches, for example, highlight the impossibility of extricating oneself from personal and theoretical presuppositions, thus shaping how the researcher orients herself toward her own

biases when conducting a qualitative study (McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis 2009). Rather than attempt to bracket or suspend their biases (as sometimes attempted in Husserlian approaches to qualitative research), the researcher instead attempts to make them explicit, cultivating an awareness of how their biases might problematically shape the interview questions or the data analysis.

In contrast to qualitative approaches that draw upon phenomenological methods, approaches that draw on existentials tend to produce knowledge that's more closely aligned with philosophical research and, thus, may be of more interest and value to philosophers. In this section, I provide an overview of how existentials have been used in qualitative research, including in both data analysis and study design.

3.1 Existential Approaches to the Analysis of Qualitative Data

Qualitative researchers most often draw upon existentials when analyzing data, such as interview transcripts or observational notes. Why do they incorporate existentials at this late phase of their study? Qualitative research is often (but not always) conducted with an open or exploratory attitude. The researcher may have a general topic of interest or a broad research question. But they don't usually stipulate an explicit hypothesis about what they expect to discover. Whereas natural scientists try to avoid bias by formulating a hypothesis in advance, qualitative researchers often try to mitigate the effects of bias in the opposite way—by not presuming too much about their potential findings. Many phenomenological approaches to qualitative research attempt to mitigate the effects of bias by bracketing, suspending, or bridling their presuppositions—often attributing this practice to the Husserlian epoché (e.g., Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom 2008; Giorgi 2009; van Manen 2016). However, even those methodologists who are strongly committed to bracketing theoretical presuppositions have

still found ways to reincorporate specific philosophical concepts in later phases of their study, including in data analysis.

Two qualitative methodologists who propose this kind of approach to data analysis are Max van Manen and Peter Ashworth. Van Manen allows for various approaches to analyzing qualitative data, but suggests that, in some cases, it can be helpful to analyze qualitative data through what he calls “guided existential inquiry” (van Manen 2016). Originally, van Manen suggested only four existentials: “*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relations* (relationality or communality)” (van Manen, 1990: 101). In more recent work, he introduces other existentials, such as “lived things and technology (materiality)” as well as “death (dying), language, and mood” (van Manen, 2016: 302–303). His list of existentials is meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive or exhaustive, and can in principle include any “universal themes of life” (van Manen, 2016: 302)

When analyzing a personal narrative or description of experience from the perspective of relationality, for instance, the researcher might ask how the person experiences themselves in relation to others, how they experience their community, or how their relation with others changes when interacting in online spaces. When analyzing this same material from the perspective of the lived body, by contrast, the researcher might ask how the person attended to their own body, whether they became explicitly aware of their body, and how they experienced their own body in contrast to the bodies of others. Van Manen presents existentials as useful guides for analyzing qualitative data, but also for structuring and presenting the study’s findings in publications. The use of existentials is not, however, essential to van Manen’s methodology—he offers this as just one possible way of analyzing and presenting ones findings (van Manen 2016).

Ashworth presents a similar, but more formalized, approach to using existentials in data analysis—although he refers to them as “fractions” or “fragments” of the lifeworld, emphasizing their essential interrelatedness (Ashworth 2003: 147). He lists eight concepts: selfhood; sociality; embodiment; temporality; spatiality; project; discourse; and moodedness. Like van Manen, Ashworth does not consider his list to be exhaustive. Each fraction constitutes an essential feature of experience, such that any experience one investigates necessarily involves every fraction—every experience includes some element of selfhood, some temporal flow, some kind of affective attunement, and so on. Using this list of fractions as a heuristic, the researcher can remind herself to consider the experience in question from each perspective, piecing together a holistic account.

Ann and Peter Ashworth demonstrate this in their study of the lifeworld of a person living with Alzheimer’s disease (Ashworth and Ashworth 2003). They don’t prioritize any individual aspect of the experience from the start. Rather, they consider the experience of Alzheimer’s from each perspective in turn, examining elements of selfhood, sociality, embodiment, and so on, until they’ve pieced together a holistic view of this person’s experience.

In addition to Ashworth, several other phenomenological psychologists have incorporated existentials into their approaches to data analysis, including many psychologists often associated with Giorgi’s more Husserlian approach, such as Scott Churchill, Clark Moustakas, James Morley, and Frederick Wertz (Moustakas 1994; Churchill and Fisher-Smith 2021; Churchill 2022; Wertz 2023). The division between Husserlian and existential approaches to qualitative research is not as strict as it’s sometimes portrayed to be. In most cases, phenomenological qualitative researchers are quite eclectic, drawing on a wide range of philosophical and theoretical resources that help them to make sense of the often complex and multifaceted experiences that they investigate.

In addition to psychologists, anthropologists also use existentials to analyze and make sense of their qualitative data, including both interview transcripts and observational notes. But their use of existentials is usually less systematic than in the above approaches. In general, anthropologists tend not to use the more formalized methods of data analysis found in many other disciplines. From a philosophical perspective, this less formalized or systematic approach may be seen as a positive feature of anthropological inquiry: Anthropologists tend to engage with phenomenological concepts in rich and nuanced ways, and their approaches to analyzing data and presenting findings are akin to at least some styles of philosophical writing and argumentation. Perhaps the most well-known figure in existential anthropology is Michael Jackson, who draws widely on existential, phenomenological, and pragmatist approaches (Jackson 2012; Jackson and Piette 2015). To illustrate how existentials can be used in anthropological research, however, I turn to the work of Thomas Csordas, who draws on Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment to understand a variety of complex behaviors, experiences, and social situations, such as religious practices around ritual healing.

Csordas uses embodiment as a "paradigm," which he defines as "a consistent methodological perspective that encourages reanalyses of existing data and suggests new questions for empirical research" (Csordas 1990: 5). In his own example, he draws on concepts of embodiment from Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu to reanalyze practices of faith healing in North American Charismatic Christianity. The practices involve complex interactions among religious leaders and followers. One element of these practices proved especially challenging to understand: glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. When Csordas conducted his study in the 1980s, Pentecostal glossolalia was typically understood in one of three ways: "as a phenomenon of trance or altered state of consciousness (Goodman 1972), as a mechanism of commitment to a fringe religious movement (Gerlach and Hine 1970), or as a

ritual speech act within a religious speech community (Samarin,1972)” (Csordas 1990: 24).

Csordas, however, was not interested in the social function of glossolalia or its accompanying mental states. Rather, he asked, “what can the ritual use of glossolalia tell us about language, culture, the self, and the sacred[?]” (Csordas 1990: 24).

How did he use Merleau-Ponty’s account of embodiment to help him answer this question? Csordas points out that glossolalia is perceived as gibberish by outsiders, yet its meaning is immediately apparent to those within the respective religious community. He argues that glossolalia therefore challenges conventional accounts of speech as straightforward representations of thought. With this in mind, he sought out alternative theories of speech and language, including in the work of Merleau-Ponty. As Csordas interprets him, Merleau-Ponty understands speech not as the external expression of some internal thought, but as “a verbal gesture with immanent meaning,” as “an act or phonetic gesture in which one takes up an existential position in the world” (Csordas 1990: 25). When conceptualized in this way, glossolalia can be seen as a kind of speech that, rather than expressing an internal thought, expresses the speaker’s habitation in a sacred space where they have received a gift from the divine and are brought closer to God. Csordas argues that the absence of the semantic element is precisely how glossolalia “reveals the gestural meaning of language, such that the sacred becomes concrete in embodied experience” (Csordas 1990: 26).

In addition to Csordas, several other anthropologists—such as Robert Desjarlais, Tim Ingold, Bernhard Leistle, Kalpana Ram, Jason Throop, and Jarrett Zigon—have incorporated existentials into their work. They draw upon a range of concepts—including embodiment, mood, emotion, empathy, understanding, intersubjectivity, and responsivity—to make sense of diverse cultural practices and experiences. Examples of similar kinds of existentially-informed qualitative inquiry can be found across a variety of disciplines, including nursing

(Klinke, Thorsteinsson and Jónsdóttir 2014; Klinke *et al.* 2015), psychiatry (Pienkos, Silverstein and Sass 2017; Feyaerts *et al.* 2021), and dance studies (Legrand and Ravn 2009), to name just a few.

3.2 Existential Approaches to the Design of Qualitative Studies

While existentials are most often used when analyzing qualitative data, it's also possible to incorporate them into the design of empirical qualitative studies. In most cases, this is done implicitly. Once qualitative researchers become familiar with existential phenomenology, this familiarity often influences how they formulate their research and interview questions, or even what they attend to and notice when conducting observations. In this section, however, I focus on an approach that explicitly incorporates existentials into the design of qualitative studies: Phenomenologically Grounded Qualitative Research, or PGQR (Klinke and Fernandez 2023; Køster and Fernandez 2023).

PGQR is inspired by the success of “frontloaded” phenomenology in the cognitive sciences, which uses phenomenological concepts in the design of experimental studies (Gallagher 2003). This contrasts with a “retrospective” approach to phenomenology, which involves the critical reinterpretation of existing studies (Gallagher 2003: 88–91). For instance, when Merleau-Ponty critically engages with experimental research in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he takes a retrospective approach, critically reinterpreting the results of psychological and neurological studies from a phenomenological perspective. Gallagher argues that these kinds of reinterpretations should not be seen as definitive conclusions, but as speculative hypotheses that should be confirmed by experimental testing. To design experiments that can test a phenomenological hypothesis, we typically need to frontload phenomenological concepts into the design of the study—otherwise it's not clear whether the study investigates the relevant aspects of experience.

Gallagher provides an example of frontloading phenomenological concepts in an experimental study of the neural correlates of various senses of selfhood. Typically, when performing everyday activities, I have a simultaneous experience of agency and ownership—I feel not only that I am the one bringing about my own actions, but also that the body performing these actions is mine. Once we draw this conceptual distinction, however, we can also come up with cases where I might experience one sense of selfhood without the other. If I'm pushed by someone else, for instance, I'll have a sense of ownership (it's my body being pushed) without a sense of agency (someone else pushed me). With this distinction in hand, the cognitive scientists were able to design a study that could identify some of the neural signals associated with a sense of agency, since they could create situations where one's sense of agency would be disrupted (Gallagher 2003: 94). Only by using the right phenomenological concepts were the scientists able to isolate the relevant aspect of experience.

Qualitative research is not typically conducted in an experimental setting. However, it's still possible to frontload phenomenological concepts into the design of interview-based or observational studies. But why should we want to frontload phenomenological concepts in qualitative research? For the same reason that we might frontload in the cognitive sciences: It focuses the study on a specific aspect of subjectivity or experience, allowing the researcher to inquire into this experience in considerably more depth than they might otherwise be able to. This can be preferable to more exploratory approaches for at least two reasons: First, if the researcher is already an expert on the particular topic of the study, they may be in a good position to identify key gaps in current knowledge and would therefore benefit from using an approach that allows them to investigate a specific aspects of experience that we don't currently have a good understanding of. Second, because many aspects of experience are pre-reflective (i.e., we don't typically reflect upon them, but they can in principle be brought to

reflective awareness) the researcher may need to guide the informant's attention toward aspects of their experience that they wouldn't normally attend to—and a more focused study can better facilitate this kind of reflection.

Allan Køster's study of long-term grief following early parental bereavement provides a clear example of this approach (Køster 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Based on his knowledge of the psychological literature on grief, he knew that we have well-established accounts of the emotional aspects of grief (i.e., grief involves a feeling oriented toward the lost loved one, which often comes in waves). However, by reviewing memoirs and other first-person narratives, he found that some people referred to a different kind of affective alteration—something more subtle, more difficult to put into words, but also more pervasive (see, e.g., Barthes 2010). Those who reported this experience didn't describe it in much detail, but they seemed to refer to shifts in their affective disposition that continued years after the loss of their loved one. Køster suspected that they were describing shifts in what phenomenologists refer to as ground moods or existential feelings (Guignon 2003; Ratcliffe 2008), typically understood as pre-reflective, non-intentional affective states (i.e., affective states that are not directed toward or about anything, but instead constitute the affective background within which we have other kinds of intentional states). To determine whether people actually underwent a change in their affective dispositions and, if so, what this change is like, Køster directed his informants to reflect on this aspect of their affective experience rather than on their emotions or other feelings that might be more salient to them. Most participants hadn't seriously reflected on these experiences and didn't have ready-made words to describe them. They relied largely on metaphorical descriptions, describing life as feeling like being in a bubble, being behind glass, or watching a party from a distance (Køster 2022). Køster introduced the term "world-distancing" to characterize this feeling of being separate or apart from one's everyday environment, even while being in the midst of it (Køster 2022).

It may have been unlikely that the informants would provide these kinds of descriptions if they were interviewed in a more exploratory or open-ended manner. Without explicit directing or prompting, informants are more likely to discuss aspects of their experience that are more readily apparent to them and that they have a ready-made language to express, such as their emotional life. To direct informants toward their experience in the right way, the researcher needs to be familiar with the relevant existentials, specifically formulating their interview questions to help orient informants toward these pre-reflective aspects of their experience (which is not to suggest that they use the phenomenological concepts in the interview itself).

PGQR is most appropriate when the researcher is already an expert on the topic of their study. Drawing upon their subject expertise, they can identify aspects of an experience that haven't been adequately articulated in the relevant literature and design a study that specifically investigates one or more of these aspects. This approach, however, comes with a risk: The researcher might select an aspect of experience that doesn't differ in any significant ways from typical or everyday experiences. For example, one might decide to investigate temporal alterations in anxiety disorders, only to find that their informants have little to say about whether, or how, their experience of lived time alters when they're anxious. If this were to occur, then the study might produce no interesting or valuable results. Typically, this risk can be mitigated by conducting extensive preliminary research, including exhaustive reviews of the relevant literature or preliminary interviews.

While there are certainly advantages to frontloading phenomenological concepts into the design of a qualitative study, there are also cases where other approaches are better suited. For instance, if the researcher is not an expert on the topic of investigation or there's little existing literature to build on, then a more exploratory approach may be more desirable. In

such cases, establishing a more holistic account of the relevant phenomena might even provide a foundation for focused or tightly delimited investigations in the future.

CONCLUSION

Existential phenomenology has had significant influence on qualitative research methods across a range of disciplines. For the most part, however, this influence has not been reciprocal. Phenomenological qualitative researchers draw extensively upon classical and contemporary philosophical texts. But philosophers—including many of those who collaborate on qualitative studies themselves—have often ignored the extensive body of phenomenological qualitative studies produced by researchers in other disciplines over the last few decades.

The reasons behind this lack of mutual engagement remain unclear. One obstacle is that many philosophers are simply unfamiliar with phenomenology's influence in disciplines such as education, nursing, and anthropology. A more considerable obstacle, however, is the difficulty of understanding how—or whether—these qualitative studies relate back to philosophical concerns. Reading through these studies as a philosopher, it's often easy enough to see that the phenomenological tradition influenced the methods being used. But it's more difficult to determine whether the results of the study have any implications for current philosophical discussion and debate. In my own experience, this difficulty is at least partially alleviated when qualitative studies explicitly appeal to phenomenological concepts, including existentials. Whether they're used to design a study or to analyze data, the conceptual framing helps to situate the results with respect to broader philosophical inquiry. This isn't to suggest that, by conducting a study in this way, one guarantees that its findings will have philosophical implications. Rather, using a shared conceptual frame can help to determine how the study fits within existing discussions, making its potential implications more readily

apparent. Moreover, by clarifying how existentials are used in qualitative research, we can facilitate not only constructive dialogue, but also genuine collaboration, between philosophers and qualitative researchers.

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