**Phenomenology** - by: Jen Reich, PhD, RN, ANP-BC

Phenomenology is both a philosophical tradition and human science method (Dowling, 2007, Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, Van Manen, 2002). Phenomenology seeks a deep understanding of lived experiences in our human world (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) noted that a real understanding of phenomenology could only be done by doing phenomenology. He explained that in the process of doing phenomenological research, we become connected to it, thus we “become the world.” (Van Manen 1990, p. 5). Heidegger terms this being in the world “dasein” (Koch, 1995).

A major concept in phenomenology is intentionality. Crotty (1998) explained that that intentionality in the phenomenological sense is means referentiality, relatedness, “aboutness”, rather than purpose or deliberation (p.44). Intentionality posits a relationship between conscious mind and object of consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Existential phenomenologists would explain this as a “radical interdependence of subject and world.” (Crotty, 1998, p.45). This unity of subject and object that intentionality posits requires a rejection of objectivism and subjectivism (Crotty, 1998).

Of the two major schools of phenomenology, Heideggerian and Husserlian, Heidegger’s version of phenomenology is more existential, seeking the meaning and understanding of our being in the world (Koch, 2005). Husserl’s method is descriptive, and stems from the Cartesian tradition, describing phenomena as brought through consciousness (Koch, 2005).

Since Husserl and Heidegger, there have been seven unique perspectives of phenomenology identified (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Max van Manen, a phenomenologist from the Utrecht (Dutch) tradition, has guided the research of many in the health profession and education fields (Dowling, 2007). Van Manen expressed that the ultimate goal of phenomenology “is to effect a more direct contact with the experience as lived” (Van Manen 1990, p.78). His work is considered a combination of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Dowling, 2007).

In both descriptive and interpretive traditions, phenomenology is intended to be an initial critique and not a be-all, end-all method (Crotty, 1998). Crotty explained that it is a valuable starting point in social inquiry, with research for the phenomenologist an attempt to “break free and see the world afresh.” (Crotty, 1998, p. 86).

**References**


