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Distinguishing Features and Similarities Between Descriptive Phenomenological and Qualitative Description Research

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Abstract

Scholars who research phenomena of concern to the discipline of nursing are challenged with making wise choices about different qualitative research approaches. Ultimately, they want to choose an approach that is best suited to answer their research questions. Such choices are predicated on having made distinctions between qualitative methodology, methods, and analytic frames. In this article, we distinguish two qualitative research approaches widely used for descriptive studies: descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description. Providing a clear basis that highlights the distinguishing features and similarities between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description research will help students and researchers make more informed choices in deciding upon the most appropriate methodology in qualitative research. We orient the reader to distinguishing features and similarities associated with each approach and the kinds of research questions descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description research address.

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Choosing an appropriate qualitative research approach based on the research question is a critical point in launching a qualitative nursing research project. Descriptive phenomenological research and qualitative description offer nurse scientists two descriptive research approaches to describe lived experiences and aspects of experiences of health and illness. With a clear research question and specific aims related to an identified topic of interest, problem, or substantive knowledge gap in an area of inquiry, the nurse scientist is able to judge whether descriptive phenomenological or qualitative description approach is the best fit for the proposed study. Although both research approaches are well suited to answer nursing science questions, they are different with regard to their underlying philosophical underpinnings, theory, aims, questions posed, design, data collection, and analytic strategies. However, as qualitative research approaches, they do share some similarities that we highlight. Of the many research approaches subsumed within the qualitative tradition under the overarching umbrella term *qualitative research* (e.g., descriptive phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, qualitative description, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, etc.), descriptive phenomenological research and qualitative description can be difficult to differentiate. Yet, these approaches are different.

Purpose

Students and researchers need to be able to make informed decisions about research design based on a clear understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of these approaches. Given the absence of literature comparing these two approaches, the purpose of this article is to differentiate them by highlighting their distinguishing features while noting their similarities. We have structured the article to address underlying philosophical tenets, sampling, data collection, and data analysis in descriptive phenomenological research and qualitative description. We use examples from our research with the two approaches to illustrate salient points about each.

Undergirding Tenets: Descriptive Phenomenological Research

The philosophies underlying phenomenological research methods were developed in the scholarship of the major philosophers Husserl, Heidegger,

and Merleau-Ponty (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Husserl, 1913/1962, 1900/1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). Phenomenology as a whole is focused on the showing or disclosing of phenomenon in consciousness (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Husserl, 1913/1962, 1900/1970). Husserl focused his work on the world of lived experience, a notion in phenomenological research that has been examined within the nursing science literature (Munhall, 2007; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Three major types or modalities of phenomenological research have dominated the nursing science literature. First, descriptive phenomenology, a focus of this article, based in the philosophy of Husserl (1913/1962), has as its aim the description of the essence or essential structure of an experience focusing on what is essential and meaningful (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Husserl, 1913/1962; Lopez & Willis, 2004). The French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) emphasized the human being as a perceptual embodied being tied to the world through the body and sensory awareness, expanding a view of the human being as that type of being whose access to the world is through perceiving via the body. Second, interpretive or "Heideggerian hermeneutics," based in the philosophy of Heidegger (1927/1962), who was concerned with human beings and the integral nature of being and time (temporality), aims to illuminate common meanings and practices of everyday experience (Benner, 1985; Diekelmann, 2001). Third, hermeneutic phenomenology or the Utrecht School stems from phenomenological philosophy and includes aspects of both description and interpretation (Gadamer, 1962/1976; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Husserl, 1913/1962). Hermeneutics explores how people describe and interpret and make meaning of their life in relation to a phenomenon (Gadamer, 1962/1976). Scholars in the hermeneutic tradition approach phenomena with a sense of wonder, seeking to discern and interpret layers of possible meanings of texts and how these meanings are revelatory of one's situated lived experience including a turn toward meaning and its social and historical contexts (Gadamer, 1962/1976; van Manen, 1984, 1990, 1997). The dialectical process of examining data from the perspective of part-whole and whole-part constitutes a hermeneutic circle (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000) of dwelling with data through the interpretation process, resulting in a synthesis to capture the meaning of the phenomenon.

The Concept "Phenomenon": A Starting Point for Descriptive Phenomenological Research

Sokolowski (2000) aptly explained the concept "phenomenon." He stated, "Things do appear to us; things truly are disclosed, and we, on our part, do display, both to ourselves and to others, the way things are" (p. 12). Thus,

phenomenon refers to how things (objects) appear in human consciousness. Sokolowski pointed out this concept in contrast to the concept "noumena," or the things themselves. From this distinction, one can glean that a defining attribute of phenomenological research is found in the philosophical notion of the melding of subject and object. Thus, in the end, descriptive phenomenology turns to the description of the lifeworld—lived experience where consciousness is present. The findings from a descriptive phenomenological inquiry describe the essence of a phenomenon as lived (e.g., the experience of healing, etc.) by a person who has had the experience.

Lifeworld: A Central Organizing Concept Undergirding Phenomenological Perspective

The existential phenomenological concept "lifeworld" helps to disclose "lived experience," a precise phenomenological term stemming from the philosophy of Husserl (1913/1962). Thus, lived experience is integral to descriptive phenomenological research and provides an orientation to aid the researcher in phenomenological reflection on the essence and meanings of lived experience. The concept was proposed as useful for understanding how human beings live their lives by sociologists Schutz and Luckmann (1973). Building on the notion proposed by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) offered a view of lifeworld as a structure of perceptual experience, or webs of relationships in lived experience composed of the themes of corporeality (embodiment), temporality (lived time), and relationality (lived others). Thus, a distinguishing attribute of phenomenological research, and its modality of descriptive phenomenology, is the researcher taking the view that the human being is that sort of being who lives through events or life situations that are necessarily shaped and held within one's consciousness pre-reflectively; that is, the human being is the type of being who is able to reflect on his being. The focus is on experience as lived. The researcher realizes that when human beings' moments of consciousness are discovered and accessed, lived experience or one's lifeworld is brought forward. The descriptive phenomenologist brings forth and bears witness to human being's account of subjective experience. This view of human beings as the types of beings who are conscious of their being, or self-reflective, has epistemological and methodological ramifications. Namely, a dialogical epistemology and methodology are called upon that draw upon, for example, the individual face-to-face conversational interview as a primary method utilized to uncover lived experience or one's lifeworld. While other material from the human world such as music, artwork, and so forth may be useful in discerning meaning in a phenomenological inquiry depending on the

topic, the face-to-face interview provides access to human being's consciousness of lived experience. Questions may be raised about whether every person is able to be self-reflective. Thus, it is important for the descriptive phenomenologist to consider such a fundamental question from an epistemological standpoint, purposively selecting participants with the cognitive capacity and ability to be self-reflective and express oneself verbally in interviews.

Phenomenological Reduction: A Defining Feature of Descriptive Phenomenology

The phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1913/1962) is aided by the idea of epoche (suspending beliefs). Bracketing (discussed below) is a method to facilitate the epoche. Stemming from the philosophy of Husserl (1913/1962), epoche has been described as a process used by the researcher to suspend or lay aside what is known to apprehend lived experience with fresh eyes without predetermined judgments, biases, and answers setting the condition for attentive listening and openness (Munhall, 2007). Because the descriptive phenomenological researcher comes to any research project with knowledge, life experiences, and a horizon of language and understanding, the researcher needs to lay aside presuppositions, assumptions, and biases about the phenomenon under investigation to allow the phenomenon to be disclosed as lived uniquely and subjectively by the other (Colaizzi, 1978).

Bracketing: Interpretations of Bracketing

Bracketing, or holding one's ideas in abeyance in phenomenological research, emanated from the mathematical notion of [bracketing] in Husserl's (1913/1962) philosophy and is integral to descriptive phenomenology to describe the essence and meaning of phenomenon. Scholars have interpreted the performance of bracketing in various ways. The basic performance entails the researcher holding in brackets predetermined notions of the phenomenon being studied (Drew, 2004; Gearing, 2004; LaVasseur, 2003). For example, Gearing (2004) provided a useful bracketing typology, including "existential bracketing" (p. 1440), stating, "The foundational focus in existential bracketing does not disengage from the world but resolves to hold in abeyance suppositions and theories to investigate the phenomenon's lived experience" (pp. 1440-1441). Drew (2004) described bracketing techniques such as the use of a "bracketing facilitator" and a "synthesis of intentionality" (p. 215). Another way to initially approach bracketing is to have another person conduct an audiotaped interview with the researcher before initiating the research, which

helps to uncover views of the phenomenon held by the researcher before data are collected and analyzed (Cohen, 1995; Cohen et al., 2000).

Illustrating Various Features of a Descriptive Phenomenological Research Project

Various methodologists have developed frameworks for conducting descriptive phenomenological research that is beyond the scope of this article. Illustrations from descriptive phenomenological research conducted by the first author guided by one of these methodologists (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) are provided. This approach was chosen as it explicitly called for imaginal variation (to be described later) linking phenomenological findings to disciplinary perspectives.

The various process features of descriptive phenomenological research with middle school children who were bullied will help to illuminate defining features of the approach. The purpose of the study was to discover the essence of the phenomenon as subjectively lived. The research question for the study was "What is the lived experience and meaning of being bullied for middle school children?" The research question was best answered using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The most appropriate sampling approach was purposive. Purposive sampling helped the researcher to identify and select individuals who had experienced being bullied and who were willing and able to engage in a phenomenological conversational-style interview about the lived experience. During individual face-to-face interviews (audiotaped) conducted with children who had been bullied, the researcher focused on (a) obtaining detailed descriptions of the children's lived experience, (b) the phenomenological reduction facilitated by bracketing as described above to discover participants' experiences pure from the researcher's perspectives, and (c) dialogue/conversation to clarify participants' statements and meanings (Giorgi, 1997). This focus on obtaining detailed descriptions from the perspective of participants was central to maintain the phenomenological orientation to lived experience, uncovering what was present to the participant. During the phenomenological interviewing process, participants were asked to describe their experiences. Performing the phenomenological reduction included the researcher bracketing or holding in abeyance theories related to anxiety, literature on fear response, psychosocial developmental frameworks, personal experiences with the phenomenon, and conceptual models that were a part of the researcher's horizon (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In the phenomenological mode of interviewing, the researcher reflected back to participants their experience in their own words, probed for detailed description and clarification when necessary, and verified the participant's point of view.

After the interviews were complete and transcribed verbatim, the researcher focused on describing the essence of the lived experience of being bullied as the participants had described it. Reading all of the transcripts to apprehend a holistic sense of the data was important. The phenomenological reduction had already facilitated the resesarcher to allow participants to describe their experiences, as they were present to them. Thus, describing the essence of the lived experience occurred through the identification of meaning units within the transcribed data. The researcher reflected on possible meanings of the phenomenon and how the identified meaning units reflected various aspects of the lifeworld of the participants. Giorgi (1997) explained meaning units as a "purely descriptive term that signifies that a certain meaning, relevant for the study, and to be clarified further, is contained within the segregated unit" (p. 246).

Using Giorgi's (1997) approach, describing lived experience included the researcher identifying what was individually meaningful to a participant and essential to all the participants in making sense of the web of relationships among the meanings revealed. The written product of the research provided a phenomenological description of the essence of the lived experience with identified lifeworld themes and subthemes (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Following suggestions by Giorgi (1997) and Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), imaginal variation was conducted to intuit and situate findings within a disciplinary perspective (i.e., nursing, psychology, sociology), whereby the findings of the descriptive phenomenological research were linked back to the literature and the perspective of the discipline, utilizing extant concepts and theories from the discipline.

Descriptive Phenomenological Data Analysis

According to the descriptive phenomenology of Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), beginning with the first interview question, the entire interview contains data for discriminating meaning units that reflect the lifeworld of participants. Data analysis began with close examination of the interview data. From an epistemological standpoint, analysis was focused on discovering the essence of the lived experience as described by participants. Analysis advanced iteratively through identification-reflection on meaning units (described earlier) inherent in the transcribed interviews. Keywords, phrases, and continued lines of thought in sentences or paragraphs were identified and coded with a descriptive phrase (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). These descriptive phrases reflected lifeworld corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational pre-reflective themes. Van Manen (1990) recommended that these four lifeworld features be used to guide phenomenological reflection to discern what stands out as

central to the phenomenon in terms of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations.

The first and fourth authors have conducted both descriptive and hermeneutic research based within the phenomenological tradition. Both have found that descriptive components of phenomenological research are inherent within the process known as the "hermeneutic circle" of analysis, whereby the researcher goes back-and-forth between smaller units of interview texts and larger units within and across interviews to discern possible meanings of lived experience (Cohen et al., 2000). In addition, writing the phenomenological description in a style and language that calls forth a deeper reflection and understanding of the phenomenon results in a final product that should be recognizable to readers as descriptive phenomenological research. In developing phenomenological descriptions, some researchers may prefer to use qualitative data management software to help index, organize, and sort data; however, the authors have not found this to be absolutely necessary. The signature analytic approach of phenomenological analysis is deep reflection on the data of lived experience to disclose the essence of a phenomenon that does not require qualitative software programs.

Phenomenological Analysis: A Brief Description

Steeped in the phenomenological foundations of research discussed above, the researcher noticed participants spontaneously described a corporeal sense of the body when they discussed their lived experience of being bullied, especially when they referenced how they became aware of their embodied thoughts and range of emotions (Willis & Griffith, 2010). The relational lifeworld was discovered in their descriptions as being centered on non-violent ways of responding in the face of a bully and ways of being close to or connected to others (Willis & Griffith, 2010). Furthermore, the phenomenon revealed itself as participants described specific moments and times of the day when bullying occurred, the school environment and physical spatial layout that occasioned bullying, as well as the consequential emotional effects and lingering aftereffects of being bullied (Willis & Griffith, 2010). Participants, unprompted, described the physical environment and the social relational climate in which bullying was a reality. Participants spontaneously communicated descriptions of spaces within the school environment where they had experienced bullying and what occurred in the experience of being bullied as well as how they resisted. For example, a participant quote illustrates the following point:

> As soon as I go to walk around a corner in the hallway, they'd put their foot out to trip me, so I'd . . . stick my foot out around the corner to make sure no one was . . . out there.

In conducting this descriptive phenomenological research, the researcher was able to utilize the phenomenological reduction described earlier to ascertain what the participants were present to, as reflected in their detailed descriptions.

Undergirding Tenets: Qualitative Description Approach

Qualitative description is a research approach based in the philosophical tenets of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach was appropriate to the second author's aims of exploring the complex diabetes management issues related to parents raising young children with chronic conditions. The tenets of qualitative description include recognition of varied shared experiences and the interactive-inseparable nature of human interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Various scholars have described aspects of qualitative description including sampling (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), data collection (Patton, 2002), and qualitative content and thematic analytic strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles et al., 2014). Sandelowski's (2000) seminal publication described this approach as a distinct, eclectic, and acceptable type of design. In 2010, Sandelowski revisited her earlier position. She indicated that researchers using qualitative description use various sampling, data collection, and data analysis strategies, but the overarching goal, achieved by analyzing the data with qualitative content analysis, is to describe at a surface or manifest level an individual's experiences in his or her own words (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2006) provided an especially insightful, practical discussion of the nature of thematic analysis and strategies for undertaking such an analysis. Surface level thematic analysis still demands interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski, 2010). As an example, descriptive qualitative studies might report as findings a comprehensive thematic summary. Thus, one interprets common themes, moving beyond what individual participants reported, clustering together common ideas from multiple individuals to re-present the data.

Qualitative description research does not require the researcher to become involved in the phenomenological reduction/bracketing and phenomenological reflection on the lifeworld (Gearing, 2004). However, reflexivity and

transparency of one's presuppositions are addressed by having other qualitative researchers review the data to ensure the findings are valid and credible.

Illustrating Various Features of a Qualitative Descriptive Research Project

The investigator must generate a rich descriptive database, commonly through qualitative interviewing. Other sources of data are also used, such as participant observation to generate data on activities, behaviors of individuals, and interactions of dyads, families, groups, and so forth (Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, Tamborlane, & Grey, 2004). These additional data sources enrich the completeness of the qualitative description. For instance, in the second author's research, mother–child interactions were observed during feeding and teaching sessions to explore a dyad's reciprocity and mothers' ability to manage the child's care.

Documents, photos, and journals can be used as additional data sources (Creswell, 2013). For instance, several mothers interviewed about their child being diagnosed with diabetes showed photos taken at the time of the child's diagnosis. These data underscored the time-focused event. Another parent referred multiple times to the insulin pump, repeatedly touching the pump while discussing the positive change it had made in her own life. Her handling of the pump reflected its importance in her life.

Detailed planning is needed for a qualitative descriptive study. A beginning conceptual or theoretical framework is used to guide and focus the initial interview questions (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005). Depending on the specificity of the framework, it may provide a general direction about the topical areas to be addressed in the interview or it may provide more precise specification about the variables and relationships to be studied. Miles et al. (2014) suggested that in the absence of an appropriate framework, an organizing scheme of concepts developed from the literature can be helpful in guiding data collection and analysis. It is common in qualitative description to conduct either individual interviews to explore experiences, or focus groups when seeking consensus to assist in the development of an educational program or intervention, or to explore beliefs, attitudes, and values. Initial questions may be changed depending on responses and probes based on respondents' answers to enrich the depth of the description. Interviews are initially framed by open-ended questions that reflect concepts from an organizing framework. Depending on the participant's responses, questions may be altered, omitted (if they become unimportant to the experience), or new questions may emerge. Observational data are also collected either simultaneously documenting what was done, what was observed including non-verbal responses, and interviewer

responses to the interview process (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), or they can be more formalized by using formal interaction instruments.

All data are documented through maintaining an audit trail of decisions that are preserved in memos throughout the course of the study. For example, in-depth interviews are conducted, adding or eliminating questions as experiences are shared. At the same time, the researcher begins to look for commonalities and differences in participants' experiences within and across the data (Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, Deatrick, & Grey, 2003). If interviews are the primary data, analysis begins with the first interview. A detailed summary of the first interview is developed, and this development continues for each subsequent interview. Observational data are included in the summaries for data analysis.

For illustrative purposes, the second author highlights additional research conducted with fathers of young children diagnosed with type 1 diabetes to explain the strategies used that informed the subsequent analysis (Sullivan-Bolyai, Rosenberg, & Bayard, 2006). Using the same framework that guided development of an interview guide for mothers of young children with type 1 diabetes, the author began asking fathers similar broad open-ended questions focused on day-to-day management, concerns, fears, and resources. Occasionally, fathers shared information not previously identified as an issue, resource, or problem in the research conducted with mothers. For example, only fathers expressed fear that the child with diabetes would be bullied. When a father in an early interview shared this fear, the researcher asked subsequent fathers if they had experienced similar fears in an effort to see if there were common fears or differences across the fathers. This process of suggesting ideas is not used in descriptive phenomenological research as the purpose is to uncover what the meaning of the lived experience is. That is, what is important enough for participants to raise spontaneously. In qualitative description, rich description was sought until saturation was clear across interviews. This was necessary to avoid premature closure of data collection.

Data Management and Analysis Process

Qualitative content analysis, often described as thematic analysis, is commonly used with several analytic strategies to identify key content areas of the data and integrate those content areas into coherent results (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles et al., 2014; Sandelowski, 2010). This process always includes two distinct phases: data management, where data are precisely prepared for the final phase of analysis process, and the formal analysis process. Careful planning and implementing each step is essential for finalizing the finished product.

Qualitative Descriptive Data Management

As with other qualitative approaches, data management is a critical step prior to the final analysis of data (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). After interviewing each father about his experiences managing his child's condition, a descriptive summary of the interview was completed. A professional transcriptionist transcribed each interview verbatim shortly after the interview. Next, the researcher verified the transcription with the audiotape. The written transcript then was uploaded as a rich text file into a software program for data management. Field notes, observations, and procedural and personal reflections were incorporated into each uploaded comprehensive data document. For instance, the researcher wrote in the field notes that father's sadness was palpable (observation of eyes, tone of voice, mouth rigidity) although sadness was not actually discussed by any of the fathers. Field notes enhanced transparency of analytic insights and speculations.

Qualitative Descriptive Data Analysis

Analysis began with coding chunks of data after initial summarization of each interview (Miles et al., 2014; Richards & Morse, 2007). For instance, a chunk of data might be a whole thought process such as a description one father shared about his fear of his child being bullied. It consisted of several paragraphs describing his fear. As coding began, the researcher sorted through the data to identify similar phrases, emotions, beliefs, experiences, and values frequently stated leading to identification of themes and patterns (Saldana, 2014). As an example, the bullying fear data were coded from the first interview in which that information was shared. This topic was explored with each subsequent participant. Following the researcher's review of the coded data on bullying, they were clustered to form a theme "fathers' fears of bullying." The analytic process was iterative.

Eventually, the researcher identified similar ideas, experiences, or issues that commonly occurred. Typically in qualitative description, there may be two or three of these issues. For instance, when the researcher asked fathers about their concerns with their children being bullied because of their diabetes status, it was confirmed repeatedly. Rearranging work schedules to accommodate the daily management of their children's diabetes was also a common experience. While confirmed, the concern may not have been the essence of the experience (the focus in descriptive phenomenology).

Once the themes are fully developed, the next step is to ensure both descriptive validity (the precise description conveyed by the participants) and interpretive validity (accurate description of the meanings participants give

to the phenomenon), which can be reviewed with participants using member checks. Across the interviews, the researcher discovered variation in the actual amount of hands-on care described by fathers. Moreover, similarities existed across interviews regarding the fathers' awareness of having to keep up-to-date with the daily management regimen of their children in case they had to fill in for the mother. Meaning in qualitative description is described at the level of the obvious (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The Descriptive Approaches Are Clearly Different

Descriptive phenomenological research and qualitative description are different. To facilitate further clarification of these different research approaches, we discuss purpose of the research, research questions, data analysis, use of theory, and types of findings. Table 1 provides a concise summary of these two approaches.

Purpose of the Research

In terms of the purpose of the research, it is obvious to see a similarity between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description approaches as both aim to describe and enhance understanding of human experiences and events that are not commonly described or adequately understood (Sandelowski, 2000; Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005; Willis & Griffith, 2010). However, descriptive phenomenological research, grounded in phenomenological philosophy (described earlier), includes conducting inquiry from within the perspective of the phenomenological reduction, seeking to discover the essential structure and meanings of subjectively lived experience. Lived experience is a precise term integral with the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl (1913/1962), thereby highlighted in descriptive phenomenological research.

Research Questions

Research questions in both approaches are focused on experiences pertaining to health situations. However, the research question guided by phenomenology places the essence and meaning of lived experience as reflected in concrete detailed examples of the lifeworld in the forefront of the research process (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Munhall, 2007). Descriptive phenomenological research seeks to describe the meaning of living through an experience. Descriptive phenomenological researchers aim to provide an in-depth description that deepens an understanding of the essence of a phenomenon and therefore calls forth reflection on meaning as opposed to the manifest

Table 1. Distinguishing Features of Descriptive Phenomenological and Qualitative Description Research.

Aspects of Research Process	Descriptive Phenomenology	Qualitative Description
Purpose/aims	Discover the essence and meanings of lived experience; Describe the essential structure of the phenomenon	Describe range of responses of a phenomenon, life event, or health and illness situation
Research question	What is it like to experience ____? What is the essence and meaning of the lived experience?	How does one learn to manage ___? What strategies were helpful to manage _____?
Preparation for analysis	Grounded in phenomenological philosophy (phenomenological reduction, bracketing, lifeworld)	Each transcript is read and summarized, field notes are incorporated into the transcription
Analysis	Reading transcripts, dwelling with meaning units, identifying lifeworld and web of relationships, phenomenological and disciplinary literature, writing the essence and meaning of the lived experience	Chunks of data ideas, descriptions of the investigated topic are coded and clustered within and across transcripts looking for commonalities and differences
Findings	Structure of the essence and meaning of the lived experience, including aspects of what stands out in the lifeworld (corporeal, temporal, spatial, relational)	Major clusters of rich descriptive themes and subthemes are re-presented in common easy-to-understand language (many times using participants' language)

focus in qualitative description that delineates a wide range of pragmatic issues encountered in daily living. Descriptive phenomenological research provides answers to questions about how it is to be meaningfully aware of one's experiences as a human being within specified circumstances that reflect phenomenological lifeworld—embodied (corporeal), temporal, spatial, and relational webs of relationships. Qualitative description, however, generates a focused summary and understanding of a health-related experience that includes contextual cultural factors that shape participants' experiences. The clear and precise answers to cultural factors and barriers in health care from the perspective of recipients of care are especially useful for practice (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). As Thorne (2008) aptly said,

> We desperately need new knowledge pertaining to the subjective, experiential, tacit, and patterned aspects of human health experience—not so we can advance theorizing, but so we can have sufficient contextual understanding to guide future decisions that will apply evidence to lives of real people. (p. 36)

In descriptive phenomenological research, Husserl's phenomenological philosophical orientation provides the basis to guide the research questions focused on describing the essence of lived experience. In contrast, research questions in qualitative description are aimed at obtaining manifest surface-level descriptions of a broad range of issues or events surrounding a health topic (Sandelowski, 2010). Different from descriptive phenomenology, an initial conceptual or theoretical framework may guide the qualitative description research project and direct the interview questions based on the concepts subsumed in the theory undergirding the framework. In contrast, interview questions in descriptive phenomenology focus on uncovering a description of the lived experience pure from the researcher's beliefs and perspectives. In terms of similarities, both descriptive phenomenology and qualitative description are based on research questions that can provide findings easily translated into practical and useful understandings or strategies for health care providers to help patients, and/or families.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in both descriptive approaches includes preparing transcripts for analysis, data reduction, and data management plans, and relevance of the analysis in relation to the research questions, purpose, and aims. Both types of research rely on the researcher's immersion in the data while listening closely to audiotapes of interviews and comparing them with the data transcripts and field notes. Both approaches require the researcher to read and study transcripts to identify significant statements. As data are analyzed in qualitative description, member checks are common. The two approaches differ however in the level and nature of the final product or description. Phenomenological analysis is specifically oriented toward the pre-reflective lifeworld (corporeal, temporal, spatial, relational) to describe a phenomenon, as it is present in consciousness to the participant. This is not employed in qualitative descriptive research.

Use of Theory at the Outset

As can be seen to be the case throughout these comparisons, descriptive phenomenological research is grounded in Husserl's (1913/1962) philosophy rather than any specific a priori theory. Although not atheoretical,

qualitative description is not wedded to a particular theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski, 2010). In qualitative description, one may begin with a theory or framework to guide collecting and analyzing data. However, the researcher should not be restricted to the theory if data indicate a poor fit. This means that the researcher does not try to force the data to fit a framework. With a theory or framework in place, one might choose to begin with a directed qualitative content analysis described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). If the data do not fit the framework, the researcher has an obligation to provide supporting as well as non-supporting evidence for the theory or framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). With qualitative description, one may begin to see themes or concepts for future grounded theory or phenomenological research (Sandelowski, 2000). In descriptive phenomenology, while a disciplinary perspective or specific theories may undergird the researcher's clinical practice worldview, this must be bracketed at the outset of the research during the interviewing process. However, when making the translation of findings from descriptive phenomenology into accessible disciplinary knowledge, the researcher is faced with knowing the philosophical literature on phenomenology, disciplinary perspective, nursing practice theory, and conceptual frameworks in nursing and other health sciences that help to illuminate the findings, drawing upon the idea of imaginal variation described earlier. In this way, knowledge about the essential structure of lived experience and its relevance for the practice of nursing is further advanced or extended through descriptive phenomenological research.

Types of Findings From the Two Types of Descriptive Research

Findings from a descriptive phenomenological study provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experience under study. Providing this type of deep description is accomplished by clearly showing the meanings and web of relationships that exist among the lifeworld features of the phenomenon. The findings from descriptive phenomenological research can be used to enhance sensitivity of clinicians for recognizing complex, multilayered, meaningful realities that reflect corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions of living, and thus provide a foundation for developing and testing nursing interventions based on understanding of lived experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Willis & Griffith, 2010). Likewise, the findings from qualitative description provide a basis for the transformation of taking richly described ideas, themes, or concepts from participants and developing them into pragmatic educational or behavioral interventions (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005).

Future Directions

The authors have offered clarification of two qualitative types of description. Differentiating the two approaches and noting their similarities are important for guiding nursing researchers to select the most appropriate approach for their proposed study and for developing findings that reflect the specific qualitative approach.

As the field of qualitative inquiry in nursing evolves, concurrent examination of a human experience from both phenomenological descriptive and qualitative description approaches may move analysis into new directions. For example, Morse (2009) discussed combining two qualitative approaches, with core components and supplemental components. Sandelowski (2000) has conceptualized qualitative description studies having various "hues, tones, and textures" (p. 337). Morse points out that research from two qualitative approaches, "enables the identification of gaps or holes that may be corrected by adding other data and analytic strategies" (p. 1524). In nursing research, a systematic approach to understanding the way humans view themselves, their experiences, and their relationships with others is foundational to person-centered health care; thus, there is much value to descriptive phenomenological research. Findings from both descriptive phenomenological research and qualitative description can be requisite for the development of health interventions to promote health, ameliorate suffering, and meet human needs for humanistic care, meaning, choice, quality of life, and healing in living and dying (Willis, Grace, & Roy, 2008).

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