

Are Phenomenology and Postpositivism Strange Bedfellows?¹

Frances E. Racher
Steven Robinson

Researchers are advocating that a necessary condition of scholarly research is congruence between philosophical positions and research approaches. Phenomenology and postpositivism, traditionally, may appear to be situated in scientific inquiry as polar opposites and mutually exclusive paradigms. This article (a) describes the reflections of a nurse researcher and clarifies her philosophical assumptions; (b) delineates the postpositive paradigm and the interpretive paradigm, which traditionally includes phenomenology; (c) discusses phenomenology as a philosophy, an approach, and a research method; and (d) demonstrates the consistency between postpositivism and phenomenology. Nurse researchers must be aware of their philosophical assumptions and appraise the philosophical underpinnings of the methodologies, but this process should not restrict and limit their exploration of possibilities and the creativity in their efforts to address the growing challenges that await nursing science research.

Keywords: *phenomenology; research paradigms; philosophy; interpretive research; methodology*

At first blush, the terms *phenomenology* and *postpositivism* appear to be situated in scientific inquiry as polar opposites and mutually exclusive paradigms. Phenomenology is frequently depicted as an inductive, descriptive approach (Benner, 1994; Omery, 1983; Schacht, 1975) that gives subjectivity a privileged position (Gurwitsch, 1967; Schwandt, 1994; Welch, 1999). Postpositivism is considered an empirical, explanatory approach that maintains belief in observables (Ford-Gilboe, Campbell, & Berman, 1995; Gortner, 1999).

A paradigm is a worldview or a philosophy of science and includes a research approach or orientation and assumptions inherent in that worldview

Frances E. Racher, Ph.D.(c), R.N., Associate Professor, School of Health Studies, Brandon University; *Steven Robinson*, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Brandon University.

DOI: 10.1177/0193945903253909

© 2003 Sage Publications

464

(Haase & Taylor Meyers, 1988). Researchers generally reflect on their philosophy of science through examination of their ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions or premises in relation to research paradigms and apply research methods consistent with their assumptions (Guba, 1990). As a result, researchers who concurrently hold postpositivist assumptions and implement a phenomenological research method may appear to be conflicted and inconsistent in their approach.

At a time in history when researchers are advocating that a necessary condition of scholarly research is congruence between philosophical positions and research approaches (Annells, 1999; Dzurec, 1999; Moccia, 1988) and nurses are closely examining their philosophies of science and their approaches to nursing research (Booth, Kenrick, & Woods, 1997; Monti & Tingen, 1999; Munhall, 1997; Rawnsley, 1999; Wolfer, 1993), inconsistency is not deemed acceptable. This study (a) describes reflections of a nurse researcher and clarifies her philosophical assumptions; (b) delineates the postpositive paradigm and the interpretive paradigm (which includes phenomenology) utilizing the philosophical questions of Guba and Lincoln (1994); (c) discusses phenomenology as a philosophy, an approach, and a research method; and (d) demonstrates the consistency between postpositivism and phenomenology. Phenomenology and postpositivism may appear to be strange bedfellows, but on closer scrutiny they need not be conceptualized as separate entities but may be recognized for having some similarities and shared perspectives. Phenomenology and postpositivism overlap or intersect in the epistemological position presented.

REFLECTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Nurses hold beliefs and assumptions that provide the foundations for their nursing practice and underpin their research activities. The assumptions that have guided my practice for many years are informed by Martha Rogers (1970) and adapted for my own work. Additionally, postpositivist or critical realist premises have influenced the methodology of my research (Racher, Kaufert, & Havens, 2000).

Nurses work with the individual, the family, and the community—each a whole possessing integrity and manifesting characteristics. Individuals, families, and communities are greater than and different from the sum of their parts. Human beings are in states of ongoing reciprocity with their environments. Life processes evolve irreversibly and unidirectionally along the space-time continuum. Humans are homeodynamic, as they seek

stability and balance in their dynamic forward motion. Humans are characterized by their capacity for abstraction and imagery, language and thought, sensation and emotion. Pattern and organization individuate and identify persons, families, and communities and reflect their innovative wholeness.

Nursing science is concerned with human beings. There is no such thing as value-free nursing science. Lived reality serves as a focus of inquiry with subjective and objective realities merging in an alliance between that reality and our knowledge of it. Munhall and Oiler Boyd (1993) opined and we concur that the everyday perceived world underlies scientific explanation, and because human experience is the focus of concern in nursing practice, a means of describing lived experience in nursing situations is of paramount importance for nursing research. Subjective involvement in the objective world becomes an origin of inquiry and contributes to knowledge concerned with human experiences in the various domains of nursing practice. The natural world or lifeworld exists prior to our experience of it. Science offers description and explanation of the lifeworld and of our experience in it. Multiple interpretations of reality may exist in parallel and evolve over time. In describing and honoring particular experience, a movement toward understanding of common experience emerges.

The researcher and participant may be interactively linked in the exploration of the experience of "something," the object (van Manen, 1997). Intersubjective experience generates meaning of the social world (Munhall, 1994). Researchers and participants must seek to recognize and overcome their subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, and expectations in the research process (van Manen, 1997). Theory related to the phenomena being studied and other meaning-giving structures, beyond or beneath the theory, must also be set aside to the fullest (although never absolute) degree possible to allow prereflective understanding of the phenomena to emerge.

Researchers have taken up different epistemological positions, situated themselves in any of various research paradigms, and applied single research methods, combinations of single methods, and blends of methods to produce knowledge that adds to our understanding of the world and to nursing science. Methods are not necessarily paradigm specific. Consistency should be apparent between the assumptions that underpin the research and the method applied. Scholarly researchers make assumptions and principles explicit while demonstrating sound judgment in implementing traditional methods and creating new techniques.

POSTPOSITIVE AND INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS

Debate has historically focused on the differences between research paradigms including the assumptions or premises that comprised the paradigms (Cull-Wilby & Pepin, 1987; Moccia, 1988; Newman, 1992). Researchers are more recently examining the complexities of paradigms and comparing them to reveal similarities and shared perspectives (Booth et al., 1997; Clark, 1998; Monti & Tingen, 1999; Wolfer, 1993). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000), four major paradigms structure research. They include (a) positivist/postpositivist, (b) constructivist/interpretive, (c) critical, and (d) feminist/poststructural paradigms. Newman (1992) and associates (Newman, Sime, & Corcoran-Perry, 1999) developed a version of scientific paradigms with three categories to depict nursing research: (a) particulate-deterministic (holds closely to the positivist view), (b) interactive-integrative (similar to postpositivism) and (c) unitary-transformative (similar to the interpretive paradigm) (Ford-Gilboe et al., 1995). Parse (1987) characterized only two paradigms: (a) totality (empirical) and (b) simultaneity (interpretive) (Fawcett, 1993; Monti & Tingen, 1999). In each categorization, approaches that might broadly be called "postpositive" and "interpretive" (including phenomenology) are portrayed as mutually exclusive research paradigms. An examination and clarification of the philosophical assumptions behind these methods can reveal some strong similarities across this so-called divide. The similarities or common ground offer opportunity for a research position within this intersect.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested that the basic philosophical assumptions that define research paradigms can be summarized from the responses to three fundamental and sequential questions:

- a. The ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about it?
- b. The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?
- c. The methodological question: How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

A broad perspective of postpositive and interpretive research paradigms are discussed in response to these three questions. Philosophical and methodological literature, including writings from the discipline of nursing, are used

to describe each approach and demonstrate the similarities that create space for justification of their intersect.

The “Postpositive Paradigm”

Most researchers have by now rejected the early premises of positivism as they have come to recognize that a single true reality is not apprehensible, that the objective and subjective realities are not mutually exclusive, that there is no absolute source of knowledge, that findings cannot be proven to be true, and that inquiry is not value-free. As a result, alternate perspectives have generated the evolution of postpositivism (Gortner, 1999). Whereas Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) asserted that postpositivism addresses criticisms of positivism in a limited way, other researchers describe the evolution of postpositivism in more responsive and progressive terms (Clark, 1998; Schumacher & Gortner, 1999).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) stated that the positivist/postpositivist paradigm assumes a realist and critical realist ontology, objective epistemologies, and relies on experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies. Guba and Lincoln (1994) submitted that a postpositive perspective assumes that reality exists but is only imperfectly apprehendable. The ontology is critical realism, as claims about reality must be subjected to critical examination to facilitate the apprehension of reality. The dualist epistemology of objective and subjective, between what can be known and the knower, is abandoned in the recognition that objectivity can never be fully attained because reality is viewed by a subjective receiver; it is always “someone’s” reality. The goal of research is explanation, prediction, and control and involves making generalizations and cause-effect linkages. Knowledge may be gleaned through a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods that may complement each other and move knowledge closer to the truth, which can never be fully verified. Inquiry may be conducted in natural settings, and situational information is recognized as data. Discovery is reintroduced as an element of inquiry and soliciting “emic” or insider viewpoints is welcomed to assist in determining the meanings and purposes that people ascribe to their actions.

Clark (1998) extended Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) understanding and advised that postpositivism takes a realist perspective where unobservables are deemed to have existence and the capability of explaining the functioning of observable phenomena. Researchers and their perceptions are not detached from inquiry. Personal processes and involvement are

characteristic of human inquiry, and the researching human shapes the research process. The goal of research includes description as well as explanation and prediction. The contextually bound nature of research findings warrants that knowledge, deemed to be truthful, is not universally generalizable to all cases and situations. Schumacher and Gortner (1999) noted that inference is context bound and may rest between a preference for privileging universal law and a penchant for the particular. Clark (1998) concluded that postpositivism acknowledges the complications of claims about universal knowledge. Methodologies often focusing on the experiences or meanings of individuals, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, and other interpretive methodologies may be encompassed by this paradigm.

The “Interpretive Paradigm”

Proponents of interpretivism and constructivism share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the view of those who live it (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretation is required to understand this world of meaning. To prepare an interpretation is to offer the inquirer’s construction of the constructions of the actors being studied. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) declared that the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures.

In constructivism/interpretivism, realities are apprehendable as multiple, intangible mental constructions that are socially and experientially based, as well as local and specific in nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures. Constructions are not more or less “true” but rather are more or less informed and/or sophisticated. The investigator and object of investigation are interactively linked, and findings are created as the investigation proceeds. Constructions are elicited and refined, and knowledge is created through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. The aim of inquiry is understanding and description, a search for meaning. The focus is on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action (Schwandt, 1994). Angen (2000) referred to “subtle realism,” stating that for realists there is a reality independent of our knowledge of it and we can only know reality from our own perspective of it, which is consistent with the perspective of many interpretivists. Giorgio (1992) also reminded us that not all

interpretive approaches claim to be relativistic. Perhaps differences in the perspectives of a postpositivist (or modified realist) and an interpretivist (often but not always relativist) are a matter of degree or differing locations along a continuum rather than dichotomous poles.

According to Monti and Tinggen (1999), the interpretive paradigm is characterized by the ontological assumptions that reality is complex, holistic, and context dependent. Investigation focuses on human experience, and subjectivity rather than objectivity is emphasized. Multiple ways of knowing are valued to uncover the knowledge embedded in human experience. Common features of interpretive methods are sustained contact with participants, involvement of the researcher in the process, emergent design, and negotiated outcomes. Interpretive methods include phenomenology, hermeneutics, grounded theory, ethnography, and others.

Phenomenology is often considered to be located within the interpretive paradigm (Clark, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Monti & Tinggen, 1999). In contrast, Annells (1999) characterized phenomenology as having multiple philosophical traditions resulting in phenomenological approaches that may fit into any of the four research paradigms. Husserl, acknowledged as the father of phenomenology, portrayed himself as a positivist (Spiegelberg, 1982) and is described by others as representative of that paradigm (Koch, 1995, 1999; Paley, 1997). Heidegger generated a second branch of phenomenology and is considered by some as situated in constructivism/relativism (Annells, 1996), whereas others consider his position to be that of realism (a realism of practices rather than a realism of objects) (Paley, 1998). Through a discussion of the literature, an attempt will be made to illuminate the complexities of the myriad perspectives of phenomenology.

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PHILOSOPHY, A METHODOLOGY, AND A RESEARCH METHOD

Phenomenology is portrayed as the study of essences (Merleau Ponty, 1962), the science of phenomena (van Manen, 1997), and the exploration of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Spiegelberg (1982) opined that phenomenology is a moving philosophy with a dynamic momentum, determined by its intrinsic principles and the structure of the territory it encounters, composed of several parallel currents, related but not homogeneous, with a common point of departure but not a definite and predictable joint destination. Oiler (1986), Omery (1983), and Ray (1994) depicted

phenomenology as a philosophy, an approach, and a research method. As philosophy melds into methodology, which may not be completely delineated from method, this study focuses on the interwoven components of the phenomenological stances of three renowned scholars. Discussions of the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau Ponty, must recognize that phenomenology changed considerably within each philosopher's work, as well as across the different philosophers (Cohen, 1987).

Husserl's Phenomenology

Husserl rejected the extreme idealist position (the mind creates the world) and the extreme empiricist position (reality exists apart from the passive mind). He sought to forge a path that would ground and confirm the objectivity of human consciousness as it relates to the lifeworld (Kearney & Rainwater, 1996). He stated that sciences of experience were sciences of fact in his effort to develop a science of phenomena, of essences as they appear through consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1952). For Husserl (1913/1952), the world existed prior to consciousness and his phenomenology encompassed notions of pure consciousness: "It is then to this world, *the world in which I find myself and which is also my world-about-me*, that the complex forms of my manifold and shifting spontaneities of consciousness stand related" (p. 103). Husserl's goals were strongly epistemological, and he considered experience the fundamental source of meaning, of knowledge. Three key concepts of Husserlian phenomenology included essences, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction (bracketing). He stated that phenomenology should return "to the things themselves," to the essences that constitute the consciousness and perception of the human world, the very nature of a phenomenon that makes a some "thing" what it is—and without which it could not be what it is (Husserl, 1913/1952). Husserl spoke of a division without any real separation "between two different sections of our inquiry, the one bearing on pure subjectivity, the other on that which belongs to the constitution of objectivity *as referred to* its subjective source . . . the intentional reference of experiences to objects" (p. 234). In Husserl's transcendental approach, he believed that the mind is directed toward objects, consciousness was to be the "consciousness of something," and he called this directedness intentionality (Koch, 1995). Husserl devised phenomenological reduction or bracketing as a technique to hold subjective, private perspectives and theoretical constructs in abeyance and allow the essence of the phenomena to emerge.

Heidegger's Phenomenology

Heidegger shifted from the epistemological emphasis of Husserl to an emphasis on the ontological foundations of understanding reached through "being-in-the-world" (Annells, 1996; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Spiegelberg, 1982). For Heidegger (1927/1962), the primary phenomenon that phenomenology should cover was the meaning of Being (*Sein* or presence in the world) as opposed to being, or being there (*Dasein* or people who comprehend this presence) (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Heidegger agreed with Husserl's statement "to the things themselves" but criticized his emphasis on description rather than understanding. Schacht (1975) suggested that Heidegger's endorsement of this maxim concealed a profound difference between Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl is referring to phenomenologically reduced pure conscious events, whereas Heidegger means entities, the existence of which may be quite independent of the consciousness in which they are apprehended.

Heidegger articulated the position that presuppositions are not to be eliminated or suspended; therefore, he rejected a transcendental approach (Ray, 1994). Instead, his concept of Being-in-the-world necessitated a view that the person and the world are coconstituted, an indissoluble unity as a person makes sense of the world from within existence and not while detached from it (Annells, 1996; Koch, 1995). Phenomenology for Heidegger was a method or mode of approaching the objects of philosophical research (Cohen & Omery, 1994). He repudiated science as merely developing what is already known, as not really thinking at all and focused on interpretation and reflective thinking by beings on Being as the only possible source of knowing (Omery & Mack, 1995).

Heidegger applied hermeneutics as a research method founded on the ontological thesis that lived experience is an interpretive process. Understanding and possibilities are the outcome of interpretations and are linked to cultural norms (Cohen & Omery, 1994) or what Heidegger (1927/1962) calls "historicality"—as opposed to Husserl's atemporal, "eidetic" thought structures. The person and world are coconstructed; humans are constructed by the world in which they live and at the same time are constructing this world from their own experience and background (Koch, 1995). This is why we use the term *lived experience* in contrast to simply *experience*. The latter is now a technical term within positivist methodologies—in fact, an abstraction—that conceals its character as entirely derivative from a prior active engagement with others in a historically constituted lifeworld. People are self-interpreting beings, and interpretations occur in contexts involving everyday experiences. The fundamental ontological task of interpreting Being then includes

working through the apparent self-evidence (i.e., ahistoricity) of narrow, traditional points of view to the temporality of Being itself.

Time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. For us to discern this, time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 39)

Researchers must become conscious, methodologically, of historical (including cultural) constraints on them and others' interpretations, or lived experiences. In Heidegger's terms, the researcher must become self-consciously "historiological."

According to Heidegger (1927/1962), nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding, and interpretation is based on that background, in its historicity. "But temporality is also the condition which makes historicity possible as a temporal kind of being which Dasein itself possesses, regardless of whether or how Dasein is an entity 'in time'" (p. 41). Understanding is a reciprocal activity, and the present may only be understood in terms of the past and the past in terms of the present. The part and the whole are similarly understood through a reciprocal relationship. Heidegger devised the concept "hermeneutic circle" as a metaphor to illustrate this reciprocal undertaking (Koch, 1996). Interpreters participate in creating data because the hermeneutic circle cannot be avoided; coconstitution demands that primary data be regarded as contextualized life events with the individual's and the researcher's perspectives specified (Koch, 1995). Heidegger is commonly believed to have rejected phenomenological reduction or bracketing (Ray, 1994); however, historicity and the hermeneutic circle may be perceived as a revisioning of that reduction.

Merleau Ponty and Phenomenology

Building on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, the philosophical work of Merleau Ponty provided a constant reminder of the insoluble link between consciousness and the world (Kearney & Rainwater, 1994). Consciousness is always embodied consciousness, and perception interpreted by humans elicits its meaning. For Merleau Ponty (1962), "the real has to be described, not constructed or formed. Which means that I cannot put perception into the same category as the syntheses represented by judgements, acts, predictions" (p. x). Reflection is necessary to bring the awareness of the world into reality.

The need to proceed by way of essences does not mean that philosophy takes them as its object, but, on the contrary, that our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement, and that it requires the field of ideality to become acquainted with and to prevail over its facticity. (Merleau Ponty, 1962, p. xiv-xv)

The objective and subjective are inseparable. "The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible" (Merleau Ponty, 1962, p. xvii). The world is assumed; experience in it and knowledge of it come through the subjectivity of being-in-the-world, embodiment. Individuals assume a position in the world. The human gaze determines the horizon-object structure, both spatially and temporally; past experience and knowledge of the world qualify the gaze (Oiler, 1986). "I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there" (Merleau Ponty, 1962, p. 68). Perception is the original mode of consciousness; the body gives access to the world and perception access to experience as presented before reflection (Oiler, 1986). Perception needs access to reality; human experience is actualized in four lifeworlds: space, time, body, and human relation (Merleau Ponty, 1964).

The objective of phenomenology is to describe the barest contents of human experience, "the things themselves." The body is the access to the world and the means by which experience occurs. Lived experience is layered with meanings, and description in phenomenology aims to peel away the layers. The goal is to rediscover first experience; what Merleau Ponty termed the "primacy of perception." Through phenomenological reduction, presuppositions and common sense are suspended to recover original awareness. During inquiry, the researcher and participants suspend or bracket their knowledge, common sense, beliefs, and habits.

The philosophical assumptions of Merleau Ponty are consistent in several aspects with postpositivism, or as Annells (1999) preferred, neopositivism. Merleau Ponty is on the periphery of philosophical hermeneutics (constructivism) but holds many of the perspectives of Husserl (positivism). He believed that the essence of a phenomenon is reality, but essence cannot be fully known (modified realism). Merleau Ponty utilized the phenomenological reduction espoused by Husserl but without separating consciousness from the world, similar to the constructivist stance of Heidegger. Consideration of the philosophical assumptions advocated by Merleau Ponty suggests that his perspective shares many similarities with postpositivism.

RECONCILING PHENOMENOLOGY AND POSTPOSITIVISM

The impetus for the development of a phenomenological method for the human sciences was a perceived failure by investigators using the methods developed by the natural sciences in adequately explaining the phenomenon that the human sciences were investigating—the human being. (Omery, 1983, p. 53)

Postpositivism also arose to address shortcomings perceived by scholars in the application of the traditional methods of positivism. Many of the assumptions that underpin a postpositive perspective, particularly as it has evolved, are similar to the philosophy of phenomenology in general and the stance of Merleau Ponty in particular. For example, reality exists before our consciousness and is perceived by our consciousness. Through embodiment, the world and consciousness are inseparable. Reality is only imperfectly apprehendable, and unobservables have the capacity of explaining the functioning of observable data. The researcher is not detached from the inquiry and indeed shapes the research process. The goal of research may be description, understanding, explanation, and/or prediction. Benner (1994) suggested that

understanding is more powerful than explanation for prediction in the human sciences because it stands more fully in the human world of self-understandings, meanings, skills and tradition. Prediction is possible only in limited ways for human beings who are self-interpreting and subject to change by the very interpretations offered by research. Prediction in the human sciences resists single-factor theories and explanations because human action and world always contain incomplete and multiple levels of meanings. The understanding sought in interpretive phenomenology considers historical change, transformations, gains, losses, temporality, and context. As in any human science, predictions are offered with qualifiers such as “all things being equal” or “barring no major changes in self-understandings and context, this is what may be expected.” (p. xv)

Attention to the particular is important and contributes to an understanding of the essence of a phenomenon. van Manen (1997) offered that “the essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of a phenomenon” (p. 10). When an essence has been adequately described, whereby the description portrays the lived quality and significance of the experience in a comprehensive manner, individuals denote their understanding by exhibiting a “phenomenological nod” (Munhall, 1994; van

Manen, 1997). Although an essence is not generalizable from a sample to a population, which is characteristic of positivism, the universality of an essence depicts common understanding that is consistent with post-positivism.

Scholars such as van Manen, Munhall, and Benner have demonstrated the application of phenomenology in studying the lived experience of human beings in ways congruent with the perspective of Merleau Ponty, as evidenced by the references to him throughout their work. van Manen (1997) clarified intentionality and access to reality:

In the human sciences objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive categories. Both find their meaning and significance in the oriented (i.e., personal) relation that the researcher establishes with the "object" of his or her inquiry. Thus "objectivity" means that the researcher is oriented to the object, that which stands in front of him or her. Objectivity means that the researcher remains true to the object. . . . "Subjectivity" means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and its greatest depth. (p. 20)

Munhall (1994) articulated Merleau Ponty's perspective of consciousness as sensory awareness of and response to the environment. She stated, "*Embodiment* explains that through consciousness we are aware of being-in-the-world, and it is through the body that we gain access to this world" (p. 15). Benner's (1994) explanation of the application of phenomenology states that

interpretive phenomenology cannot be reduced to a set of procedures and techniques, but it nevertheless has a stringent set of disciplines in a scholarly tradition associated with giving the best possible account of the text presented. The interpretation must be auditable and plausible, must offer increased understanding, and must articulate the practices, meanings, concerns, and practical knowledge of the world it interprets. (p. xvii)

Phenomenology and Postpositivism in Research Application

Some researchers suggest that methods are selected according to the specified purposes of the investigation (Ford-Gilboe et al., 1995). Others believe that selection should be determined by an accurate understanding of all forms of inquiry, with justification based on contemporary understandings about best ways to answer research questions (Clark, 1998; Dzurec, 1999). Some suggest that the research question should determine the method, recognizing that researchers' notions about scientific truth and

assumptions influence the wording of the research question (Annells, 1999; Packard & Polifroni, 1999). Haase and Taylor Meyers (1988) declared that usually the research approach is based on the purpose or subject of the investigation or on individual values and beliefs. Wolfer (1993) concluded that saying different methods are chosen because they address different problems and questions is only partially correct and different methods must be used because fundamentally different phenomena or aspects of reality require it. Phenomenology offers an approach that focuses on human phenomena and may be consistent with differing phenomenological streams depending on the philosophical assumptions and perspectives about reality held by the researchers (Annells, 1999). Booth, Kenrick, and Woods (1997) stated that "different methodological approaches are different in degree rather than in kind . . . a new version of empiricism is required by nursing if the choice of method is to be genuinely pragmatic and not dictated by a commitment to mutually exclusive paradigms" (p. 807).

Phenomenology has been described as a method applicable within a postpositive paradigm (Clark, 1998) and within an interpretive/constructive paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Van der Zalm and Bergum (1999) attested that "phenomenological inquiry yields empirical knowledge in the form of descriptive and explanatory theory, and of understanding, which leads to practically relevant knowledge, and it also contributes to ethical, aesthetic, personal and socio-political ways of knowing" (p. 217). Ford-Gilboe et al. (1995) stated that in both postpositivist and interpretive paradigms, the use of quantitative and qualitative methods can be justified to meet the purposes of the research without violating paradigm assumptions. Reconciling paradigm assumptions is considered less of a concern than recognizing the value of different paradigm insights in developing new and evolving paradigm methodologies.

Nursing is in the forefront of developing new methodologies to maximize understanding and generate new knowledge. Although it is important not to stray into logical or epistemological inconsistency in the process, recognizing opportunities arising from respecting and honoring different research paradigms and different research methods will advance nursing science. Identifying similarities and seeking understanding of those similarities enhance the ability of nursing science to relate to the phenomenon of priority—human beings.

In this article, a nurse has articulated her philosophical assumptions located within a postpositive paradigm and a nurse and a philosopher together have demonstrated their congruence with phenomenology as methodology and method. In doing so, the artificial boundaries between

paradigms have been disclaimed and the focus has been relocated to the linkage and consistency between and among the assumptions of the researcher, the phenomenon of priority (human beings), and the research method in its development and application. We have upheld our assumptions that (a) methods are not necessarily paradigm specific, (b) consistency should be apparent between the assumptions that underpin the research and the method applied, and (c) scholarly researchers make assumptions and principles explicit while demonstrating sound judgment in implementing traditional methods and creating new techniques.

Nurse researchers must be aware of their philosophical assumptions and appraise the philosophical underpinnings of the various methodologies (Annells, 1999; Koch, 1995). New methodologies take time to develop and refine, and nurses must proceed with substantive reflection and great care if we are to benefit from their development. Attention to paradigms and assumptions is important but should not restrict the exploration of possibilities and the creativity of nurses in their work to resolve the burgeoning challenges in nursing science research.

NOTE

1. Correspondence regarding this manuscript can be sent to Fran Racher at School of Health Studies, Brandon University, 270-18th Street, Brandon Manitoba, R7A 6A9, racher@brandonu.ca.

REFERENCES

- Angen, M. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*, 378-395.
- Annells, M. (1996). Hermeneutic phenomenology: Philosophical perspectives and current use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 23*, 705-713.
- Annells, M. (1999). Evaluating phenomenology: Usefulness, quality and philosophical foundations. *Nurse Researcher, 6*(3), 5-19.
- Benner, P. (1994). *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring, and ethics in health and illness*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Booth, K., Kenrick, M., & Woods, S. (1997). Nursing knowledge, theory and method revisited. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 26*, 804-811.
- Clark, A. (1998). The qualitative-quantitative debate: Moving from positivism and confrontation to post-positivism and reconciliation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 27*, 1242-1249.
- Cohen, M. (1987). A historical overview of the phenomenologic movement. *IMAGE: Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 19*, 31-34.

- Cohen, M., & Omery, A. (1994). Schools of phenomenology: Implications for research. In J. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 136-156). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cull-Wilby, B., & Pepin, J. (1987). Towards a coexistence of paradigms in nursing knowledge development. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 12, 515-521.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1998). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 1-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dzurec, L. (1999). The necessity for and evolution of multiple paradigms for nursing research: A poststructuralist perspective. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives in philosophy of science in nursing* (pp. 491-497). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Fawcett, J. (1993). From a plethora of paradigms to parsimony in worldviews. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 6, 56-58.
- Ford-Gilboe, M., Campbell, J., & Berman, H. (1995). Stories and numbers: Coexistence without compromise. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 18(1), 14-26.
- Giorgio, A. (1992). Description versus interpretation: Competing alternative strategies for qualitative research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 23, 119-135.
- Gortner, S. (1999). Nursing's syntax revisited: A critique of philosophies said to influence nursing theories. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on the philosophy of nursing science* (pp. 154-165). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Guba, E. (1990). *The paradigm dialogue*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1967). On the intentionality of consciousness. In J. Kochelmans (Ed.), *Phenomenology: The philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its interpretation* (pp. 118-137). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Haase, J., & Taylor Meyers, S. (1988). Reconciling paradigm assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 10, 128-137.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). London: SCM. (Original work published 1927)
- Husserl, E. (1952). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (W. R. Boyce Gibson, Trans.). New York: Macmillan. (Original work published 1913)
- Kearney, R., & Rainwater, M. (1996). *The continental philosophy reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Koch, T. (1995). Interpretive approaches in nursing research: The influence of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 21, 827-836.
- Koch, T. (1996). Implementation of a hermeneutic inquiry in nursing: Philosophy, rigour and representation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24, 174-184.
- Koch, T. (1999). An interpretive research process: Revisiting phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. *Nurse Researcher*, 6(3), 20-34.
- Merleau Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Merleau Ponty, M. (1964). *Primacy of perception*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Moccia, P. (1988). A critique of compromise: Beyond the methods debate. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 10(4), 1-9.

- Monti, E., & Tingen, M. (1999). Multiple paradigms of nursing science. *Advances in Nursing Science, 21*(4), 64-80.
- Munhall, P. (1994). *Revisioning phenomenology: Nursing and health science research*. New York: National League for Nursing.
- Munhall, P. (1997). Nursing philosophy and nursing research: In apposition or opposition? In L. Nicoll (Ed.), *Perspectives on nursing theory* (3rd ed., pp. 727-731). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Munhall, P., & Oiler Boyd, C. (1993). *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (2nd ed.). New York: National League for Nursing Press.
- Newman, M. (1992). Prevailing paradigms in nursing. *Nursing Outlook, 40*(1), 10-13, 32.
- Newman, M., Sime, A., & Corcoran-Perry, S. (1999). The focus of the discipline of nursing. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing* (pp. 20-24). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Oiler, C. (1986). Qualitative methods: Phenomenology. In P. Moccia (Ed.), *New approaches to theory development* (pp. 75-103). New York: National League for Nursing Press.
- Omery, A. (1983). Phenomenology: A method for nursing research. *Advances in Nursing Science, 5*(2), 49-63.
- Omery, A., & Mack, C. (1995). Phenomenology and science. In A. Omery, C. Kasper, & G. Page (Eds.), *In search of nursing science* (pp. 139-158). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Packard, S., & Polifroni, E. (1999). The nature of scientific truth. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing* (pp. 126-134). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Paley, J. (1997). Husserl, phenomenology and nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 26*, 193-197.
- Paley, J. (1998). Misinterpretive phenomenology: Heidegger, ontology and nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 27*, 817-824.
- Parse, R. (1987). Paradigms and theories. In *Nursing science: Major paradigms, theories and critiques* (pp. 1-11). Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum.
- Racher, F., Kaufert, J., & Havens, B. (2000). Conjoint research interviews with frail elderly couples: Methodological implications. *Journal of Family Nursing, 6*, 365-377.
- Rawnsley, M. (1999). Polarities in nursing science: The plight of the emerging nurse scholar. *Nursing Science Quarterly, 12*, 277-282.
- Ray, M. (1994). The richness of phenomenology: Philosophic, theoretic, and methodologic concerns. In J. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 117-135). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rogers, M. (1970). *An introduction to the theoretical basis of nursing*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.
- Schacht, R. (1975). Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. In *Hegel and after: Studies in continental philosophy between Kant and Sartre* (pp. 207-227). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Schumacher, K., & Gortner, S. (1999). (Mis)conceptions and reconceptions about traditional science. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing* (pp. 61-69). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Schwandt, T. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1982). *The phenomenological movement: A historical introduction* (3rd ed.). The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

- Van der Zalm, J., & Bergum, V. (1999). Hermeneutic phenomenology: Providing living knowledge for nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31, 211-218.
- van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London, ON: Althouse.
- Welch, M. (1999). Phenomenology and hermeneutics. In E. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on the philosophy of science in nursing* (pp. 235-246). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Wolfer, J. (1993). Aspects of "reality" and ways of knowing in nursing: In search of an integrated paradigm. *IMAGE: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 25, 141-146.