Phenomenological Research Enrichment Using Photovoice and SHOWED Documentation

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Abstract

Phenomenology as a research methodology is valued for its adaptability to a wide range of circumstances. As a methodology, it can be enriched by combining it with other qualitative research methods that are suitable to the question under study. This paper explains how phenomenology was enriched for a study of food and eating habits among teens by using photovoice and SHOWED documentation to help students show examples of their thinking about food issues and document their thoughts as they complied sets of photographs that demonstrated the food issues they wanted to discuss in the research forums.

Keywords: phenomenology, Photovoice, SHOWED documentation

Introduction

Phenomenology is a commonly used approach to educational research that is seen through a qualitative lens. As a formal research movement, phenomenology is in its infancy, based most eminently and obviously in the work of Edmund Husserl in the mid-1880s (Encyclopedia of Phenomenology, 2013). Husserl was a Jewish Austrian philosopher and mathematician who matured academically in a Nazi-European context, where his focus on phenomenology developed into a movement between 1913 and 1930. As a philosopher, Husserl was interested in the way subjective experience and consciousness interacted. He was first in the phenomenology movement to stress the radical and rational autonomy of all things and to connect this autonomy to intentionality and a belief in pure consciousness as a way to interpret experience.

Husserl taught that through pure consciousness, people could come to phenomenological and eidetic (vivid and detailed memory) abilities to recall memories with precision, which he later termed *eidetic reductions*. Husserl argued for the researcher's awareness of phenomenological lenses to guide views of objective inter-subjectivity as a path to form and understand community through subjective experience. His approach advocated understanding the structure of consciousness, as might be expected from a psychology-trained researcher, as a way to bridge a phenomenon and a person's awareness of the phenomenon. Through this investigation of consciousness, researchers who used phenomenological approaches would need to bracket their assumptions about a phenomenon to reach an epoche (Dreyfus & Hall, 1986), or an understanding, of the essential structures of the subject's consciousness about a phenomenon. Although Husserl believed in the existence of objects outside of our perceptions of such objects, he saw consciousness as a way to bridge between existence of the natural world and people's perceptions of it. His teaching led to a modern acceptance of phenomenology as a way of looking at objects and phenomena by considering how we are intentionally directed toward them and by considering their perceptual and functional aspects (Mohanty, 2008, 2011; Dreyfus & Hall, 1982). In this way, phenomenology has become focused on subjective personal perceptions of life experiences.

Modern users of phenomenology as a research methodology in many contexts consider it the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, of the way we perceive and understand phenomena, and of the meaning phenomena have in our subjective experience. More simply stated, phenomenology is the study of an individual's lived experience of the world. (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). The stress in modern phenomenology is on the researcher's understanding of what he/she is studying as that understanding is illuminated by the participant's reported experiences.

Modern Phenomenology

As with any research methodology, phenomenology has changed and been refined since its earliest iteration through the work of Husserl. Neubauer et al. (2019) reported on three contemporary approaches to phenomenology, including: a lifeworld research approach, post-intentional phenomenology, and interpretive phenomenological analysis (p. 91).

Through the filters of selfhood, sociality, embodiment, temporality, and spatiality, a *lifeworld approach* examines individual experiences to mine for meaning, using each of these perspectives to prompt additional thinking and reflection. The *post-intentional approach* to phenomenology stresses the back and forth nature of phenomenological research where data are simultaneously produced and being produced and meaning is always in flux as well as contextualized. The third contemporary approach to phenomenology is, as its name suggests, reliant on the researcher to interpret reports of experience as a way to make meaning. *Interpretive phenomenological analysis* is reliant on reports of personal experience and their perceptions of the experiences, through objects and events that comprise the experiences. From multiple participant reports, the researcher looks for trends and commonalities in data chunks to make meaning and interpret the phenomenon. In all of these approaches, it is incumbent on the researcher to identify and apply data collection strategies that hold true to the purpose and beliefs about the phenomenological approach they are using.

Recently, researchers have used both descriptive (or transcendental) approaches to phenomenology (see for example Moustakas) and interpretive approaches to phenomenology (see for example van Manen). In the descriptive approach, the researcher must bracket his/her beliefs and follow the leads given by the data, reflecting on the participants' experiences and the themes that emerge from them, as well as reflecting on their own experience with the phenomenon. The descriptive phenomenological researcher considers the various perspectives yielded in the data set to uncover themes and provided examples in text format of the evidence to support the themes. The resulting descriptions explain what was learned. Further analysis supported by evidence that is recurring in the data is used to explain how these themes emerged. This stage of data mining is referred to as *imaginative variation*, used to create a structural description. The product of descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology is twofold, revealing first what was discovered (reporting) and then how the phenomenon works. While the researcher's role as a reflective observer is similar in interpretive approaches to phenomenology, the approach to data mining and meaning-making is different in that it includes a constant cycle of data collection, and reflection on the meaning of the data until the researcher reaches a point of saturation when further data is not revealing any new insights into the phenomenon.

Finding Strategies to Mine Descriptive and Interpretive Data Sources

A challenge for phenomenological researchers is to find the right strategies for the identified phenomenon that also suit the age and demographics of the participant population. Borrowing approaches from other quantitative traditions has the potential to enrich the traditional methods of phenomenology (Varpio at al., 2015). When the participant population is young, they may lack the extent of experience with the phenomenon to be able to offer generalized ideas about it. Similarly, they may lack the conceptual language to either describe or generalize meaning from their experiences to bring experiences into conscious awareness (Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Lopez et al., 2004; Staiti, 2012). In such contexts, researchers need useful and credible strategies to bridge possible gaps in experience or conceptual language to enrich their methods in a phenomenological framework, which often relies on

talk in the form of interviews, focus group discussions, or surveys. These approaches to phenomenology can be enriched using Photovoice and SHOWED documentation. The participants in this study were solicited through a letter of informed permission that went to parents of potential participants (high school aged students in the area) because of the age group involved. The remainder of this paper will describe how these approaches were used to gather rich data sets in a study where co-researcher participants were students between 14 and 18 years old.

Methodology Using Phenomenology from Descriptive and Interpretative Traditions Enriched by Photovoice and SHOWED Analysis

van Manen (2015) says, "What the phenomenological attitude gives to education is a certain style of knowing, a kind of theorizing of the unique that sponsors a form of pedagogic practice that is virtually absent in the increasingly bureaucratized and technological spheres of pedagogic life" (p. 154). It is this "pedagogic thoughtfulness" (van Manen, 2015, p. 154) that was emulated and practised in the study that has resulted in an explanation of enriched phenomenology in this paper. As outlined by van Manen (2015), the point of phenomenological research is to "borrow" (p. 62) other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience in the context of the whole human experience. Phenomenology requires the researcher to delve into the related experiences and ask why and how in connection with those experiences, while looking for commonalities and themes across the group. Qualitative phenomenological research cannot be quantified and relies on intuition and attention to detail to interpret results.

In reference to the work of Moustakas and his emphasis on heuristic inquiry and the work of van Manen who takes more of a hermeneutic approach, intentionality, imaginative variation, and overriding themes are explained further.

Intentionality. A key concept when discussing transcendental phenomenology is the notion of intentionality. Moustakas (1994) says, "Intentionality refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are related" (p. 28). Moustakas (1994) says, "the working out of the noema-noesis relationship, the textural (noematic) and structural (noetic) dimensions of phenomena, and the derivation of meanings is an essential function of intentionality" (p. 31). The strategies that will be outlined here (Photovoice and SHOWED documentation) include deliberate efforts to support participants' intentionality.

The Imaginative Variation. At this stage, two individual interviews of each participant was transcribed, listened to, and read repeatedly. Detailed notes were taken, and underlying themes were established. Attending to the imaginative variation was the next consideration. The role of the imaginative variation is to formulate a "structural differentiation among the infinite multiplicities of actual and possible cognitiones, that relate to the object in question and thus can somehow go together to make up the unity of an identifying synthesis" (Husserl, 1977, p. 63, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). That is, common themes and ideas that were

related or repeated could be examined more closely to consider deeper meaning. These themes and ideas were then presented to all participants in an anonymous online meeting room during a focus group discussion to affirm, modify, negate, or expand on intentional ideas that participants shared (i.e., member checking) (Birt et al., 2016) in previous interviews and through their Photovoice choices and their SHOWED analysis of those choices.

Overriding Themes. Individual observations in notes taken during the process of identifying reductions were cross-referenced with the structural essences of the imaginative variations to arrive at overriding themes that served to synthesize the "meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). Moustakas also talks about the importance of intersubjectivity and shares the notion that everything we know about someone else is based on referencing our knowledge and experiences (Is it necessary to put year here? p. 38). Attention to the element of intersubjectivity was essential when considering the Photovoice selections that were made by participants and the way they described these choices in their SHOWED document analyses, and in their anonymous online explanation of their photo priorities in the focus group discussions.

Procedure for Phenomenological Research Methods as Outlined by Moustakas

At each of the stages of interviews and the focus group discussions that followed, the *Procedure for Phenomenological Research* outlined by Moustakas was employed. For instance, co-researchers were invited to share their experiences in the first interview, revisit and extend those ideas in the second interview, and share their big ideas with their fellow co-researchers and comment on the validity of findings in the third interview/focus group discussion, relying on guidance from the Modified Version of the van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data that incorporates each of those components (See Figure 1) (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The structured guidance provided by Moustakas (2015) with the Modified van Kaam method of Analysis is helpful while acknowledging that there are necessary elements that may be both interpretive and descriptive required to depict the vivid and detailed description necessary to articulate phenomenological findings and that sometimes it is necessary to use terminology from different phenomenological orientations interchangeably. In this way, early phenomenology researchers envisioned the growth and enrichment of this research approach even as they were developing the approach to reflect its origins in the work of Husserl and other early phenomenologists.

Co-Researchers

Phenomenology adheres to a practice of treating the participants as co-researchers, acknowledging that it is their experiences studied and they are invested in the work, and it is up to the researcher to interpret and portray those experiences accurately (Gill, 2014; van Manen, 2015) and to find meaning in everyday experiences. For young participants, the practice of

referring to them as co-researchers also lent some gravitas to their input and provided a source of focus to their shared input.

Photovoice

A modified version of Photovoice is a methodology that has been blended with phenomenology to enrich it for use with the current study. This approach was chosen because it was judged to be motivating to invite young co-researchers to use their phones in the unique and focused ways envisioned in the study.

Photovoice was first identified as a methodology by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in the early 1990s (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Wang and Burriss (1997) identified several goals of Photovoice, including,

1) to enable people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns;

(2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs; and

(3) to reach policymakers. (p. 370)

To these purposes, we add that the strategy showed promise in its ability to focus observations, make participants more aware of patterns in practices and behaviours around them, and provided opportunities for moving perceptual knowledge (i.e., see the thing), to conceptual knowledge (i.e., naming the thing), and often to analytical knowledge (i.e., understanding the impact of thing on their lives and their communities). While we do not claim any connection in this strategy to social justice awareness, it was evident in some of the data that were collected using this enriched phenomenological approach was edging participant co-researchers toward awareness of actions needed to change things that had recently become aware of and recognized personal discomfort with (i.e., in the sense that they felt manipulated by commercial interests). This is an outcome that is consistent with earlier research with Photovoice use.

Photovoice is recognized as a way to enlist community action and can serve as a means to provide a voice for marginalized groups (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Photovoice may also be used as a political action tool and has early roots in the work of Freire, who encouraged the impoverished in his community to use their collective voices (Sutton-Brown, 2014) and in recognition that youth voices are sometimes overlooked and underutilized in constructing our vision of society (Spencer et al., 2019) and Photovoice is a flexible way to allow them to express themselves in research.

The goal was to ensure that the voices of the students were heard, and their individual experiences were recognized, including reflecting on the essences of their input (Gill, 2014). Allowing them to take photographs and reflect on them (with guided questions) assisted them in the process of clarifying their thoughts and articulating their message (Photovoice, 2007). In addition, writing and reflecting on the pictures (in SHOWED documents) allowed them to come to the interviews and focus group discussion with more confidence and willingness to

share their ideas.

Once students had a chance to share their initial ideas through the first interview, they were asked to take a minimum of five photos and share the most significant of these photographs (as determined by the individual photographers) in a second interview. These became part of a foundation upon which to build additional insights and subsequent theories. The photographs became a thought-provoking reference tool for further discussion. In addition, the photographs were referenced throughout the research as themes were developed and codes established (Moustakas, 1994; Wang & Burriss, 1997).

Phenomenology Using Photovoice and SHOWED Documentation: Welcome to my Heritage Garden

In this research, a heritage garden metaphor was used to envision the amalgamation of how phenomenology, Photovoice and SHOWED documentation worked together. van Manen (2014) says,

A metaphor is a figure of speech that creates an analogy between two objects, by using one word or image to clarify another. Creative use of metaphor may help to discover new meanings about something. In philosophy, too, metaphor helps us to perceive one idea in terms of something else and thus may create new insights or meaning about the original idea. (p. 149)

The metaphor of a heritage garden can incorporate the theoretical lenses of sustainability, constructivism, postmodernism, and existential worldviews (Kingsolver, 2007; Yawney, 2020; Wincott, 2018). A second metaphor (in this case a sunflower in a garden) helped the researcher to analyze stages of mining through the data to first recognize data chunks (the flower petals), mesh repeated ideas into themes (the stem and leaves), and recognize recurrent themes as key ideas (the roots). Photovoice allowed this analogy to flourish in this research context because it was consistent with the visual data mining from Photovoice collections submitted by the participant co-researchers. Photovoice was used as a social construction tool to elicit data and experiences and give voice to individuals and groups who may not otherwise be heard (Sutton-Brown, 2014).

Sutton-Brown (2014) says, "Photovoice was born out of three distinct theoretical frameworks: empowerment education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography. The overall aims of these frameworks support an action-oriented, participant-directed method" (p. 170). Photovoice is described as "Using photography to help people share their ideas, improve our communities, and give voice to those not heard" (Photovoice, 2007). In this study, the strategy of using Photovoice allowed for participant-directed themes and key ideas to emerge organically from the opportunities to interrogate the objects that the participants felt expressed their ideas and by limiting the number of photographs they could submit, thus forcing their analytical input to uncover meaning in what they chose to photograph.

The nature of Photovoice and phenomenology may at first appear to be at odds in that

phenomenology asks one to simply account for individual experiences while the use of Photovoice suggests more of a participatory action approach. We suggest that phenomenology can be strengthened by the use of Photovoice and embraces the phenomenological requisite of treating participants as co-researcher participants. Photovoice then becomes a valuable tool for individuals to share their experiences. This is consistent with Glesne (2016) to support contemporary knowledge and discussion (or lack of) and provide the co-researcher participants a means of voicing their concerns, thereby making the time spent in interviews more meaningful to them on an individual basis.

Qualitative Methods Open to Participant Specific Approaches

As mentioned earlier, the research was guided by the structure provided by Moustakas (1994, p. 103). For the purposes of this paper, the final three steps of this process are most relevant to identifying how both Photovoice and SHOWED documentation were used as methods to engage, motivate, interpret, and mine for the essence of data collected from the many participant co-researcher interactions during the current study (See also Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Gill, 2014; Lopez et al., 2004, Staiti, 2012).

Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values as well as involving social meanings and significance

Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature

Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers

Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research

Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process

Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview (and follow-up interviews if needed) that focuses on a bracketed topic and question

Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate the development of individual textural and structural descriptions and synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences.

(Moustakas, 1994)

Figure 1. Procedure for Phenomenological Research Methods Outlined by Moustakas

Using SHOWED Documentation to Support Pre-Focus Group Reflections

To support interpretation of Photovoice pictures that were submitted for this research, the SHOWED method of interpretation was also used (Spencer et al., 2019; Wang & Burris, 1997). Each co-researcher participant was asked to select five photographs (indicating which one they would like to discuss in the future focus group discussion) as outlined by the SHOWED format (See Figure 2) (Photovoice, 2007).

Figure 2.   *An*
Exemplar of the SHOWED Photograph Analysis Procedure Presented to the Co-Researcher/Participants that was used in this Research Project

Photovoice is your chance to share your ideas in photographs. For the purpose of this research question, we are looking for photographs of objects and places rather than people (we do not have research approval to photograph identifiable human subjects). Some ideas to get you started...

- What do you see (topically related) in your everyday life? You could take your camera with you and make a "photo essay" about a typical day for you. Afterwards, look at the pictures, and see what stands out for you.

- Pretend you are taking pictures to send to a pen pal from another part of the world. What would you want to share with them?

- Start with an opinion or idea. Have you ever wanted to write a letter to the editor of the newspaper or a magazine and share your thoughts this topic? What would you say? Now, try to create a picture that gets your idea across.

- How do you interact with this in your home? In your community? Show this in pictures.

- Make a collection of pictures showing all the things you think about when you think about this in a positive light.

- Make a collection of pictures showing all the things you think about when you think about this in a negative light.

- Use your emotions as a cue. Consider where you live and how you experience this... what gives you a strong emotional response (excited, angry, afraid, sad...)? Tell the story.

- From the collection of pictures you have taken, choose your top five and fill out the SHOWED questionnaire for each of them. Provide an explanation for why and how each photo is significant to you. Following this exercise, rate them in order of significance to you from 1 to 5. (1 being the most meaningful and 5 being the least). Please be prepared to share your number 1 photo (and explanation) with the group in focus group discussions.

Name of Photographer _____

Title of Picture _____

Picture Number_____ Date_____

Please fill out one SHOWED form along with each of the five pictures you will submit.

Insert Photograph here:

S	"What is Seen here?" (Describe what the eye sees.)
H	"What is really Happening?" (The unseen "story" behind the image)
O	"How does this relate to Our lives?" (Or MY life personally)
W	"Why are things this **W**ay?"
E	"How could this image **E**ducate people?"
D	"What can I **D**o about it?" (What would I like to see happen in the future?)

SHOWED questionnaire modified for this study by Deborah Yawney (2021) supported by © Photovoice Hamilton Ontario 2007. Source: Photovoice Hamilton Manual and Resource Kit, Reproduced with Permission. (Courtesy of photovoice.ca, 2007).

The participants would typically discuss their images and SHOWED document that they had previously shared via email. Depending on the details provided in the SHOWED document, additional information would be elicited, or they would be asked the questions that had been prepared in advance. Due to the effort to customize the questions based on the first interview, the questions might be quite different for each participant in the second interview. Following this process, co-researcher participants were asked to share any additional insights they may have and were invited to consider which of the Photovoice images and SHOWED observations was most meaningful to them and that they would like to present in a focus group discussion.

In focus group discussions, each person took turns sharing their number one rated image based on choosing their most significant image accompanied by its SHOWED document (Photovoice, 2007). Following participant discussion, the trends and patterns that were developing in the first and second interviews were shared. Participants were provided with an opportunity to talk

about them. They were asked if they had any other comments or contributions they would like to make at that time and if anything had occurred to them as a result of the focus group discussion.

For each focus group session, a slide show was prepared that was shared in the google meeting room and customized for the group to include questions derived from themes from the first two interviews. Additionally, the slide show included each of the selected Photovoice images that the participants wanted to talk about with their peers. They each took turns presenting their image and responding to the presentation of their peers. This allowed for member checking of some of the themes that were developing, by asking participants to decline, clarify, or add to the themes as they were forming. Photovoice was intended to be their voice, so it was important that they carefully selected the images and thought reflectively about their selection, assisted in this process by the SHOWED document.

Enriched Phenomenological Analysis

To conduct a phenomenological analysis of the data reference was made to the modified version of the van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data provided by Moustakas (Figure 1) who modified the original document to be used to "guide human science researchers" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120) and because

The Modified van Kaam approach popularized by Moustakas (1994) is the most used form of data analysis, in large part because of the significant amount of data that is needed for this analysis. There are seven steps to the modified van Kaam analysis: (1) listing and grouping; (2) reduction and elimination; (3) clustering and thematizing; (4) validation; (5) individual textual description; (6) individual structural description; (7) textural-structural description. (Precision, 2019)

All of these steps were used in the study to gain the advantage of thoroughness in mining the data set which include two interview transcripts, five Photovoice pictures from each participant co-researcher, five SHOWED document analyses, and records of discussions from the focus group meetings.

Closing Comments

Phenomenology is valued by social science researchers as a strong and adaptable methodology for qualitative investigations. This methodology provides a way of looking at objects and phenomena by considering our relationship to them and by considering their perceptual and functional aspects in systematic ways. However, one aspect of phenomenology that may be challenging with some groups of co-researcher participants in such studies is our ability to ensure the participants' intentional direction toward the object. As intentionality is a critical condition for deep reflection, ensuring intentional direction and focus on the object(s) under study is crucial to learning and forming new knowledge from the study. This approach reinforced the strength of combining these methods of research.

This paper has provided an outline of two methods to enrich talk-based phenomenology that

could be used by social science researchers to ensure and strengthen intentional direction by participants to the object being studied. With the population of 14 to 18 year olds who were part of the recent study that employed this methodology, researcher observation showed that it was an effective approach for a number of reasons. First, the provision of the challenge to capture meaningful photographs that related to the topic under study seemed to motivate the participant co-researchers. They seemed eager to share their culled set of photos with the researcher and to further cull their collection to a single meaningful photo for inclusion in the final focus group slide show when they could explain their thinking about why their photo contributed to the research. Second, participant co-researchers became aware of patterns and trends in their own observations of related objects and events around them. The need to prepare a set of photos that had personal meaning seemed to allow students to see their surroundings through two lenses: their own family and home experiences and the experiences being foist upon them from the wider (often commercial) world. By narrowing the camera lens, they focused on key messages. It was also evident in their SHOWED documentation that they were sometimes surprized at the strength and prevalence of key messages in their day-to-day lives. Third, participant co-researchers presented many instances of photos and analyses that were evocative in that they had strong emotional ties to many of the photos they captured, particularly if the photos related to things they remembered smelling (e.g., homemade cookies), doing with another person (e.g., cooking with a grandparent or parent and particularly a family member), or that they came to recognize as a meaningful tradition in their lives (e.g., baking tortiére at Christmas, making perogies, or making smores with friends at a socially distant campfire during COVID).

Without the prompts of the photographs and the structured analysis of their pictures that was required by the SHOWED document, we wonder if such personal revelations would have been possible for participants. We also know from the study that used these enriched methods for data collection that *eidetic reductions* may also be multi-sensory since many participant co-researchers spoke and wrote about how their photographs reminded them of certain smells and emotions, as well as connecting them to the original experiences.

As researchers worldwide continue to build on and enrich the methods used to engage phenomenological methodologies in their research work, we can confidently recommend the potential of Photovoice and SHOWED document analysis as structured but individually oriented methods that can enrich data collection. Using the methods outlined in this paper provided accessible and readily individualized approaches to the research topic. From a phenomenological standpoint, the object being studied was able to remain external but the students' analysis of the objects also meant that the objects were not simply external at the same time. Participant co-researchers were able to examine objects for their meaning by considering their personal experiential perceptions in a moment of pause created by their photographs, followed by moments of reflection about the SHOWED documentation. How participant co-researchers perceived the objects, how the objects functioned within their perceptions, and the meaning to them personally about both perceptions and functions were seen more clearly than might have been possible without the focusing potential of this

combination of strategies to enrich phenomenology.

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Author (2023). Dissertation [unpublished]