Issues about Thinking Phenomenologically while Doing Phenomenology

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Abstract
This methodological article explores issues related to having the ontological ground for phenomenological empirical research present throughout the research process. We discuss how ontology needs to be taken into consideration regarding the phenomena to be studied and how ontological aspects of phenomena need to be highlighted during various data collection and analysis procedures. Here, we discuss how philosophical works can be used in the context of specific research projects. In illustrating our statements, we present four empirical examples connected to the themes of life changes and learning processes with the purpose of exemplifying and discussing how general lifeworld ontology can be integrated as an active resource in empirical phenomenological research.

Keywords
methodology, lifeworld ontology, empirical phenomenological studies

But if we rediscover time beneath the subject, and if we relate to the paradox of time those of the body, the world, the thing, and others, we shall understand that beyond these there is nothing to understand. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 365)

Central in phenomenological empirical research is the manner in which ontology can be present throughout the research process. This question deals with how to think phenomenologically while doing phenomenology. As guidance for researchers to facilitate research processes in the interest of conducting phenomenological studies, a series of methodological procedures

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have been put forward by, among others, van Kaam (1966), Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985, 1997) and Karlsson (1995). Others, in line with the Utrecht school have emphasized focusing on studying experiences as they are lived using open and sensitive methods (Bollnow, 1989; Kockelmans, 1987; Langeveld, 1984). In this article, we will elucidate and discuss the necessity of reflecting upon and integrating general ontology and philosophical works with empirical phenomenological studies when researching experiences as they are lived.

Recent methodological studies in the field of empirical phenomenology have spanned across problems concerning how to deal with pre-understanding in the research process (LeVasseur, 2003), appropriate application of empirical phenomenological methods (Giorgi, 2000), phases of the interpretive phenomenological process (Crist & Tanner, 2003), issues of validity (Giorgi, 2002), and accessibility of empirical phenomenological texts (Halling, 2002). Further, the utilization of lifeworld ontological concepts in the phenomenological research process has been developed (Ashworth, 2003a, 2003b; van Manen, 1990). Ashworth (2003a) delineated specific intertwined lifeworld constructs, labelled “fractions” (p. 147), such as embodiment, temporality and sociality, which are then applied as structures in the process of phenomenological analysis (Ashworth & Ashworth, 2003; Finlay, 2003). However, the applicability of general lifeworld phenomenological constructs is not further spelled out for relevance to the uniqueness of various phenomena in diverse fields under study and here we intend to contribute to this discussion.

Within empirical phenomenological research, general phenomenological ontology may tend to be too extensive in scope and perhaps too complicated to carry into one’s reflections throughout the research process. Accordingly, our goal is to reiterate an unquestioned phenomenological assertion; the significance of thinking phenomenologically while doing phenomenology. For the purpose of this article, we interpret this claim in order to elaborate upon the significance of reflexively applying phenomenological ontology throughout the research process to ontic or empirical phenomena; thus, general ontology would be placed in a particular empirical field of psychological study. Here in the Heideggerian tradition of existential phenomenology, we assume the distinction between the “ontological” as the dimension of Being, and the “ontic” as the dimension of entities present to us in our natural attitude toward the world. First, we