

## **La validité de l'étude phénoménologique herméneutique : vers une éthique de l'évaluation**

**Judy Rashotte et Louise Jensen**

Cet article explore la relation de l'éthique par rapport à la validité de l'étude phénoménologique herméneutique. En premier lieu, les auteures font un bref tour d'horizon des divers discours sur la validité de la recherche qualitative appliquée de multiples façons à l'étude phénoménologique herméneutique. Elles examinent ensuite de quelle façon l'éthique relationnelle est à prendre en compte dans cette forme d'étude. Enfin, elles offrent une série de réflexions d'ordre moral pour aider les chercheurs à s'engager dans un questionnement déontologique à chaque étape du processus de recherche.

Mots-clés : étude phénoménologique herméneutique, validité

# Validity in Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry: Towards an Ethics of Evaluation

Judy Rashotte and Louise Jensen

This article explores the relationship of ethics to validity in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. First, the authors present a brief overview of the various discourses on validity in qualitative research that have been variously applied to hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Next, they examine how relational ethics is a presence to bear within this form of inquiry. Finally, they offer a set of ethical reflections to help the researcher engage in a process of ethical questioning during each step of the research process.

Keywords: Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, validity, relational ethics, evaluation criteria

I am deeply troubled by the anonymous imperial violence that slips quietly and invisibly into our (my) best intentions and practices and, even, into our (my) transformational yearnings. ...I fear the arrogance we enact “unknowingly”; I fear my seeming lack of fear in proposing new imaginaries of validity.... Perhaps, instead, we (I) ought to be stunned into silence — literally, into silence, into a space of emptiness, into the clarity of unknowing that appropriates no one or no thing to its sameness, that “which can neither be acquired nor lost” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 76). (Scheurich, 1997, p. 90)

Validity has always been a contentious issue in qualitative research, particularly for those conducting studies on hermeneutic phenomenology. On the one hand, some researchers are concerned with the “myriad kinds of validity” that serve simply as “masks that conceal a profound and disturbing sameness” (Scheurich, p. 80) — that is, validity within a positivist framework. *Validity*, a word derived from the Latin verb *valere*, means to be strong, and the adjective *validus* refers to the strength, firmness, and power of a thing. The Oxford English dictionary (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002) defines valid as possessing authority, such that the quality of the thing under consideration (an event, an argument, or data) can be accepted as binding given that it has been executed with all the proper formalities. Our current understanding of validity in research, which has arisen from Descartes’s dream of clarity and distinctness, finds its strength in the univocity of reality, univocal discourse, and the adherence to method. Validity becomes formalized, orienting to precision,

definition, and repeatability. From this perspective, validity is understood to have an exclusionary nature within a movement of normalization and levelling. But this understanding of validity is not in keeping with a mode of inquiry that seeks to keep the question of Being open (Heidegger, 1927/62), to engage in an un-doing (Caputo, 1987), or to show the *différance* by which things are inhabited (Derrida, 1973/2002).

On the other hand, some qualitative researchers argue that if the research report is nothing more than what might have been constructed by a good journalist, then it cannot be said to constitute original scientific research. "Validity must be distinguished from the researcher's own sincerity and enthusiasm in presenting the findings as 'truths,' what has been described as 'cardiac validity' (i.e., how heartfelt the interpretation is) or 'lachrymal validity' (i.e., how much emotion it produces)" (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 17). It appears that the issue of validity places hermeneutic phenomenological researchers "between a rock and a soft place" (Lather, 1986). However, now that reports of qualitative studies across the various methods are being systematically scrutinized for their worth and quality so that the results can be effectively applied and realistically synthesized (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002), there is a heightened awareness of and a renewed call for intellectual rigour, coherence, and validity within the various qualitative traditions (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

We have an opportunity to keep our "understanding of validity in play, or, in motion, flexible, in flux" (Caputo, 1987, p. 263). Perhaps if we look at validity through a set of ethical reflections it will help us to "cope with the flux" (Caputo) that is demanded by hermeneutic phenomenology. It will let us stand, albeit slightly off balance, in the same world, while having extricated ourselves from the dominant scientific "method" or understanding of validity. Sobered but inspired by Scheurich's (1997) words quoted at the beginning of this article, we are commanded to face the problem of validity, not just in terms of what we can know as a result of engaging in this form of inquiry but also in terms of what we are to do during the research process. Numerous ethical questions pervade how we are to judge the quality of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. How can we do justice to stories about what has happened to particular participants at a particular time and place? Whose voice should be heard in the analysis and writing when new understandings come into the clearing? How can we preserve the diversity and character of our topic without reducing them to sameness?

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship of ethics to validity in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. First, we present an overview of the various discourses on validity in qualitative research that have been variously applied to hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

Next, we examine how relational ethics is a presence to bear within hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Finally, we offer a set of ethical reflections adapted from the work of Afaf I. Meleis (1996), which, when attended to, helps the researcher engage in a series of ethical questioning during each step of the research process. We do not claim to have found a high ground, nor do we seek a way out of the issue of validity; rather, we seek a meaningful way to stay and move with it, to create a new opening, not a resolution of the question of validity.

### **Validity at Play in Qualitative Research**

What, then, are the various criteria typically used to judge the validity of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry? Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, scholars in the qualitative domain worked hard to silence the voices of critics within the positivist paradigm by developing evaluation criteria that would meet the rigorous standards of its counterpart. This arose from the marginality of the qualitative research method in the context of academia and funding agencies (Kahn, 1993). It was assumed that if methodological trustworthiness and data truthfulness could be proven, then the findings would be considered legitimate knowledge. Original evaluation criteria included truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality and were an attempt to match the corresponding criteria used in the scientific paradigm — internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sparkes (2001) termed this the “replication perspective,” while Kahn referred to the criteria as “analogous language,” implying that the issue of validity is comparable in context to that of quantitative research.

Gradually, these criteria were deemed inappropriate by some and new criteria were developed. The following are examples of what have been considered criteria for evaluation: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); credibility, fittingness, auditability, and confirmability (Sandelowski, 1986); descriptive vividness, methodological congruence, analytic preciseness, theoretical connectedness, and heuristic relevance (Burns, 1989); credibility, confirmability, meaning-in-context, recurrent patterning, saturation, and transferability (Leininger, 1994); curiosity, confirmability, comparison, changing, collaborating, critiquing, and combinations (Chenail, 2000); and interpretation of subjective meaning, description of social context, evidence of theoretical or purposeful sampling, and evidence of adequate description (Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998). These criteria have been labelled “foundational” (Lincoln, 1995/2002) or the “parallel perspective” (Sparkes, 2001). Despite the label change, the central motive of evaluation remained virtually the same.

In the latter part of the 20th century, critics in the qualitative domain began to challenge “issues of representation and legitimization” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1049) and to question the foundational standards of evaluation. Findings from cultural, feminist, and action studies brought to light the strong empiricist influence within qualitative research. Consequently, attempts were made to develop evaluation criteria “more commensurate with the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative domain, returning the dialogue to the topics of ethics, vulnerability, and truth” (p. 1049). In fact, Sparkes (2001) identifies two evolving perspectives: “diversification of meanings,” and the “letting go of validity.” Proponents of the former perspective choose not to reject the concept of validity but to reconceptualize it in relation to particular forms of qualitative inquiry. Brink (1991) refers to this orientation as “the insider’s domain,” while Kahn (1993) calls it “metaphorical languaging.” For example, Lather (1986) initially developed her catalytic validity within her feminist, critical theory orientation but later (1993) added ironic, paralogical, rhizomic, and voluptuous validity, all of which she subsumed under the label transgressive validity. Lather (1993) addresses validity as a catalyst to discourse, “a fertile obsession,” and rewrites validity in a way that uses this postmodern difficulty to loosen the stronghold of positivism. In contrast, the champions of the “letting go of validity perspective” argue for the abandonment of the concept of validity and the seeking of alternative criteria with which to judge qualitative research. Wolcott (1994) is a proponent of this view, asking, “Should we not seek to have our work regarded as provocative rather than persuasive?” (p. 346):

And I do not accept validity as a valid criterion for guiding or judging my work. I think we have laboured far too long under the burden of this concept...that might have been better left where it began, a not-quite-so-singular-or-precise-criterion as I once believed it to be for matters related essentially to tests and measurement. (p. 369)

### **Relational Ethics in Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry**

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry does not set out to discover fixed essences (Caputo, 1987) or essential structures that can be determined once and for all; it is not assumed “that the voicing life must be *either* the single, isolated voice of difference (such that lived-experience turns out to be idiosyncratic and subjectivistic), *or* the clear and foreclosing voice of identity” (Jardine, 1998, p. 25). Rather, it seeks to understand what it means to be human and all the possibilities for being in this world (Heidegger, 1927/62). Understanding is enabled from the outset because there is already a living connectedness with the focus of the

researcher's inquiry. In other words, a sense of kinship with the Other's lived experiences is possible because the range of human desires, feelings, emotions, and hence meaning, is bound up with the level and type of culture we share, which in turn is inseparable from the distinctions and categories marked by the language that people speak (Taylor, 1985). Language and its expressive dimension allow us to: (a) bring to fuller and clearer consciousness that which we have only an implicit sense of; (b) put things in public space, thereby constituting and shaping the kind of space in which we can share something between each other; and (c) make the discriminations that are foundational to human concerns and hence that open us to these concerns (pp. 256–263).

However, this shared public understanding seductively creates a tendency for us to understand our everydayness of being-in-the-world in a superficial and conventional manner. The task, then, of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is to make more meaningful what it means to *Be* as human beings. But in saying this, Heidegger (1927/62) states that we must always be on guard against arbitrary “fancies and popular conceptions” (p. 195) and be willing to revise our point of view in light of what is uncovered or released in “the clearing” (p. 171). The awareness of existence requires that the everyday perspective of existence, which can be questioned only in particular cases, be shaken and disrupted (Gadamer, 1960/89, p. 268), although this does not suggest any kind of arbitrary rejection of what is already known and understood. The everyday perspective is never abandoned; it is transcended. Gadamer further holds that we must be ready to leave things open, to even tolerate a plurality of possible interpretations, because no single interpretation can really be exhaustive (p. 363).

To do so, understanding requires engagement, to become party to the conversation in order to keep it going, “to keep it alive, to dwell in the kinships, relations, and similarities it evokes” (Jardine, 1998, p. 27). This means bringing one's preconceptions to the interpretation of a text but then deliberately risking them in the encounter. The paradox is that this view can guide us to something new that raises the possibility of achieving deeper and richer understandings. According to Gadamer (1960/89), the vehicle that facilitates this process of understanding is participative, conversational, and dialogic, for it is only in a dialogical encounter with what makes a claim upon us that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our preconceptions; new understanding is achieved through a process of moving dialectically between a background of shared meaning (the whole) and a more finite focused experience within it (the part) through the continuous process of questioning; new meaning occurs in “the art of questioning,” which “is the art of questioning even further” (p. 367).

In conversation between two people, each party is open to and accepts the other's point of view for what it is — that is, the coming to a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1960/89). But fusion must not be confused with consensus. When we experience Other “truly as a thou,” we do “not overlook his claim but let him really say something to us” (p. 361). This relationship to Other is based on openness. We neither objectify nor claim to speak for Other. Instead, we are open to Other as someone who has his/her own autonomous position and claims. “At work is a conversation in which we seek to understand and address the independent claims of the other and, in turn, are addressed by them” (Warnke, 2002, p. 93).

“When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person ‘understands’ the other. ... [Rather] openness to the other... involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (Gadamer, 1960/89, p. 361). In other words, understanding occurs in keeping ourselves open to others' understandings, “in not thinking that something is known, for when we think we already know, we stop paying attention to what comes to meet us” (Moules, 2002, p. 23).

In hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, Others' stories are the vehicle through which meaning is shared. Stories inhabit the textuality and difference in lived experience, which is everything each human being thinks and does and hopes for. Embedded in stories are the particular ways that Beings are granted to be and to dwell. Through exchange with Others and learning through rich modes of human expression (such as stories), we not only “become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves” (Taylor, 1991, p. 33) but also “restore life to its original difficulty, to show that things never are what we say they are, that they do not have pure and unambiguous presence” (Caputo, 1987, p. 249). Perhaps it is this latter aspect in particular that calls for the listener to come to Others' stories with a certain compassion, a sense of togetherness, if you will, which arises precisely from the sense of this common fate of “suffering (*passio*) a common (*com*) comfortlessness” (Caputo, p. 259) of living with flux and the constraint of being unable to take hold of or show the meaning of something once and for all (Derrida, 1973/2002). Understanding what it means to be human “doesn't mean that [we] work it out in isolation, but that [we] negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others” (Taylor, 1991, p. 47). In other words, the complexity of some lived moments in life is encompassed in our minds with a story, not with theories or a system of ideas. “In one way or another, we will see these events in the light of our own principles — because stories inevitably demand ethical reasoning.... A story is always charged with meaning, otherwise it is not a story, merely

a sequence of events” (Fulford, 1999, p. 6). Therefore, the power of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is that it reminds us of what we know and calls us back to what we consider significant when we tell the story of our experience to another. In addition, Taylor argues that personal stories of life as actually experienced are a beginning of politics and that there is a powerful moral ideal in the search for authenticity. Therefore, exploring the meaning of a phenomenon as told through Others’ stories of their lived experiences can function in “counter-hegemonic ways, bringing into critical focus the institutions of governance, economic control, educational institutions, the media, and so on” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1034).

Given the ambiguous and open-ended quality of experience, sharing one’s lived experience gives a measure of coherence and continuity that is not available at the original moment of experience. Consequently, there comes a sense of morality — unspoken but practical answers to how we should live. This morality is not fixed but is constantly being revised in subsequent (re)tellings, including those that put different emphases on old tellings. The purpose of (re)calling and (re)telling experiences, the meanings of which are often deeply embedded in the rich allegorical nature of our language, reflects a desire to grasp and seize the possibilities of meaning rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived. Thus stories are ontological in nature. They are a means of fashioning experience in language (recognizing that language, like Hermes, can play tricks and is part of the flux). Therefore, the opportunity for authenticity and moral development is provided through the storytelling that occurs in the dialogical relation of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

“Science is meaningless,” wrote Tolstoy, “because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important to us — what shall we do and how shall we live?” (cited in Frank, 2002). The dialogical relation that occurs in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry provides an occasion when one can co-author responses to Tolstoy’s great question, to find meanings that go beyond the purely practical and technical (Frank). The dialogical relation that occurs within the text as told by Others becomes an occasion for Others to open the venue of ethics, the place where ethical existence occurs. Others call us into question in the dialogical relation and (re)call our responsibility to them through understanding our kinship with them, through understanding, not severing, the threads that already bind us.

Consequently, the analysis in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry entails extensive ethical obligations. The researcher does not simply record and analyze data as text but assents to enter into a relationship with Other. The researcher becomes part of Other’s ongoing struggle



towards a moral life as well as societies' ongoing struggle to attain the ethic of authenticity, what Taylor (1991) terms "la lotta continua" (p. 71). Doing this type of research means that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living and serves as a form of moral education. Asking Others to tell about their lived experiences implies value, attributes reality, and confers affirmation of choice on both the individual(s) and the communities of which they are a part (Taylor, 1991). Gergen and Gergen (2000) write that different cultures (e.g., ethnic or professional) invite different stories and therefore different expectations of those stories from audiences. Because individuals live and narrate their lives in time and place, they provide us with knowledge about much more than themselves. Individuals are products of social interchange and as a result contain elements of universality. "This is why we see ourselves and others as part of, and in or out of synchrony with, history and culture, although we may not always recognize it" (Sandelowski, 1996, p. 119). Perhaps it is here that we (re)cognize the strength, firmness, and power of the thing — that is, the validity of the research findings. Perhaps, too, it is here that we can (re)cognize the irreducibly multivalent nature of a phenomenon as lived experience. Viewed in this way, validity, like valency, is concerned with the power or capacity to both combine with and displace other meanings and understandings — in other words, to keep our understandings in play.

Yet it is of concern that, in our need to be taken seriously, the potential power of stories has been diluted by claiming quantitative notions of validity, notions that tend to silence stories rather than invite them to resonate in polyvocal ways (Burns-McCoy, 1997). Thus, our concerns relate to the (re)presentation of Other, power or dominance in the researcher-participant relationship, and the claim that the text of Other may be inaccurate, untrue, or incomplete. hooks (1990) argues that in an attempt to comply with foundational standards of validity, the hermeneutic researcher assumes a position of control or dominance:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk. (p. 69)

Burns-McCoy (1997) suggests that the methodological framework of the conventional evaluation criteria drives the study forward and becomes the researcher's voice, organizing, choosing, interpreting, and

silencing (p. 9). Scheurich (1997) takes this position of dominance one step further, having found support for his view in Minh-ha's (1989) contention that the Western project is an attempt "to annihilate the Other through a false incorporation" by the Same (p. 66):

If I completely control the (O)ther, then the (O)ther ceases to exist.... In such a relationship, one side (the Same) maintains its boundaries (i.e., its validity); while the Other (the raw untheorized world) must, to gain acceptance and legitimacy, lose itself within the Same — must convert to and, thus, become the Same. The Same relentlessly seeks to capture and theorize more data in an attempt to attain and maintain power. (Scheurich, p. 86)

Olthius (2000) argues that in this period of modernity "the dominant culture in the West developed liberal stratagems of toleration of the strange and different which tended to bracket, deny, ignore, dismiss, or consume the very characteristics which constitute uniqueness or difference" (p. 1). For Scheurich (1997), converting Other into Same (thus undermining the multiple differences revealed in the unfolding particularities) is as dangerous as maintaining a concept of dualism (with the danger of Other remaining marginalized or prejudicially different and therefore lacking in power) (p. 89). As a result, he argues, by holding onto the term validity, even those who seek a radical reconstruction of what it means are fighting a lost cause due to the cultural baggage this term carries. Because validity acts as a mask for a boundary or serves a policing function across both foundational approaches and more radical alternatives, an unsettling and disturbing sameness across multiple paradigms is created.

Burns-McCoy (1997) laments that "even when our methodologies establish postpositive frameworks that acknowledge situated, constructivist readings, they still work to stabilize meaning as well as assume acceptable and expected cultural retellings" (p. 2). Accordingly, the criteria for validity are the expected trappings that set up an audience for another cultural (re)telling — "we frame the text so tightly with report-like presentation of methodology, that the polyvocality of the text is stifled, its resonance muffled" (p. 2). She posits what we believe to be the ultimate provocative question, and the one of primary importance:

Do you question the credibility and validity of my story? On the one hand, my story is incredulous. On the other hand my story is sensible and fits neatly into my world, into other's experiences, into our material realities, for when we do find avenue into purposeful self-expression, when we are no longer silenced, when our outward acts align with our internal desires, we our transformed and our worlds transform. (p. 6)

Thus there is a moral imperative within the process of establishing validity in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Researchers use their subject-object position of dominance to silence Other's voice and maintain Other's marginalized position if they only change perspectives within the scholarly narration (report of findings) without changing social positions. Kahn (1993) argues that the need for the researcher to account for several relationships is at the heart of the hermeneutic research process.

A new way of discussing validity, then, might be grounded productively in a language constructed around three key relationships. The first is the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Ethical questioning starts with the influence of the researcher on the process, particularly regarding the social interactions themselves. As Shotter (2005) notes, "As soon as I begin an interchange of looks with another person, and I sense them as looking toward me in a certain way (as they see me looking toward them in the same way too), a little ethical and political world is created between us" (p. 104). Knapik (2006), for example, queries: How did elements of mutual trust or mistrust, social attractiveness, or gender differences enter into the situation? What interpretations were participants making of the researcher?

The second relationship is that of the researcher with the data, which should be moved away from the linear form of collection to coding to analysis with recognition of the actual circularity of the process. For example, how and when did aspects of the interpretation emerge, and in what forms? How were the interpretations challenged and tested over the course of the study?

The third relationship is that of the researcher with the readers. Both the researcher and the reader must *leap into* the text with a hermeneutic attitude — that is, with a sense of attentiveness, empathy, sensitivity, carefulness, respect, reflection, engagement, conscientiousness, awareness (Davies & Dodd, 2002), open-mindedness, and open-heartedness (Dahlberg & Drew, 1997). Hermeneutic phenomenological researchers must invite the reader to open the door to the experience of this otherness, while the reader must be willing to continue the engagement of dialectic, to be drawn into the implications of meaning, to pick up the thread of meaning and become part of the whole (Jardine, 1992). The reader must be open to the idea that not all interpretations will work for everyone. Indeed, the reader must engage in the same dialectical process, particularly when the findings "haunt or frustrate or resist or provoke" (Jardine, 1992, p. viii). The findings cannot simply be dismissed as untrue or untrustworthy. The reader must also come to the researcher's text with an openness of heart and mind that will allow him/herself "the luxury and the risk of getting lost in [the] huge forest of the text — and then

suddenly noticing something vaguely familiar, or glimpsing something moving out of the corner of [one's] eye, or following a rocky side trail of traces and footprints that stop at the sheer edge of a cliff" (p. vi).

### **Putting Ethics in the Evaluation of Validity in Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry**

As noted by Caputo (1987), the notion of flux that underpins hermeneutic phenomenology "does not leave action behind, does not let us enter a new world, make a leap into a different sphere where there is no longer any need to act. The thought of the flux remains always and already in the same sphere, faced with the demand to act but now with a transformed relationship to action" (p. 239). Where are we to turn, whence are we to get guidance and direction, if we view validity from an ethics of evaluation? We suggest that Meleis's (1996) work on the development of criteria to ensure culturally competent scholarship, work based on a relational ethic of care, can be woven through the three key relationships of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Addressing the ethical questions associated with four criteria, namely contextuality, communication styles, awareness of identity and power differential, and disclosure, is one way to evaluate the process of this form of inquiry.

#### ***Contextuality***

Meleis (1996) writes that knowledge without a context leads to marginalization of the populations under study and to stereotyping of groups. Context includes sensitivity to structural conditions that contribute to participants' responses and to the interpretations of situations informed by experiences, by validation of perceptions, and by careful review of existing knowledge. Rather than separating Others' experiences from the contexts in which they occur, the researcher recognizes Others' everyday experiences as inextricably connected to the political, social, and economic environment. In this way, the complexity of Others' reality is also emphasized and explicated. Both the researcher and the reader, engaging in the language of ethics-in-action, ask the following questions:

Has the researcher provided a thick description of events by describing them in their context? Have those thick descriptions been incorporated inside their temporal and narrative contexts? Have the concrete particulars of the particular people at particular places and times been provided? (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005, pp. 177–178)

Have the "voices" and "stories" of individuals been connected back to the set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated? (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 126)

What are the traditions in which we participate that are relevant to the phenomenon under study? (Gadamer, 1960/89, pp. 3–42)

Similarly, the researcher clearly reveals and discloses his/her own context. By making these horizons explicit, the reader and participants can become aware of how the questioning is able to seek insight rather than confirm beliefs. When assumptions are unrecognized or disregarded, understanding is incomplete and Other's voice will remain hidden. Emphasizing that understanding is a dialectical process, the writing generously discloses, not only in the account of the questions asked of the Other, but in the questions the researcher asked of self, Others' experiences, and relevant texts as they unfold throughout the process. In the end, validity "lies in the ability of the researcher to be honestly open to the world" (Dahlberg, 1995, p. 190). The researcher and the reader need to ask the following questions that we believe emerge from the writings of Gadamer (1960/89), Jardine (1992), and Taylor (1991): How were the stories related to the researcher's own sociocultural context, history, and traditions? How was the researcher surprised by what the stories revealed about the phenomenon and its meaning for living in this world? Does the researcher take the measure of herself, her limitations, her confusions, ambivalence? How were the researcher and the participants changed by coming into "the clearing," and why?

### ***Communication Styles***

Another way to evaluate the process is "the extent to which the scholarly interpretations demonstrate critical understanding of preferred communication styles for the research participants and their communities, including the most congruent design for the population's communication style" (Meleis, 1996, p. 11). The evaluation would include evidence of understanding of (or attempts to understand) the subtleties and variations inherent in language, as well as symbols used. Attentiveness to communication styles demonstrates a respect for and sensitivity to language, connotation, and lifestyle. Linked to this is what Hall and Stevens (1991) call "naming." Hall and Stevens define naming as "learning to see beyond and behind what one has been socialized to believe is there" (p. 26). It is addressing Others' lives in their own terms and generating concepts through words directly expressive of their experiences. These authors contend that naming has two powers: "It defines the value of that which is named by the emphasis of selecting it and it denies reality to that which is never named" (p. 26).

Understanding of communication style is also demonstrated in the production of the research report. Richardson (1994) saw the use of a mechanistic model of writing intended for quantitative research as an abdication of our responsibility to our participants, data, and readers:

Unlike quantitative work, which can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work depends upon people's reading it. Just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its "plot summary," qualitative research is not contained in its abstracts. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading. (p. 517)

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquirers are ethically required to capture and preserve Others' experiences, even as they paradoxically understand that this is not possible. All they can hope for is to find a way to (re)present the experience for the reader in such a way as to cause an evocation, "to *express* meaning rather than *state* it" (Norris, 1997, p. 93). In order to highlight that which has been released, the hermeneutic researcher as writer may deliberately "disrupt, find and cultivate the familiar" (Moules, 2002, p. 31), potentially leaving the reader with the impression of exaggeration. Validity would be recognized if the reader were engaged in the phenomenon as lived by self and Other in such a way that s/he is willing to open the door to a room and take a journey to a door on the other wall (Jardine, 1992). The researcher and the reader therefore would ask the following questions that emerge from the provocative arguments of Denzin (2002), Jardine (1992), and Richardson (1994): Does the researcher seek to empower the other by writing in the distinctive styles, rhythms, and cultural dialect of the participants? Does the language make you feel the feelings of the characters, smell the smells, see the sights, hear the sounds, as though you were there? Is the language used in such a way that it brings people together in understanding? Is the language free of prejudice, repression, and discrimination? Does the researcher allow the reader to join the conversation through the use of the participants' symbolic and allegorical language?

### ***Awareness of Identity and Power Differential***

It is unrealistic to think we can eliminate the vertical power structure and rigid separation of identities. "A researcher and a participant can never possess equal power; they are differentiated by knowledge, boundaries, power, and the purpose of the encounter" (Meleis, 1996, p. 11). Consequently, validity would be recognized by evidence that the researcher is cognizant of the power differential (Meleis). There would be evidence of both a movement towards fluidity in boundaries and a process to decrease hierarchical differences. It is within the dynamics of relational ethics that one is able to see the diminishing of the boundaries and margins created by the vertical power structure. Gadamer (1960/89) even suggests:

When we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but...we try to transpose ourselves into the

perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. If we want to understand, we will try to make his arguments even stronger. (p. 292)

To facilitate the achievement of this goal the researcher must believe that knowledge is held to be jointly constructed by researchers and participants. For example, Knapik (2006) suggests that this would require the researcher to notice, both in the moment of the interview and during data analysis, who made what relevant and what prompted shifts in focus. For example, the researcher would provide evidence of how s/he was able to establish more horizontal relationships and develop shared authority and ownership of the data. The researcher could share his/her draft manuscripts with readers close to the setting, thus checking for “narrowness of vision, prejudices, and focus” (Moules, 2002, p. 32). This would help to ensure that the generative nature of interpretation has been honoured and kept in play. Emergent disagreements and criticisms, when viewed in relation to other data sources, would signal a need to (re)evaluate conceptualizations and/or interpret new insights, all of which would need to be reported and discussed. The researcher and the reader would therefore ask the following:

Have some constituencies or participants reviewed the material with the researcher and interpreted, dissented, challenged the interpretations?  
How did these disagreements/agreements in perspective get reported?  
(Fine et al., 2000, p. 126)

This does not mean that the participant’s reading of his/her own story is above and before all others. It must be remembered that the topic is *not* the participants, nor should the writing be a *portrait* of the participants (Moules). However, with this acknowledgement, neither does the interpretation of the generative meaning(s) of the text belong only to the researcher. “In this game [of interpretation] nobody is above and before all others; everybody is at the center” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 32). Therefore, discrepancies between accounts, whether given by one person or different persons, would not be treated as if one of the accounts were wrong, but rather would be a directive to keep the conversation alive and in flux.

Researchers as interpreters need to reveal themselves, their investments, and their position in the production of knowledge and the making of meaning, as well as the power of Others as meaning-makers (Russel y Rodriguez, 1998). The researcher, the participants, and the reader must all work at revealing their own assumptions and power to define the discourse and the authority to assert fact. We need to see in the writing when the researcher has placed his/her ideas squarely in the centre, when those of Others have been placed in the centre, and those

that are a fusion of horizons. The reader should be able to discern how the space of Others is desired, invited, and granted, while accounting for the researcher's own investment in the metaphors, values, and meanings. This is demonstrated when the researcher has resisted the temptation to reduce or distil the lives of Others to a central motivation and has instead lived with and revealed the complexity and ambiguity of their responses (Watson, 2005). If the researcher and the reader are mindful of Others' identity and power differential, they will ask:

How far did the researcher go with respect to theorizing the words of participants? Has the researcher worked to understand his/her own contribution to the materials/narrations provided and those silenced? Has the researcher worked to explain to readers the position from which participants speak? Has the researcher worked to recast the person(s) whom the participants choose to "blame" or credit for social justice or injustice? Has the researcher considered how these data could be used for progressive, conservative, repressive social policies? How might data be heard? Misread? Misappropriated? Does the researcher need to add a "warning" about potential misuse? (Fine et al., 2000, pp. 126–127)

### ***Disclosure***

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry seeks to open up the social world in all its dynamic dimensions, which means recognizing that lives are replete with multiple interpretations and grounded in cultural complexity. Linking this notion to disclosure, Meleis (1996) suggests that "research in a human science is predicated on authenticity of data, not on participants passing as nonmarginalized" (p. 12). She argues that marginalized groups keep their identities secret and attempt to pass as mainstream. Therefore, one of the tasks of the researcher is to uncover Others' experiences in ways that appear authentic to the participants/insiders and are understandable to the reader/outside. Authenticity, as discussed earlier, is a dialogical achievement. This requires the development of a sense of trust. "Unless relationships of trust and openness are developed, there can be no confidence that the research accurately represents what is significant to [the other] in their everyday lives" (Hall & Stevens, 1991, p. 22).

Researchers, then, would demonstrate evidence of trust-building. Hall and Stevens (1991) suggest that disclosure (and therefore the degree of trust established in the relationship) can be evaluated in a number of ways, such as by the depth and specificity of information shared, verbal and non-verbal indications of Others' comfort and openness, and Others' willingness to be involved over a period of time. Christians (2000) adds: "The research account should possess that amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical conscious-



ness to be formed by the reader. Such accounts should also exhibit representational adequacy, including the absence of racial, class, and gender stereotyping” (p. 145). The account, in other words, would demonstrate life as it is lived in its original difficulty (Jardine, 1998), filled with tensions and paradoxical complexities, meanings, and understandings that change over time.

Likewise, the researcher needs to build a sense of trust in the relationship with the reader, disclosing meanings and understandings of self and Other. As Kvale (1995/2002) states, “With the conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood, the nature of the discourse becomes essential” (p. 314). The complexities of validating hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry rest upon the researcher’s and the reader’s ability to picture and to question the complexity of the social reality investigated. As a result, ambiguity and contradictory beliefs will be inherent in the findings. If the researcher and the reader are mindful of the evidence of disclosure, they will ask the following questions that we believe emerge from the writings of Hall and Stevens (1991) and Moules (2002): Has the researcher disclosed his/her own pre-understandings and vulnerabilities? What surprised the researcher and what did the researcher do when participants brought forth something unanticipated? Does the researcher reveal the complex, ambiguous, uncertain, and chaotic nature of living the experience? At the same time, does the research attend to the ways in which there is a struggle to find coherence and a resistance to fragmentation and marginalization? Are the paradoxes inherent in being human in the lived experience revealed? Does the researcher’s account express a tale of multiple selves? Can the reader see and enter into the layering and de-layering of understanding through questioning?

[Is there] abundant, concrete detail; concern not only for the commonplace, even trivial routines of everyday life, but also for the flesh and blood emotions of people coping with life’s contingencies; not only facts but also feelings? Are the narratives structurally complex, told within a temporal framework that rotates between past and present reflecting the nonlinear process of memory work — the curve of time? (Bochner, 2002, p. 263)

### **Concluding Remarks**

There has been an ongoing struggle to answer the question, What is validity and how should it be evaluated in qualitative research? “The various proposals of evaluation criteria have made the field infinitely more complicated, but also infinitely more responsive, rich, and politically and ethically sensitive and complex” (Lincoln, 1995/2002, p. 330). An ethics

of evaluation has been purposely made prominent as another way of affirming its presence — in the sense described by Caputo (1987) — as an openness to the mystery of things and the mystery of the play of the world that hermeneutics is bent on restoring. Perhaps validity can be addressed meaningfully through a set of ethical questions that gazes towards the relational ethics inherent in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. We believe that by putting validity back into play in this way, we will help to ensure that Other(s) are less likely to be subsumed within the Same and also that the study is able to provide new insights into the phenomenon of interest for both self and Other(s). Equally important, engagement in ethical questioning will help to ensure that this form of inquiry does not become a means for the world to gaze voyeuristically upon Other(s). Moreover, ethical questioning is congruent with the behavioural expectations of relational ethics (Gadow, 1999), or what Olthius (2000) calls an ethics of difference, and thus offers an alternative to rational objectivity as the basis of validity. Ethical questioning expresses the willingness of the researcher to hold open an intersubjective space in which difference can unfold in its particularity. This notion of intersubjectivity, part of the postmodern turn, recognizes that “the valuing of persons requires perception of each one’s uniqueness, and perception involves engagement” (Gadow, p. 63). This difference can be achieved through dialogue and collaboration between the researcher and the Other (be it the research participants or the readers of research). Validity in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is “not the puppet of some method but is forced to make its own way without metaphysical, methodological assurances. Science and reason remain displaced, kept slightly off balance, robbed of their security — but liberated and put back into play” (Caputo, p. 239).

## References

- Bochner, A. P. (2002). Criteria against ourselves. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The qualitative inquiry reader* (pp. 257–265). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brink, P.J. (1991). Issues of reliability and validity. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Qualitative nursing research: A contemporary dialogue* (rev. ed.) (pp. 164–185). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Brinkman, S., & Kvale, S. (2005). Confronting the ethics of qualitative research. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18, 157–181.
- Burns, N. (1989). Standards for qualitative research. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 2, 44–52.
- Burns-McCoy, N. (1997). *Water is to chocolate like story is to qualitative research: Questioning credibility and narrative studies*. Retrieved January 20, 2002, from <http://www.lib.wmc.edu/pub/jcp/issueI-2/burns-mccoy.html>.

- Caputo, J. D. (1987). *Radical hermeneutics: Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chenail, R. J. (2000). Navigating the “seven C’s”: Curiosity, confirmation, comparison, changing, collaborating, critiquing, and combinations. *The qualitative report* [Online serial], 4(3/4). Retrieved May 22, 2002, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssw/QR/QR2004-2003/sevencs.html>.
- Christians, C. G. (2000). Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 133–162). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dahlberg, N. (1995). Qualitative methodology as caring science methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science*, 9, 187–191.
- Dahlberg, K., & Drew, N. (1997). A lifeworld paradigm for nursing research. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 15(3), 303–317.
- Davies, D., & Dodd, J. (2002). Qualitative research and the question of rigor. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(2), 279–289.
- Denzin, N. K. (2002). The practices and politics of interpretation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 897–922). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Derrida, J. (2002). Différance. In D. Moran & T. Mooney (Eds.), *The phenomenological reader* (pp. 555–572). New York: Routledge. (Reprinted from *Speech and phenomena and other essays on Husserl’s theory of signs*, pp. 129–160, D. B. Allison, Trans., 1973, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S., & Wong, L. (2000). For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 107–131). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Frank, A. (2002). Why study people’s stories? The dialogical ethics of narrative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(1), Article 6. Retrieved January 27, 2002, from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>.
- Fulford, R. (1999). *The triumph of narrative*. Toronto: Anansi.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1977). *Philosophical hermeneutics* (D. E. Linge, Trans. & Ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1989). *Truth and method* (2nd rev. ed.) (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). New York: Crossroad. (Original work published 1960)
- Gadow, S. (1999). Relational narrative: The postmodern turn in nursing ethics. *Scholarly Inquiry for Nursing Practice: An International Journal*, 13(1), 57–70.
- Gergen, M., & Gergen, K. (2000). Qualitative inquiry: Tensions and transformations. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1025–1046). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hall, J., & Stevens, P. (1991). Rigor in feminist research. *Advanced Nursing Science*, 13(3), 16–29.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (Original work published 1927)
- hooks, b. (1990). Marginality as a site of resistance. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Minh-ha, & C. West (Eds.), *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures* (pp. 341–343). New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press.

- Jardine, D. (1992). *Speaking with a boneless tongue*. Bragg Creek, AB: Mākyō Press.
- Jardine, D. (1998). *To dwell with a boundless heart*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kahn, D. L. (1993). Ways of discussing validity in qualitative nursing research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 15, 122–126.
- Knapik, M. (2006). The qualitative research interview: Participants' responsive participation in knowledge making. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), Article 6. Retrieved October 15, 2006, from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5\\_3/pdf/knapik.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_3/pdf/knapik.pdf).
- Kvale, S. (2002). The social construction of validity. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The qualitative inquiry reader* (pp. 299–325). (Reprinted from *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(1), 1995, 19–40)
- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, 17(4), 63–84.
- Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after poststructuralism. *Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 673–693.
- Leininger, M. (1994). Evaluation criteria critique of qualitative research studies. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 95–115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (2002). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The qualitative inquiry reader* (pp. 327–345). (Reprinted from *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(3), 1995, 275–289)
- Lincoln, Y., & Denzin, N. K. (2000). The seventh moment: Out of the past. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1047–1065). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. In Y. Lincoln & E. Guba, *Naturalistic inquiry* (pp. 289–331). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Meleis, A. I. (1996). Culturally competent scholarship: Substance and rigor. *Advanced Nursing Science*, 19(2), 1–16.
- Minh-ha, T. T. (1989). *Woman native other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), Article 2. Retrieved May 2, 2002, from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1\\_2Final/html/morse.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/html/morse.htm).
- Moules, N. J. (2002). Hermeneutic inquiry: Paying heed to history and Hermes. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(3), Article 1. Retrieved July 30, 2003, from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>.
- Norris, J. (1997). Meaning through form: Alternate modes. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Completing a qualitative project: Details and dialogue* (pp. 87–115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Olthius, J. (2000). Exclusions and inclusions: Dilemmas of differences. In J. Olthius (Ed.), *Towards an ethics of community: Negotiations of difference in a pluralist society* (pp. 1–10). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University.
- Popay, J., Rogers, A., & Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic reviews of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(3), 341–351.

- Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 516–529). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Russell y Rodriguez, M. (2002). Confronting anthropology's silencing praxis: Speaking of/from a Chicana consciousness. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(1), 1998, 15–40.
- Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advanced Nursing Science*, 8(3), 27–37.
- Sandelowski, M. (1996). Truth/storytelling in nursing inquiry. In J. F. Kikuchi, H. Simmons, & D. Romyn (Eds.), *Truth in nursing inquiry* (pp. 111–124). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2002). Finding the findings in qualitative studies. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 34, 213–219.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1997). The masks of validity: A deconstructive investigation. In *Research method in the post modern* (pp. 80–92). London: Falmer.
- Shotter, J. (2005). Acknowledging unique others: Ethics, “expressive realism,” and social constructivism. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18, 103–130.
- Sparkes, A. (2001). Myth 94: Qualitative health researchers will agree about validity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(4), 538–552.
- Taylor, C. (1985). Theories of meaning. In C. Taylor, *Human agency and language: Philosophical papers*, Vol. 1 (pp. 248–292). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The malaise of modernity*. Toronto: Anansi.
- Thorne, S., Reimer Kirkham, S., & O'Flynn-Magee, K. (2004). The analytic challenge in interpretive description. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 1–17. Retrieved April 23, 2004, from [http://www.ualberta.ca/iikum/backissues/3\\_1/pdf/thorneetal.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/iikum/backissues/3_1/pdf/thorneetal.pdf).
- Trumble, W. R., & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). (2002). *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (5th ed.), Vols. 1–20. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Warnke, G. (2002). Hermeneutics, ethics, and politics. In R. J. Dostal (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Gadamer* (pp. 79–101). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson, C. (2005, April). Living the life of the social inquirer: Beginning educational research [67 paragraphs]. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [online journal], 6(2), Article 28. Retrieved March 4, 2007, from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-05/05-2-28-e.htm>.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). On seeking — and rejecting — validity in qualitative research. In H. F. Wolcott, *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation* (pp. 337–371). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### Authors' Note

The paper on which this article is based was supported by an Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, a Ludmyla Zujewskij Memorial Scholarship, and a Jannetta MacPhail Award to Judy Rashotte.

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Comments or queries may be directed to Judy Rashotte, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, 401 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8L1 Canada. E-mail: rashotte@echo.on.ca.

---

*Judy Rashotte, RN, PhD, CNCCP(C), is Director, Nursing Research, and Knowledge Transfer Consultant, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Ottawa, Canada. Louise Jensen, RN, PhD, is Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.*