

L'herméneutique interprétative et la modification d'une conception moderne de la méthode

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Les chercheurs en sciences humaines doivent de nos jours relever un défi, celui de reconnaître l'importance de créer un horizon de signification commun dans le cadre de leur travail. Pour atteindre cet objectif, ces derniers doivent comprendre l'effet qu'entraîne le choix d'un cadre conceptuel, c.-à-d. un rétrécissement qui influe sur leur connaissance et leur compréhension de l'individu. L'approche méthodologique de l'herméneutique philosophique interprétative met l'accent sur le fait que l'apprentissage issu de l'expérience s'étend au-delà des rétrécissements imposés par des méthodes formalisées et offre une façon de pensée médiane dans le cadre de la rencontre en contexte de recherche. Cet article explore les possibilités de l'herméneutique interprétative, notamment la façon dont elle peut élargir la notion de recherche et permettre non seulement d'acquérir des connaissances mais aussi d'accéder à une compréhension. Pour ce faire, il se penche sur l'herméneutique philosophique de Gadamer, qui amène les chercheurs à intégrer un éventail de perspectives philosophiques plutôt que d'adopter une méthode philosophique particulière. La recherche intégrant l'herméneutique philosophique interprétative comporte un élément clé, soit l'importance accordée à l'expérience humaine.

Mots clés : herméneutique interprétative, expérience humaine

Best Practices for Research

Interpretive Hermeneutics and Modifying the Modern Idea of Method

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A challenge currently facing human sciences researchers is recognizing the importance of creating a shared horizon of meaning in their work. To move towards this goal, researchers require an awareness of how their chosen conceptual framework creates a stricture through which they know and understand the individual. The methodological approach of philosophical interpretive hermeneutics emphasizes that what is learned from experience extends beyond the strictures of formalized method, thus offering a middle way of thinking in the research encounter. This article explores how interpretive hermeneutics can broaden the notion of research from one of simply knowing to one of understanding. It does so by engaging with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, where researchers strive to embrace a constellation of philosophical outlooks rather than a specific philosophical method. A key insight in research involving philosophical interpretive hermeneutics is its emphasis on human experience.

Keywords: advanced nursing practice and education, philosophy and theory, interpretive hermeneutics, human experience

Carefully constructed research frameworks and formalized methods offer the most respected research approaches available to human sciences researchers. Although these methods are of great value, especially in the realm of the health professions, the inclusion of other ways of engaging in human sciences research is equally important but presents a considerable challenge. Part of this challenge is the fact that formalized methods offer researchers a well-organized, clearly delineated path — a conceptual framework — to the acquisition of knowledge. Such knowledge helps to inform the calculative reasoning and objective ways of knowing that are an important part of the health professions, but are these methods sufficient when employed as the predominant mode of research?

A detailed reflection on the philosophical underpinnings that shape human sciences researchers' vision of the world and their interpretation and communication of the human condition are presented here as a way of disrupting the boundaries and dogmatism of current understanding

and its application to research. This reflection highlights why it is important in human sciences research to strive towards the goal of creating a shared horizon of meaning. This article explores how the methodological approach of interpretive hermeneutics can broaden the notion of research from a concern mainly with cognitive knowledge to one that also values experiential understanding. An interpretive hermeneutic research approach will be of interest to researchers who want not only to know but to understand human experiences that are particular to their work, such as the experience of chronic illness.

Human Sciences Research and Formalized Methods

Individuals have an innate need for deeply felt human experiences that express vitality and life energy, yet both our history and our culture create a tension for and against this need. This tension is not limited to our personal experiences; it is also apparent in many of our professional undertakings, including health-care research. From a historical and cultural perspective, we live in a time when the analysis and methodological questioning of researchers often operate from a strong system of formalized beliefs.

During the 20th century the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1883–1989), one of the pioneers of modern Western philosophy, called attention to formalized methods in human sciences research and the limitations they create. Concerned with the tendency in the human sciences to take on the norms and ways of thinking of the natural sciences and apply them to the study of individuals (Palmer, 1969), Dilthey reacted against the rationalistic sciences by indicating their inadequacy in understanding human phenomena (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). As one of the first modern-day researchers to pioneer an approach to human phenomena, Dilthey promoted the importance of meaning in human experience (Dilthey, 1976).

In many ways, today's human sciences researchers demonstrate both their historical and their cultural situatedness. A host of early life philosophers, including José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), and Georg Simmel (1858–1918), set the stage for the research approaches that are best suited for interpreting human phenomena (Palmer, 1969). A common finding amongst these approaches for the interpretation of human phenomena is the desire to get at the experiential fullness of our human existence in the world.

Methodological Challenges in Interpretive Phenomenology

Researchers who situate themselves in the world of philosophical interpretive hermeneutics face a considerable challenge related to the lack of

articulated methods. While traditional research approaches offer definitive methods that include well-organized conceptual frameworks with detailed techniques and procedures, phenomenological researchers are without a method and are stimulated to learn about the philosophical underpinnings that shape their vision of the world and how they can work towards the interpretation and communication of the human condition (Caelli, 2001). Both Gadamer (1972/89) and van Manen (1997a, 1997b) explain that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach has no method available from which to direct a human sciences investigation. In fact, Gadamer questions any method that tries to turn philosophy into a purely methodological enterprise (Grondin, 2003). According to Palmer (1969), the work of interpretive hermeneutics is not so much to develop a procedure for understanding as to clarify the conditions upon which understanding takes place. Caputo (1987) also offers cautionary insight into the challenges surrounding method: to remain so highly focused on method makes science subservient to method, so that method rules instead of liberating. Caputo encourages researchers to maintain a focus on *methodos* or *meta-odos*, meaning the way we choose to pursue a matter.

The search for method demonstrates researchers' desire for legitimacy in an academic world that keeps human sciences researchers questing for a map that will legitimate their efforts (Angen, 2000). Bernstein (1985) writes that strict methodological procedures developed in an effort to minimize the taint of subjective bias, prejudice, and tradition and to prevent distortion of what he calls the purity of the results. In keeping with this idea, traditional methodological procedures prompt researchers to enter the research encounter with a preliminary way of seeing that which stands before them. In turn, this perspective offers researchers a sense of confidence so that they do not need to call into question their guiding presuppositions and thus can operate in such a way that the answer is always potentially present and expected within the system (Palmer, 1969, p. 233). For example, I may be interested in researching the influence of health professionals' supportive care on individuals hospitalized for a chronic illness. My guiding presupposition is that supportive care is strongly associated with the knowledge and skill level exhibited by health professionals. This presupposition with which I enter the research encounter diminishes the possibility of questioning or bringing into dispute what I, as a researcher, believe to be the critical features of supportive care. What is also being minimized in this research encounter is the context of an individual's hospitalization for a chronic illness: it is an incurable illness and, because of its persistent nature, individuals may identify the attitude of the health professional as the most important aspect of care during hospitalization (Shaw, 2007). In other words, presuppositions can minimize the possibility of an open dialogue between

the researcher and the research participant that would help to clarify the conditions for understanding, as well as to expand each individual's horizon of meaning.

It is important to enter the research encounter with preparatory knowledge. The difficulty lies in how this knowledge informs the use of methodological procedures that can limit the researchers' scope of vision and openness to the array of human experiences that stand before them. When researchers approach their phenomenon of concern guided by assumptions that they are not prepared to dispute or question, what likelihood is there of uncovering new knowledge and new understanding? Koch (1996) speaks of the need to be less attentive to method and more concerned with methodology. For Koch, methodology is "the process by which insights about the world and human condition are generated, interpreted, and communicated" (p. 174).

Interpretive hermeneutics offers a movement away from traditional research and its focus on method and methodology. Gadamer (1972/89) reminds us that the human sciences are about our very being, and that, as researchers, we must consider the social, historical, and temporal nature of life. For that reason, interpretive hermeneutic research is based on a very different understanding of experience.

The Humanist Tradition and Human Sciences Research

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) made a tremendous contribution to 20th-century thought by proposing a different approach to the human sciences and their concern with human phenomena. Gadamer highlights this approach by drawing attention to the significance of the humanist tradition for the human sciences. Subsequently, Gadamer stresses his conviction that method alone will not determine the scientific relevance of the human sciences (Grondin, 1997): the experiences of the socio-historical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedures of the natural sciences (Gadamer, 1972/89, p. 4). Gadamer takes issue with the prevailing concept of experience, especially within human sciences research (Taylor, 2002). Experience, as it is currently understood, is orientated to a form of knowing that is highly perceptual in nature and identifies knowledge as a body of conceptual data (Gadamer, 1972/89). This orientation can negate the experiential fullness of our human existence and how our history and culture inform what is known and what is understood. Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1972/89) offers detailed insight into the humanist tradition and the recent historical changes that have created a methodological bias that values the use of rigorous methods in human sciences research.

The humanist tradition underwent noteworthy changes with the introduction of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). As Grondin (1997) explains, the Kantian turning point marks a period when the human sciences were compelled to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in order to enhance their own scientific relevance (Gadamer, 1989, p. 41). Gadamer recognizes the value of methodological paradigms but cautions against their unquestioned adoption in the research setting. He thereby reacquaints the researcher with the humanist tradition, which in turn helps to bring the researcher closer to the human sciences (Grondin, 2003).

In this tradition, humanism encompasses a sense of direction that an individual tries to cultivate in his or her life (Gadamer, 1989). Humanism is not defined by the notion that humanity should distinguish itself from the animal nature out of which it stems through the process of reason; rather, it denotes the importance of being vigilant with respect to the darker side of humanity's animal nature (Grondin, 1997). Through the process of education or formation, for which there are some models but no scientific rules, one becomes vigilant about one's animal nature (Grondin, 1997). Gadamer (1989), in his rehabilitation of humanism, starts with the notion of culture, or *Bildung*. In the humanist tradition, the individual is always in the process of self-formation, education, and cultivation, all key components of *Bildung*. To strive towards *Bildung* is to recognize that there is no fixed idea of what an individual is, that one is always in the process of forming the unique inherent dispositions that are part of one's humanity (Gadamer, 1989). What this description evokes is the idea that a cultured individual is not someone who possesses a wealth of factual or cultural knowledge. On the contrary, a cultured person is someone who never ceases to learn and who is forever willing to challenge what he or she may have once taken for granted. Grondin, quoting from Gadamer's lecture at a 1995 conference, writes:

The cultured person is the one who is ready to admit as plausible (literally, to value) the thoughts of others...to leave something undecided is what constitutes the essence of those who can ask questions. The person who is not equal to recognizing their own ignorance and, for that reason, to keeping the open character of some decisions precisely in order to find the right solution, will never be what is called a cultured person. The cultured person is not the one who displays superior knowledge, but only the one who, to take an expression from Socrates, has not forgotten the knowledge of his ignorance. (2003, p. 25)

Through our openness to perspectives that are different from our own, we are able to manifest the general characteristics of *Bildung* (Warnke, 1987). The characteristics of *Bildung* make us more human and help us

to grasp what we are attempting to understand (Gadamer, 1989). In other words, it is important that researchers grasp the impossibility of getting to know human phenomena in such a way that one can say *I know everything there is to know about them*. Human phenomena are not objects that can be construed based on the model of the sciences. Human life as we know it is much more fluid, contextual, and relational (Jardine, 1990), and this must be considered in our research. For that reason, human sciences researchers find themselves risking the achievement of certainty for the achievement of understanding in their research endeavours. And only through ongoing dialogue with that which researchers are interested in understanding can they hope to achieve a degree of confidence that their understanding has been enlarged and deepened. Gadamer's humanism stresses that this new understanding is possible only through (hermeneutic) experiences, because this is what helps researchers to change or adjust their perspective.

Gadamer speaks of experience in the full sense of the term, including the experience of negation (Taylor, 2002). From an interpretive hermeneutic perspective, to be experienced "does not mean knowing everything but, quite the contrary, being radically undogmatic, being prepared to have and learn from new experiences" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 204). For instance, researchers may be interested in studying a persistent, progressive illness such as heart disease. As a researcher, I may assume that the truth pertaining to the object of study is centred on its alteration of the biological structures of the body, or that any experiences associated with this disease reside in its physical features. If I base what I know on my cognitive experiences associated with heart disease, there is minimal opportunity to research this health problem beyond a frame of reference that often underestimates experience in the full sense of the word, where the dynamic, complex, and uncertain nature of persistent health conditions such as heart disease is considered. An obvious but often overlooked step in our utilization of research methods is to ask if it is possible to ever get to the bottom of things, to discover the real structure of human behaviour and consciousness, especially through the pursuit of a particular kind of research approach (Schwandt, 1999).

Differentiating Knowing and Understanding in Human Research

Research based on a model of the sciences drives the quest for a specific kind of interpretation, one with a sound objective footing (Dunne, 1993), orderliness, and closure. However, this serves to decrease sensitivity to the voices of our research participants (Davey, 2006). Deeply connected to the scientific method is the unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

Knowledge — its origins, characteristics, and limitations — is rooted in an empiricist orientation, particularly as it has developed during the last four centuries (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). This view promulgates a way of knowing that effectively trumps our everyday experiences. It embraces the belief that life can be known from an external, objective vantage point. To situate yourself within an empiricist orientation, you must abstract from the experiences that stand before you (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). Is it realistic to believe that we can be satisfied, in our research encounters, with a methodological approach that reduces contextual human phenomena to a body of knowledge that is predominantly viewed as factual and objective in orientation?

Subtle but obvious differences do exist between what it means to know and what it means to understand, especially as they relate to research processes involving human phenomena. In the context of the recent history of Western culture, it is common to define understanding as a primarily epistemological or cognitive process: it is not unusual for knowledge and understanding to be used interchangeably. Martin Heidegger, whom Gadamer follows in this regard, challenged the epistemological understanding of understanding.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger writes that understanding is less a cognitive process than a capacity, a possibility, and an ability that arises out of our existence through experience (Heidegger, 1962). As Gadamer (1972/89) explains, to understand is more than to reconstruct in a disinterested fashion the meaning of a text or research phenomenon according to its author. Individuals who possess an understanding of something are not endowed with specific knowledge as much as they are able to exercise a practical skill (Grondin, 2002), and that skill centres on the use of language. To understand, you must have the ability to grasp something, to be prepared to see what stands before you with great clarity, and to integrate a particular meaning into a larger frame (Grondin, 2002, p. 36). Whatever it is that we are attempting to understand, it “has to be construed, not on the model of the scientific grasp of an object, but rather on the speech-partners who come to an understanding” (Taylor, 2002, p. 126). This statement specifies the difference between knowing something, which involves mainly a unilateral form of communication, and understanding something, which involves bilateral communication. For example, a large percentage of clinical research involves what Rose (1994) calls the anatomo-clinical method, which constitutes “man” as an object of knowledge. This construction makes possible a science of the human individual where a person can be diagnosed, calibrated, and generalized (p. 68). Researchers whose prime concern is the attainment of knowledge engage in the use of a method that will offer them what Taylor calls “full intellectual control over the object,” where there is little

opportunity for the object to talk back at or surprise the researcher (2002, p. 127). The communication between the researcher and the object of his or her attention is for the most part a one-way process.

Someone who seeks to understand must be willing to engage in bilateral communication. Thus researchers must be prepared to challenge what they already know and recognize that whatever understanding they may achieve depends on the standpoint of all individuals involved in the interaction. Take, for example, research involving individuals with “idiopathic pain,” or pain with no agreed upon cause such as lower back pain, and no obvious signs of soft tissue injury (Bendelow, 1996). The researcher may possess a firmly grounded epistemological understanding of the generalized physiology of pain, but what happens when the pain cannot be linked to an identifiable physiological condition? An empirical referent is important in research that values calculative reasoning and objective ways of knowing. Without this referent, the research encounter becomes difficult at best, especially within methodologies informed by the natural sciences.

Gadamer (1996) describes science as based on “projective constructions” rather than on the experiences of life. In other words, science is a kind of mechanics: it artificially produces effects that would not come about by themselves. As researchers, we project these constructions onto the object(s) we are interested in researching, thereby eliminating the practical dimension whereby our experiences of life inform what we know and what we understand. Researchers who are interested in the interpretive method need to consider lived experiences in an effort to value, within their research approaches, the importance of moving towards understanding. Returning to the example of idiopathic pain, it is safe to say that individuals who live with pain know it in a more practical way, one that calls forth their experiences; they know that pain has a physical cause but that this is only one aspect of the whole. Pain is also an existential issue and always relates back to the individual’s entire existence. Practically speaking, individuals know and understand those aspects of their existence that influence their pain. In other words, pain involves not only empirically derived knowledge but practical understanding, and to understand is to experience. If a researcher wishes to gain an understanding of an individual’s pain, he or she must be willing to be informed, so to speak, by that person and his or her life experience with pain. Both parties must be willing to engage in bilateral communication where each individual’s current knowledge and understanding of pain is challenged and expanded upon.

[Understanding] consists of very real aspects of experience, [without which] factual assertions often lose their force, for they include the sense

of the whole, the overview with its myriad adumbrations, associations, and connotation that remain in the background and yet determine whether the emphases and import of a text are properly grasped. (Hoy, 1978, p. 48; also quoted in Solloway & Brooks, 2004, p. 2)

Defining Understanding in Terms of Experience

Defining understanding in terms of experience, rather than conceptual knowing, is significantly different from more traditional research methods. When researchers define understanding from a primarily cognitive perspective they rely on the theory of induction. Induction begins when the researcher recognizes those experiences that repeat themselves. As certain experiences accumulate, the researcher may begin to abstract a general concept that covers all such experiences. The acquisition of a concept through induction results in a situation of minimal need for any further experiences. “Inductive experience is fulfilled in the knowledge of the concept — which, in both senses, is the end of experience” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 202).

Gadamer’s interpretive hermeneutics denies that understanding needs an awareness of rules (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003). Understanding is what Davey (2006) calls an enduring task, one that often involves those revelatory moments when it becomes apparent that another does not think the same as me or that I cannot think as they do about a person or object of concern (p. 5). In this enduring task of understanding, researchers recognize the constellation of concepts and affectivity they bring to the research encounter and the value in challenging them or bringing them into some form of dispute.

Consider an individual living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). During our lifetime, we learn the meaning of HIV from the culture in which we are raised. This persistent illness was given a name for us, and along with this name a host of meanings and associations derived from the culture in which we were raised. If we are surrounded by individuals who do not have HIV, then this type of chronic illness has no significance for us beyond what we have learned from others, possibly through formal education. Conversely, if we are brought up in a culture that is greatly touched by this persistent illness, then the meanings and understandings that we associate with HIV are significant. Our background experiences shape how we as researchers see that which stands before us. A later encounter with an individual with HIV and the willingness to question our early assumptions can be an occasion for us to challenge and revise these earlier meanings and understandings. When we bring our unquestioned meanings of HIV to the research encounter, they take on a cognitive form of awareness. This conceptual form of knowing becomes what Ortega y Gasset calls “masks worn” (Crotty,

1996, p. 161) by individuals living with HIV. In turn, these masks inform our experiences of these individuals.

The meanings and understandings imparted to us by our culture are what come to the forefront when we come into contact with the object that concerns us, such as individuals with HIV. Interpretive hermeneutic researchers recognize the degree to which our encounters with our research participants may become nothing more than an occasion in which our pre-established knowledge and understanding inform our engagement with that which stands before us. The knowledge and understanding with which we enter the research encounter can become nothing more than screens that hide from us what we are interested in. Returning to the example of individuals with HIV, if we as researchers wish to gain a more comprehensive understanding of individuals with HIV, and not merely things that have to do with HIV, we have to remove the mask and penetrate the screen that often hides that which we are interested in (Crotty 1996).

Removing the mask can provoke us to start questioning both the familiarity and the strangeness we feel in an encounter with the “object” that concerns us. Without awareness there is a greater possibility that the very experiences that need to be understood will be concealed.

In considering the need for “experienced” researchers, it is apparent that human sciences researchers must be encouraged, early on in their careers, to recognize how their implicit sense of the human condition can block their understanding of others. Is it possible to know and understand another when we are blocked by our own unreflecting outlook? Researchers must be vigilant to the way in which the historically derived horizon of the past can be radically cut off from the horizon of the present.

Calling into Question Our Own Horizons of Expectation

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1979/82) writes at length about the importance of thinking beyond understanding as a strictly instrumental process. He attends to the importance of calling into question our own horizons of expectation, reminding us that the human sciences are about our very being and experiences. In particular, he offers an exposition of two forms of experience: *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*. Although Gadamer argues for the displacement of *erlebnis* (a personal life experience) by *erfahrung* (the experience of social interaction), the consideration of both forms of experience has value in furthering the ability of researchers to understand lived human experiences.

Erlebnis denotes an experience that is isolated and categorical. *Erfahrung*, in comparison, is an experience that is ongoing and cumula-

tive. Simply stated, *erlebnis* is something you have and *erfahrung* is something you undergo. An *erlebnis* experience is something that happens in the moment and jolts you out of the daily course of events. Life as you know it is suddenly and unpredictably felt in ways that it has never been felt before. This is an opportunity to allow the experience to make a lasting impression, one that can be of continuing importance, especially as life remains connected to and returns to its everydayness. Because of the indelible relation of an *erlebnis* — an unforgettable experience — to all experiences, it could be said that *erfahrung* denotes the ongoingness of *erlebnis*. In this sense, a life-jolting experience may provide an opportunity to awaken oneself to oneself. In this awakening, individuals assume a new stance on the world — *erfahrung*. By assuming a stance of *erfahrung*, one increases one's probability of having subsequent *erlebnis* and *erfahrung* experiences.

Consider the experience of receiving a cancer diagnosis. For most individuals, this moment will be forever marked as an unforgettable experience. Although they may have had other episodic-type illnesses over the course of their lives, this experience is very different. In comparing the experience of receiving a cancer diagnosis to the experience of having a common episodic illness, one could say that the short-lived episodic illness was a straightforward event with no lasting meaning. A cancer diagnosis, on the other hand, is an experience that separates itself out from the rest of the individual's life. It does this by calling "for [its] distinction in the moment of its conception and derives it by the place it takes in the rest of the life" (Arthos, 2000, p. 3). In other words, an *erlebnis* experience can be viewed as a predominantly negative and painful experience in which one learns what one did not know before and could never expect (Palmer, 1969). It serves to shatter any prior understandings so that the individual does not so much understand better as understand differently. It teaches the person what he or she did not know or understand before this point in time. This event can help the individual see that an *erlebnis* experience is the great teacher from which we emerge wiser and perhaps sadder. As Palmer states, the truly experienced person is one who has learned the limitations and finitude of all expectations (p. 233).

It is through *erlebnis* experiences that we come to see the significance of our culturally constructed ways of being in the world. An *erlebnis* experience helps us to see that we do not know everything and that when we are open to being non-dogmatic we are taking a stance of *erfahrung*, whereby we are forever prepared to transform our views. "Gadamer calls this process a reversal in consciousness...experience leads to the recognition that that which one previously took as the truth of the object under study is precisely that: simply that which one took as its truth and

not its truth at all” (Warnke, 1987, p. 26). When one is open to experience in this way, one is demonstrating hermeneutic consciousness.

Engaging in the Dialectical Character of Experience

It is in this letting go that researchers develop an awareness of the many possibilities that exist about how individuals live and cope in the world. This sense of understanding arises out of *erfahrung* — social interaction — and indicates an orientation to experience that increases the probability of *erlebnis* (Solloway & Brooks, 2004). From Gadamer’s exposition of the experienced individual, one is able to see that interpretive understanding is born from inspiration, not methodological calculation, and that when one is engaging in the event of understanding, rules are not the guarantors of truth. Hermeneutic consciousness exists when researchers demonstrate openness to restructuring or reversing their awareness of the phenomenon of concern. By viewing the phenomenon in a different light, researchers, as a result of moving towards an *erfahrung* stance, are themselves forever changed. Researchers who embrace hermeneutic consciousness recognize that “the new [phenomenon] contains a truth above the old, the old has served its time” (Palmer, 1969, p. 195).

Researchers who recognize the importance of creating a shared horizon of meaning in their work must be prepared to acquire a structure of openness characterized by authentic questioning. When researchers are prepared to engage in the dialectical character of experience, referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1972/89), the realization exists that there is no neutral vantage point where you can begin to engage with the phenomenon of concern. All knowledge and understanding develop historically, meaning that all participants bring certain assumptions to the research inquiry. As a result, researchers working within traditional research approaches will understand their phenomenon of concern in much the way their predecessors did. Jardine (1998) writes about how easy it is to miss the radical mystery that confronts us in our engagement with every individual. Rigid theories can determine in advance the conditions under which anything new will be accepted, thereby foreclosing the possibility of our own transformation. To be open to anticipations — based simply on the thing itself — researchers must hold in reverence the immanent ambiguity that exists in every individual, and in this awareness a space is open for genuine dialogue to occur.

Experienced — *erlebnis/erfahrung* — researchers recognize the importance of genuine dialogue, particularly when trying to reach agreement about the phenomenon of concern. Researchers must resist thinking about human phenomena in a limited way: the way to expand current horizons of understanding is to engage in open dialogue. In other words,

when the researcher is engaging with the phenomenon of concern he or she must be prepared to engage in open and honest dialogue in order to arrive at some agreement about the whole experience.

This article has emphasized the importance of researchers being open to different possibilities and new modes of description as they relate to their phenomena of concern. More often than not, researchers in the human sciences wield the power to control the context of what they believe to be important in the research encounter. Unfortunately, this may mean that human sciences researchers will work from their own unchallenged assumptions, including the assumption that knowledge of an individual's illness is all that is necessary. In recognizing the inherent differences between what it means to know and what it means to understand, researchers are moved to consider the alternatives that exist outside of the cultural parochialisms that often direct their thinking.

Through the lens of interpretive hermeneutics, researchers are given an opportunity to move beyond the assumptions and purported truths associated with their phenomena of concern. The approach of philosophical interpretive hermeneutics emphasizes that any learning that takes place — particularly within the philosophical framework of an *erlebnis* experience — involves, amongst other things, a commitment to be guided by the nature of that which they are attempting to understand. When researchers take a stance of *erfahrung* there is greater opportunity to disrupt the boundaries and dogmatism of current understanding in human sciences research. By seeing beyond the limited meanings that are associated with our phenomena of concern — in this case individuals and their experience with chronic illness — we are moved towards a path of possible awakening. In this awakening, researchers and individuals who live with chronic illness come to know and understand illness in ways they previously had not considered.

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