A Heideggerian phenomenologic perspective on the concept of the person

Nursing research has been the focus of intense debates on epistemological questions in recent years. This author contends that these methodologic debates have at their base the problem of differing conceptions of the person. In this paper, a Heideggerian phenomenological view of the person will be presented and contrasted with the Cartesian view of person implicit in current empirical research strategies. Methodologic implications of the phenomenological view will then be outlined in a discussion of interpretive research methods, or hermeneutics.

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MUCH RECENT DEBATE in nursing research centers around the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Insight into current philosophical thinking affords us an alternative to this endless, currently irresolvable controversy.

The battle lines in this debate were largely drawn by 17th-century science as part of the controversy over how the private mind apprehends the external world using a mechanically driven and unreliable body. In sum, how do we know what we know? How do we know that what we know is "true"? Must we choose between the subjective, relative truth of the private subject and the objective truth of the raw data? A review of recent trends in philosophy suggests that there are other ways of framing the problem that yield fruitful insights into the problem of how we study human beings.

Much of the current thinking in philosophy that attempts to get beyond the debate

over objectivism and relativism stems from the work of Martin Heidegger. It was Heidegger's shift from the problems of epistemology to those of ontology—that is, of what it is to be a human being—that radically altered modern debates on the nature of science and of knowing. Nursing would profit from considering this question of what it is to be a person before considering questions of epistemology. Once fundamental ontologic notions are clarified, the at times acrimonious debate concerning methodology will be resolved, for, as Laudan[1] argues, a research tradition includes both methodologic and ontologic commitments, which are inextricably linked.

To illustrate this point, the present article will first discuss briefly the Cartesian view of the person, then a Heideggerian phenomenologic view, and finally the hermeneutic method will be outlined. Hermeneutics is a method for studying human beings that flows out of the Heideggerian view of the person and is consistent with it. It is critical, however, to consider the Heideggerian notion of the person before considering any notions of methodology. To consider a methodology without an ontological commitment to a view of persons is to beg the question. The question is not which methodology is best or even necessarily which method is right for the question being asked, because method acts as a theoretical screen and often determines the kinds of questions that are asked. The questions to be asked are, first, What does it mean to be a person, and then, in light of the answer, How does one ask the research questions, and, finally, How does one answer the questions

posed? Too often the researcher quickly seizes on a method without considering the more profoundly important philosophical assumptions that undergird the method or whether those assumptions are consistent with the researcher's own view of what it means to be a human being.

THE MODERN CARTESIAN VIEW OF THE PERSON

As a consequence of a world view that follows canons of Cartesianism, we in nursing are preoccupied with a notion of the person as an assemblage of traits or variables such as anxiety, control, and self-esteem, which are viewed as context-free elements to be combined according to formal laws that can be discovered through the scientific method, the goal of which is prediction and control. This notion of person flows from an implicit acceptance of 17th-century Cartesian notions of the self, in which the self is viewed as subject, an uninvolved entity passively contemplating the external world of things via representations that are held in the mind. This self *possesses* a body and, by extension, traits or attributes such as anxiety and self-esteem. The self is always seen as subject and the world, or the environment, as object.

This view of the person led inextricably to 300 years of debate over whether knowledge is real (ie, an accurate representation of an external reality) or ideal (ie, a subjective idea or private view of the world that is idiosyncratic and thus can never be fully shared or communicated). Modern versions of this debate continue in nursing today, as in the debates between transcen-

dental phenomenologists and positivist empiricists.

THE HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGIC VIEW OF THE PERSON

Heideggerian phenomenology criticizes both the objective and subjective positions of Cartesianism for asking an epistemologic question (ie, How do we know what we know?) rather than an ontologic question (ie, What does it mean to be a person?). By coming to grips with the ontologic question nurses, particularly those doing research, could move away from an uncritical belief in science and the scientific method (variously referred to as scientism or the received view) to embrace a multiplicity of methods. This variety could include the scientific method when it does not violate phenomenologic notions of what it is to be a person (eg, in cellular level or epidemiologic studies), for phenomenology does not propose the abolition of traditional science but rather its appropriate use. Its use is appropriate in levels of study where participants' meanings and interpretations do not figure, such as a study of the effects of maternal hyperglycemia on idiopathic neonatal hypoglycemia or a study of the rate of prenatal complications in pregnant women employed in jobs requiring strenuous work. Traditional science has accomplished astonishing results in the past two centuries, particularly with regard to disease, but, as Baron points out, "These accomplishments are not great in and of themselves. They derive their significance from what they mean for human beings and what effect they have on suffering and

individual capability."[2(p608)] Phenomenologists argue that traditional science is itself a theory screen that constrains our ability to understand human agency (ie, intentionality in human action constituted or shaped by concerns, purposes, goals, and commitments), limits our imaginative ability to generate questions, and, further, limits the answers we can generate for those questions that we do pose.

The view of person presented in this article is derived primarily from the writings of Heidegger.[3] The author is also indebted to the works of Taylor[4,5] and Dreyfus.[6]

In Heideggerian phenomenology, the view of person derives fundamentally from Heidegger's shift away from epistemologic concern with the relationship of the knower to the known toward the more fundamental concern with ontology: What does it mean to be a person?

The proximal goal of *Being and Time* is to develop a descriptive metaphysics. Heidegger is not interested in fanciful speculation about Being. He is concerned with what Being means to us, and this requires at the outset an understanding of the being of that entity which understands what it is to be, namely, Dasein. Dasein in the course of its everyday activities and practices is characterized as "Being-in-the-world."[7(p69)]

Dasein is the term Heidegger uses to designate "the being to whose being an understanding of beings belongs."[3(p312)] In discussing what it is to *be*, Heidegger used *Dasein* to reflect the kind of beings we are prior to the reflective, conscious ego of the Cartesian tradition. "In German the word 'Dasein' means simply 'existence,' as in man's everyday existence. But it also means, if you take it apart, 'being there.'

This conveys that this activity of human beings is an activity of being in the situation in which coping can go on and things can be encountered."[8(p 263)]

The person as having a world

The first step in this presentation of a phenomenologic view of person centers on the relationship of the person to the world. "World," in the phenomenologic sense, has a fundamentally different meaning from the common understanding of the world as environment, or nature, or the sum total of the "things" in our world. Phenomenologically, world is the meaningful set of relationships, practices, and language that we have by virtue of being born into a culture. For example, the common expression "the world of science" reflects the set of relationships, questions, skills, and practices related to science. World, as Heidegger describes it,

comes not afterward but beforehand, in the strict sense of the word. Beforehand: that which is unveiled and understood already in advance in every existent Dasein before any apprehending of this or that being. The world as already unveiled in advance is such that we do not in fact specifically occupy ourselves with it, or apprehend it, but instead it is so self-evident, so much a matter of course, that we are completely oblivious to it.[X(p165)]

World, according to Heidegger, is *a priori*. It is given in our cultural and linguistic practices and in our history. Language, in particular, sets up a world; it both articulates and makes things show up for us. "For Heidegger, a vocabulary, or the kinds of metaphors one uses can name things into being and change the sensibility of age."[8(p274)] Language creates the possibility for particular ways of feeling and of

relating that make sense within a culture. World is the shared skills and practices on which we depend for meaning and intelligibility.

World cannot be described by trying to enumerate the entities within it; in this process world would be passed over, for world is just what is presupposed in every act of knowing an entity. Every entity in the world is grasped as an entity *in terms of* world, which is always already there. The entities which comprise man's physical world are not themselves world but in a world. Only man has a world.[X(pp132-133)]

World is both constituted by and constitutive of the self. This notion of the self as constituted by world is fundamentally different from the Cartesian notion of the self as a possession.[10] The world is constitutive in that the self is raised up in the world and shaped by it in a process that is not the causal interaction of the self and the world as objects, but rather the nonreflective taking up of the meanings, linguistic skills, cultural practices, and family traditions by which we become persons and by which things become evident for us. The self as possession and project is the modern subject: autonomous, disengaged, disembodied, rationally choosing actions on the basis of explicit, cognitively held principles and values. The self as possession has a body and traits or characteristics that belong to it. As Sandel[10] puts it, my traits are *mine* but not *me*. These traits can thus

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come and go without altering the self in any constitutive way, that is, without becoming part of who the self is and shaping how that self knows itself. As Ricoeur[11] comments, this modern self is a self robbed of the health of sameness. Along with this view goes a view of the self as a radically free, autonomous agent: "the human subject as a sovereign agent of choice, whose ends are chosen rather than given."[10(p22)]

Heidegger argues that the only way in which one can arrive at this view of the self is by passing over the world, by not seeing that it is world that circumscribes our choices and creates our possibilities. The word "thrownness" is sometimes used to express this Heideggerian view of the person as *situated*, as being-in-the-world and therefore, as Benner says, "not a radically free arbiter of meaning."[12(p5)] The Heideggerian view is also a teleological view of the self, inconceivable apart from and prior to its ends and purposes, whereas for the radically free self of Cartesianism, values and purposes are the products of choice, "the possessions of a self given prior to its ends."[10(p176)] Freedom, in the Heideggerian view, is *situated* freedom.[4,5] Thus, while the self constitutes its world, it is also constrained in the possible ways in which it can constitute the world by its language, culture, history, purposes, and values. In other words, world sets up possibilities as to who a person can and cannot become. As Hoy comments, "personal identity is not a matter of ownership."[13]

Taylor[4] argues that part of the attraction of traditional science for the Western world has been that it includes the view of the self as radically free. Such a view of the self, suggests Taylor, is profoundly appealing to westerners because it coincides with

our modern notions of freedom and liberation. However, it is this very modern identity that causes us to overlook the essential inability of 17th-century science to afford us an understanding of human agency.

World is not a purely intentional, cognitive set of beliefs (a definition that depends on the Cartesian notion of the conscious subject). Nor is it the environment-as-object described by science. Rather, because world is constituted by our common language and culture and is requisite in order for anything to be visible to us at all, the subjective-objective Cartesian dualism that necessarily forces us into idealism (subjectivism) or realism (objectivism) can be replaced by understanding the person as being-in-the-world. World is neither held in the mind nor "out there" to be apprehended. While each of us may constitute his or her own world in the sense of taking up in a personal way the common meanings given in our language and culture, we nevertheless have some aspects of world in common with all other members who share our language and culture. For example, the American notion of upward mobility, which is evident in many aspects of our society, only makes sense within a cultural context in which class lines are somewhat fluid and in which at least some opportunities exist for self-improvement. Such a notion would make little sense in a culture where class lines were fixed and opportunities for self-improvement were not available to most people. Moreover, the notion of upward mobility is not a concept we are taught but rather a concept into which we are born and by which we are constituted.

Heidegger argues that the detached, reflective mode of knowing the world that is exemplified by Descartes is dependent

on the preexistence of world, in the sense that the meanings given by our language and culture create the possibility for our noticing anything at all. The taken-for-granted, involved skills and practices of what Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand mode are presupposed by the abstract, theoretical, reflective knowledge that Heidegger calls the present-at-hand mode.

World is so all-pervasive as to be overlooked by persons, and it only appears to us in a conscious way when disruption or breakdown occur. Heidegger gives us the example of the hammer. In using a hammer we do not think of it and its purpose in an abstract, theoretical way but rather in an assumed, taken-for-granted way—until such a time as the hammer breaks or fails to serve the purpose we intend for it. From the recognition of what it *isn't* doing we derive a sense of what a hammer in the assumed, ready-to-hand mode is like. A notion of "hammer" in the present-at-hand, abstract, theoretical mode will give us a notion of a hammer that excludes hammering in the taken-for-granted, lived experience of hammering.

Heidegger's example of the hammer exemplifies the phenomenologic objection to our emphasis in Western culture on the primacy of the abstract, present-at-hand mode: It overlooks the world (ie, the taken-for-granted, lived experience of our everydayness) and, concomitantly, it misses the meaning that is made intelligible through the linguistic and cultural skills and practices given by world.

The person as a being for whom things have significance and value

A second essential facet of the person from a phenomenologic perspective is that persons are beings for whom things have significance and value.

[Dasein] *finds itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of.[3(p159)]

Dreyfus points out that it is a "basic characteristic of Dasein that things show up as mattering—as threatening, or attractive, or stubborn, or useful, and so forth,"[8(p264)] and this mattering is the background for more reflective desiring or evaluating. Another aspect of Heidegger's account of significance is the way in which our activity is directed in a transparent, taken-for-granted, nonmental way toward the future (the "for-the-sake-of").

Borgman[14] further expands Heidegger's notion of the things we care for and traces the modern fate in the face of technology. Things are inseparable from Heidegger's view of world and from our engagement with them via practices that guard and protect them from technological reduction to means and ends. That is, the practice of preparing a good meal protects the meal from being reduced to a microwaved frozen dinner. Borgman contrasts things with devices in which means are, as much as possible, invisible and anonymous. In the case of the microwaved meal, the preparation of the food is minimized; only the end, the meal, is important. The practices (means) that are essential to things are irrelevant to devices whose sole purpose or end is the facile production of commodities for private consumption. The practices that gather us together in human commu-

nity and give richness and meaning wither into empty and meaningless rituals in the face of technology. An example of Borgman's thesis is found in some modern parents' attitudes toward child rearing. The whole enterprise is reduced to the efficient production of a perfect "product" that embodies certain external goods: a physically well-formed, well-educated, well-mannered, employable, attractive young adult. The practices that embody the means for child rearing are considered irrelevant to this project or, worse, are disdained. The everyday, practical routines of feeding, bathing, teaching, entertaining, supervising, and cleaning up after small children that gathered parents and children together and formed the substance of family life in the past are now left to parental substitutes.

In the phenomenologic view, persons not only have a world in which things have significance and value but they have qualitatively different concerns based on their culture, language, and individual situations. Taylor[4] suggests that the scientific rejection of "secondary" properties—that is, those properties, qualities, or feelings that cannot be "intersubjectively univocal" or free of interpretation (eg, "I feel blue")—is one of the factors that make traditional scientific methods inappropriate for the human sciences. Such methods give no weight to motives like shame, guilt, or love, which are incapable of being significance-free.

These are the ones, therefore, where the variables occur between human cultures, that is, between different ways of shaping and interpreting that significance. So that what is a matter of shame or guilt or dignity, of moral goodness, is notoriously different and often hard to understand from culture to culture: whereas the conditions of medical health are far more uniform.[4(p111)]

Because there can be no significance-free account of desires, feelings, and emotions, our understanding of these kinds of terms necessarily moves in a hermeneutic circle: We understand the term "shame" by referring to the situation that is shameful and to the purpose of covering up the shameful act or saving face. The act, the feeling, and the purpose all refer to each other. Nowhere can one step out of the circle to get a significance-free "brute datum" to ground the account.[5]

Thus, to understand a person's behavior or expressions, one has to study the person in context, for it is only there that what a person values and finds significant is visible. Understanding the relational and configurational context allows for a more appropriate interpretation of the significance that things have for a person. For example, anxiety during pregnancy is a variable often considered to be a possible predictor of events in labor and delivery. In the traditional treatment of variables as context-free elements that the researcher attempts to relate in some law-like way, a tool such as the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventor would be used to obtain an "intersubjectively univocal" measure of anxiety. Problems arise because the mean-

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ings of pregnancy and of parenthood vary widely, and thus the meaning of the anxiety varies widely. Assuming in advance that anxiety is a trait that is not fundamentally shaped by the meaning of the situation can cause the researcher, or the clinician, to miss the essential piece of the situation that is required to understand what is going on.

Certain events may be predicted, but at the cost of sacrificing an understanding of the transactional process going on between the person and her world. For example, pregnancy in older women with established careers and marriages interrupts long-established rhythms of work and love, and anxiety in these women can be interpreted as the realistic anticipatory working-through of the problems and issues that having the infant will bring. This kind of anxiety is potentially desirable and means that the woman is looking ahead and planning realistically for the new situations of motherhood. In other cases, the pregnancy may not be wanted and motherhood not valued. The anxiety of these women focuses on despair and the foreclosing of possibilities and should raise a red flag to the clinician providing prenatal care.

It can be seen, therefore, how an appreciation for the fact that persons are beings for whom things have significance, and that this significance may change with context, can reveal a different kind of understanding. The meaning of a pregnant woman's anxiety matters to the clinician because by understanding the world of the pregnant woman the clinician is better able to determine whether to intervene to help her to see new possibilities in her situation that will have meaning for her, given her

world. The woman's world provides the only access to what is possible for her. Her world can be expanded only in relation to existing concerns and possibilities. This point has great significance for nurses practicing in clinical settings.

The person as self-interpreting

Another critical piece in the Heideggerian phenomenologic view of the person is that being is self-interpreting. However, it is important that "self-interpreting" be understood as being nontheoretical and noncognitive. We are beings who are engaged in and constituted by our interpretive understanding. Contrary to Husserl's belief that these interpretations are a product of the individual consciousness of subjects, Heidegger claims that these interpretations are not generated in individual consciousness as subjects related to objects, but rather are given in our linguistic and cultural traditions and make sense only against a background of significance. For example, Caudill and Weinstein[15] studied Japanese and American babies and found that by the age of four months the babies had become distinctly Japanese or American. Thus human beings are already, at a very early age, interpreting themselves in light of their cultural background: all of those hidden skills and practices and the linguistic meanings that are so all-pervasive as to be unnoticed and yet make the world intelligible for us, create our possibilities and the conditions for our actions. In the phenomenologic view, then, persons can never perceive "brute facts" out there in the world. Nothing can be encountered without reference to our background understanding. Every encounter entails an interpretation based on our background.

"What appears from the 'object' is what one allows to appear and what the thematization of the world at work in his understanding will bring to light."[9(p136)]

The person as embodied

The phenomenologic notion of person includes a view of the body that is fundamentally different from the Cartesian notion of the body as object of possession. The Cartesian body is merely *res extensa,* "a machine driven by mechanical causality ... extrinsic to the essential self"[16(p30)] and exhibiting no intelligence or power to respond to the world. In the phenomenologic view, rather than having a body, we are embodied. Our common practices are based on shared, embodied, perceptual capacities.[17,18] Our bodies provide the possibility for the concrete actions of self in the world. It is the body that first grasps the world and moves with intention in that meaningful world. Merleau-Ponty[18] calls this bodily intelligence. In Leder's words, "Viewed as intentional, bodily functioning can express affective, cognitional influences in a way perhaps inexplicable within the Cartesian model."[16(p38)] Those researchers and clinicians who have an implicit understanding of the intentional body but frame their research and clinical problems from a Cartesian body position find themselves articulating multicausal notions of disease, but they are incapable of ever explaining satisfactorily the Cartesian mind–body problem: How do the physical and mental relate? "The paradigm of the lived-body, wherein subjectivity is always corporeally expressed, avoids these problems."[16(p39)]

Baron points out that health is the state of "unselfconscious being that illness shatters."[2(p609)] Our everyday lived experience, in which the embodied self is taken for granted, breaks down in illness, and our ready-to-hand understanding of ourselves as embodied doesn't work for us anymore. Thus it is in the state of "breakdown" that we develop insight into the taken-for-granted understanding of health: the unity of self and healthy body. "That the body is not a mere extrinsic machine but our living center from which radiates all existential possibilities is brought home with a vengeance in illness, suffering, and disability."[16(p34)] This viewpoint affords the clinician a new position from which to understand the patient's experience of illness. Rather than viewing the problem as the breakdown of an objective machine, one approaches illness as a rupture in the patient's ability to negotiate the world. It is one's embodiment that is the problem, suggests Baron,[2] not one's body as objective machine.

The present author would argue that Baron's position pertains even more directly to nursing than to medicine. It is nursing, more than medicine, that seeks to help the patient reclaim a sense of embodiment that allows for taken-for-granted, unselfconscious transaction with the world.

The person in time

Finally, the Heideggerian phenomenologic notion of the person includes a view of the person or being-in-time that differs radically from more traditional Western notions of time. Our traditional view of linear time is of an endless succession of "nows": "The common conception thinks of the nows as free-floating, relationless, intrinsically patched on to one another and intrinsically successive."[3(p263)] This "snapshot" view of time presents us with the

problem of conceiving continuity or transition. It also gives us a notion of things existing as static, atemporal entities and leads, in the scientific research tradition, to a system of formal laws that are supposed to be atemporal. For example, Sandel's[10] self of possession has traits that may come and go, but they do not fundamentally alter the self.

Temporality, in this view, is the accrual of events: for example, I had anxiety, but then X occurred and I no longer had anxiety. The "I" does not change, in this view, in the sense of having been constituted by anxiety, because it merely possessed the anxiety. In this view, time is not a constituent of human events. In the Heideggerian phenomenologic view, however, temporality is constitutive of being; for example, Heidegger describes the past as having-been-ness:

The Dasein can as little get rid of its bygoneness as escape its death. In every sense and in every case everything we have been is an essential determination of our existence. Even if in some way, by some manipulation, I may be able to keep my bygoneness far from myself, nevertheless, forgetting, repressing, suppressing are modes in which I myself am my own having-been-ness.[3(p265)]

"Temporality" is thus the term Heidegger uses to describe a notion of time that is prior to, or more original than, our common sense of time as a linear succession of nows. Linear time creates the problem of relating past and future to the now, but temporality, argues Heidegger, is directional and relational and applies only to being, not to physical objects. "The not-yet and no longer are not patched onto the now as foreign but belong to its very content. Because of this *dimension content,* the *now* has within itself the *character of a*

transition.[3(p249)] Rather than being empty or something (like space) to be filled up, time is *"essentially* content: it *exists as* activity, such as concernful dealing and attention."[19(p1184)] Thus the Cartesian self as possession is not constituted by time, and traits or attributes can be studied without considering their order or meaning in relation to each other; they are context-free elements. The being-in-time, on the other hand, cannot be studied except within the context of the having-beenness and being-expectant, or its past and future, by which it is constituted. If these concepts are applied to the previous example of anxiety in pregnancy, the older pregnant woman with career commitments might have a having-beenness that includes insisting on doing things with great precision and care. Her having-beenness also includes much rumination on whether an infant can be left in the care of a nonparent while the parents both return to full-time work. Her being-expectant includes an awareness that her company expects her to return to full-time work as an equally functioning member of the team. Her anxiety in pregnancy, then, can be seen to be constituted by her past and future.

Having outlined the essential aspects of a Heideggerian phenomenologic view of person, this article now turns to the implications of this view for research.

HERMENEUTICS AS A METHOD APPROPRIATE TO THE HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HUMAN BEINGS

A being who exists only in self-interpretation cannot be understood absolutely; and one who can only be understood against the background of distinctions of worth cannot be

captured by a scientific language which essentially aspires to neutrality. Our personhood cannot be treated scientifically in exactly the same way we approach our organic being. What it is to possess a liver or heart is something I can define quite independently of the space of questions in which I exist for myself, but not what it is to have a self or be a person.[4(pp3-4)]

Appreciating the implications for research of a phenomenologic view of the person involves going beyond the debates over qualitative versus quantitative and objectivism versus relativism. It involves a fundamental shift in orientation away from traditional notions of objectivity as unitizing and generalizing, with the goals of prediction and control. This notion of objectivity strips human actions of their context and assumes the possibility of an Archimedean point from which a foundational knowledge can be discovered on the basis of "judgments which could be anchored in a certainty beyond subjective intuition."[5(p19)] Heideggerian phenomenologists, on the other hand, propose that there is no Archimedean point, no privileged position for "objective" knowing but rather that all knowledge emanates from persons who are already in the world and seeking to understand other persons who are also already in the world. One is thus always within the hermeneutic circle

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of interpretation. Researcher and research participant are viewed as sharing common practices, skills, interpretations, and everyday practical understanding by virtue of their common culture and language. Also, since human beings are constituted by temporality, all knowledge, in this view, is temporal. Atemporal, ahistorical, transcendent knowledge of human behavior is impossible.

The human sciences, because they are engaged in temporal investigation, are not designed to arrive at an atemporal causal certainty. Instead, their investigations have as their object the rendering of life and the world continually understandable.[19(p1186)]

Further, since persons are fundamentally self-interpreting beings for whom things have significance, understanding human action always involves an interpretation by the researcher of the interpretations being made by those persons being studied. This interpretive approach is called hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is an ancient discipline that can be traced back to the early Greeks. Early Greek root words of hermeneutics suggest the idea of bringing to understanding, particularly where this process involves language. That is, something foreign, strange, and separated in time, space, or experience is revealed so as to seem familiar and comprehensible.[9]

In modern times, according to Palmer,[9] hermeneutics has had two separate focuses. The first is the rules, methods, or theory governing the exegesis of linguistic texts. Biblical exegesis, the best-known example, dates from the 17th century. Legal discourse and literary criticism also draw on hermeneutics. The second focus

of hermeneutics has been the philosophical exploration of the character and requisite conditions for understanding. In the early 19th century, according to Palmer,[9] Schleiermacher redefined heremeneutics as the study of understanding itself. His work was followed by that of Dilthey, who saw hermeneutics as the core discipline or foundation for all of the humanities and social sciences (ie, those disciplines that interpret expressions of the inner life of human beings).[9]

In the early 20th century, Heidegger's analysis of being suggested that interpretation is a foundational mode of our being. Heidegger's *Being and Time*[20] is referred to as "a hermeneutic of Dasein," an interpretive effort through which light is shed on the meaning of being. Thus the relevance of hermeneutics to the human sciences today derives primarily from Heidegger's writings. Currently the hermeneutic approach is being taken up by researchers in diverse human science fields, including nursing, that are concerned with understanding human beings.

The goals of hermeneutics are to understand everyday skills, practices, and experiences; to find commonalities in meanings, skills, practices, and embodied experiences; and "to find exemplars or paradigm cases that embody the meanings of everyday practices in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized, or sentimentalized."[12(pp5-6)] Paradigm cases and exemplars are strong instances of a particular pattern of meanings; they provide effective strategies for depicting the person in the situation and for preserving meanings and context. Access to everyday lived experience opens up a new understanding of the person and

the possibility for overcoming the subject-object split of Cartesianism.

Furthermore, rather than looking for deterministic or mechanistic explanations of causality, hermeneutics seeks to develop understanding that is based on concerns, commitments, practices, and meanings. This understanding is such that it "will focus on sufficient conditions and make statements such as, all other things being equal, one expects such and such to occur. Such a statement leaves room for transformations in meanings and changes in human concerns."[12(p3)]

Hermeneutics as a methodology makes several assumptions derived from the Heideggerian phenomenologic view of the person. First, it is assumed that the researcher, on the basis of common background meanings given by culture and language, has a preliminary understanding of the human action being studied. It is by virtue of our world that we, as researchers, have the questions we have and see the possibilities we see. Thus we approach our interpretive project with some understanding. Through systematic analysis of the whole, we gain new perspectives and depth of understanding. We use this understanding to examine the parts of the whole, and then we reexamine the whole in light of the insight we have gained from the parts. The interpretive process follows this part-whole strategy until the researcher is satisfied with the depth of his or her understanding. Thus the interpretive process has no clear termination.

A second assumption made in hermeneutics is that there is no Archimedean point from which one can have a "privileged," foundational view of the world that is atemporal and ahistorical. The researcher

has a world and exists in historical time just as the subject does. In order to have an objectively valid interpretation, one would have to understand from a position outside history, which is impossible in the phenomenologic view. Objectivity, then, is no longer a process of decontextualization or of securing abstract, eternal truths, but rather of finding what can show up in agreement among those of us sharing common cultural meanings.[15] Skills, practices, and meanings are objective in the sense of being shared, and are therefore verifiable with both research participants and external judges. They are not, however, objective in the sense of being ahistorical, atemporal, or acontextual. Taylor[4] argues that plausibility is the ultimate criterion for any hermeneutic explanation. It should be emphasized, though, that whereas individuals may take up common background meanings in a personal way, these personal meanings are neither infinitely variable nor completely relative. They are bounded by the cultural and linguistic meanings that we all share. Thus, while I may aspire to behave heroically during labor and delivery of an infant, it is not within my background meanings to go off and deliver alone and unattended. My options for giving birth are narrowed by my Western cultural tradition and by my own history. Within that bounded set of meanings I must find my possibilities for acting heroically. And because the background meanings that create those possibilites for me are shared, consensual validation of a hermeneutic interpretation of my heroic behavior is possible. Private, idiosyncratic meanings are not the data of hermeneutic inquiry.

In hermeneutics the role of theory is to show up meanings that arise out of the lived experience. Phenomenology mandates a new account of what constitutes adequate theory. No formal theoretical assumptions or predictions are made nor is formal theory (in the sense of an apparatus of formal propositions, causal mechanisms, and structures) to be used as a grid or screen through which data are filtered. Furthermore, the goal of research is not the development of a formal theory, defined as propositional statements that seek to outline the law-like relationships of atomistic elements within a static structure. The theory that results from hermeneutics involves the presentation of meanings, skills, and practices, the practical knowledge that eludes traditional empirical research.

Data collection in a hermeneutic inquiry

In hermeneutics the primary source of knowledge is everyday practical activity. Human behavior becomes a text analogue that is studied and interpreted in order to discover its hidden or obscured meaning. This meaning is hidden because it is so pervasive and taken for granted that it goes unnoticed. The data for the text analogues can come from interviews, participant observation, diaries, and samples of human behavior.[12] Since our everyday lived experience is so taken for granted as to go unnoticed, it is often through breakdowns that the researcher achieves flashes of insight into the lived world. However, it is important to note that the taken-for-granted, everyday, lived world can never be made completely explicit.

Validity issues

Content validity is threatened in a hermeneutic study by social desirability and by the ambiguity inherent in language. The problem of social desirability is addressed by including the participants' descriptions of situations. These chronological narratives are then used as text analogues. Multiple interviews may also be helpful in distinguishing recurring patterns from individual incidents. The problem of ambiguity in language can be addressed by having an interview transcribed and interpreted prior to the next interview, by allowing the researcher to present the interpretation to the participant for validation or clarification, and by involving more than one researcher in consensual validation of the interpretation.[15]

Sandelowski[21] offers a framework for evaluating qualitative research in which four factors are considered: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Truth value in a qualitative study is found in the accurate description of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by participants in the study. The effects of maturation and experience are irrelevant to a phenomenologic study, because a change over time is assumed and the study observes that change in its historical context. As does Taylor,[5] Sandelowski argues that credibility is the criterion against which the truth value of qualitative research should be evaluated.

Applicability in qualitative research is the equivalent of generalizability in quantitative research. While the sample size in hermeneutic studies is typically small, applicability can be achieved when the results of the study shed light on or "fit into" contexts outside the study situation. In a hermeneutic study the exemplars and paradigm cases may shed light on other situations that have quite dissimilar objective characteristics. The representativeness of the sample is replaced by the representativeness of the recurring themes and patterns identified by the study.

Consistency replaces reliability in a qualitative study. Hermeneutic studies assume that because subjects exist in time, a study can never be replicated exactly, just as history can never be recreated exactly. The consistency of a qualitative study can be established by the presentation of sufficient data from the text analogues to enable the research reader to participate in the consensual validation of the data.

Sandelowski's fourth criterion for evaluating qualitative research is neutrality. In quantitative studies the researcher is assumed to have an objective, disinterested stance with regard to the study. In qualitative research it is assumed that there is no detached, objective position from which to study human beings. The researcher is a self-interpreting being who is already in the world, as is the subject. The imperative in a hermeneutic study is to make sure that the integrity of the text is maintained and that the researcher does not become enmeshed in the study and thus unable to distinguish his or her own responses from what the text is saying.

Interpretive analysis

Transcribed interviews, observational notes, diaries, and samples of human action are treated as text analogues for

interpretive analysis. The data analysis in a hermeneutic study is carried out via three interrelated processes: thematic analysis, analysis of exemplars, and the search for paradigm cases.

In the thematic analysis each case (ie, all interviews, field notes, and so forth) is read several times in order to arrive at a global analysis. When several cases have been read in this way, lines of inquiry are identified from the theoretical background of the study and from themes that emerge consistently in the data. From this analysis an interpretive plan emerges and a coding protocol is developed. Each interview is then coded using that protocol. (As this microanalysis is carried out, additional lines of inquiry may emerge from the data and be added to the coding protocol). All cases are then subjected to additional interpretive analysis. The interpretive effort culminates in the identification of general categories that form the basis of the study's findings.

The second phase of the interpretive process involves the analysis of specific episodes or incidents: All aspects of a particular situation and the participant's responses to it are coded together. The completely coded event encompasses the individual's situation and his or her concerns and practices. From this analysis come exemplars, stories or vignettes that capture the meaning of a situation in such a way that the meaning can then be recognized in another situation that might have very different objective characteristics. An exemplar is thus "a strong instance of a particularly meaningful transaction, intention, or capacity."[12(p19)]

The last phase of interpretive analysis involves the identification of paradigm cases, strong instances of particular patterns of meaning. Paradigm cases embody the rich descriptive information necessary for an understanding of how an individual's actions and intepretations emerge from his or her situational context: the individual's concerns, practices, and background meanings. These patterns of meaning are not reducible to formal theory or to abstract variables used to predict and control. Instead, "family resemblances" are recognized between a paradigm case and a particular clinical situation that one is trying to understand and explain.[22]

All three interpretive strategies work both as discovery and presentation strategies. They all allow for the presentation of context and meanings. In interpretive research, unlike in grounded theory, the goal is not to extract theoretical terms or concepts at a higher level of abstraction. The goal is to discover meaning and to achieve understanding.[12(p10)]

Presentation of a study's findings involves distilling the data to their most essential terms while still providing the reader with enough evidence to enable him or her to participate in the validation of the findings.[15]

Disputes in hermeneutic interpretation are resolved on the basis of the plausibility of alternative interpretations, and the plausibility of an interpretation cannot be reduced to a priori criteria. As Bernstein comments, "A fundamental ontological motif of modernity has been variations on the theme of fundamental indeterminism. Our being-in-the-world is fundamentally indeterminate. Wisdom requires learning to live with this."[23] Thus, although we must live with a plurality of interpretations of meaning, we can narrow things down. Moreover, living with a plurality of mean-

ings, or indeterminacy, does not mean that we cannot understand each other.

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Heideggerian phenomenology offers a view of the person that is profoundly different from more traditional Cartesian notions. It is a view that has much to offer to nurses who are, in their practice, funda-

mentally concerned with the lived experiences of health and illness. Hermeneutics is a method that assumes the philosophical tenets of Heideggerian phenomenology. It offers nurse researchers the opportunity to understand the meaningfully rich and complex lived world of those human beings for whom nurses care. Both the theory and the method deserve to receive serious attention from nurse researchers.

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