Advances in Nursing Science
Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 181–191

Bridging the Distance Between the Objectivism of Research and the Subjectivity of the Researcher

Nancy Drew, PhD, RN

A phenomenological study of researchers' experience of their work is presented. The disparity between researchers' subjective experience and the inherent objectivism of science and research is discussed. Bridging the distance between the immediate experience of research and the positivistic/objectivistic nature of research is proposed as a way to keep the research community cognizant of values and beliefs that may get pushed aside in the clamor for factual information and material gain. A synthesis of intentionality is discussed as a method for disclosing a researcher's constitutive part in phenomenolgical research. Expanding the traditional format for research reports to include a brief biographical account of the inception of the research is proposed and an example included. **Key words:** *immediate experience*, *intersubjectivity*, *lifeworld, objectivism*, *preunderstanding*, *synthesis of intentionality*, *values*

IN the mid- to late 1930s, Husserl warned the European scientific community that continuing on its course of pursuing a mathematical, objectivistic, positivistic model of the world would be disastrous for society.[1] His warning, though prescient, has gone largely unheeded. He cautioned that portraying the world simply as a positivity of facts put science on a trajectory toward domination and material wealth, making it easy to cease asking the universally important questions about meaning, which, though ultimately unanswerable, must be asked by each generation of researchers, scientists, and philosophers.[1,2] If we pause to hear the universal questions for which we have no answers, questions such as "Who are we?" and "Why are we here?" we are returned again and again to our immediate experience where we hover, silent, waiting for clues about its meaning.[2] When we lose touch with immediate experience we stop asking, or worse, forget the unanswerable questions. In a pragmatic sense, losing touch with immediate experience increases our susceptibility to the pitfalls of objectivism in which we get stuck focusing on the material and neglect "what does not speak . . . the mute life,"[3(p102)] wherein lie these fundamental questions about our existence.

A blatant example of objectivism in our time is the US healthcare system. What was once the healthcare profession is now a for-profit industry whose beneficiaries are first and foremost insurance corporations.[4] In the insurance industry, the ultimate goal of research is reducing the cost of providing healthcare and increasing corporate profits. While cost reduction per se is not an onerous idea, it can have harmful effects on those who do not fit into the prevailing cost reduction scheme. In this scheme, treatment protocols regulate care along typical paths of recovery and rehabilitation. Eventually these protocols become a philosophy of care the purpose of which is to serve insurance companies' profit motive. Such a philosophy of

From the Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, Conn.

Corresponding author: Nancy Drew, PhD, RN, Saint Joseph College, 97 Cumberland St, Hartford, CT (e-mail: ndrew@sjc.edu).

care is blind to the individual uniqueness of those who do not fit the predetermined schemes of treatment. In this industry, patients are statistics and care is considered a product to be conceded only at the lowest cost. Those outside the mainstream of society, such as the disabled and the incarcerated, who are unable to advocate for themselves, are the most vulnerable in this system.[5,6] The danger that objectivism presents in our healthcare system is the predominance of materialistic gain and neglect of human experience. Ultimately, objectivism supports a viewpoint that protects monetary wealth at the expense of the poor. But, most important, this viewpoint erodes our humanity.

If we were to find a way to counter an objectivistically and materialistically oriented society, where might we begin? The Western world is a postindustrial revolution culture that emerged out of the rise of science and research in the 19th century. In the current worldview, those who conduct research are generally held in esteem. We look to scientific researchers for solutions to the problems of modern society: everything from food supply to the technologies of war. We demand of scientific researchers the objective achievements that will keep us safe from harm and our standard of living ascendant. We focus on the objective and measurable results of such research. The positive knowledge that their projects produce implies certainty and security. From this point of view, the lifeworld of researchers, how they experience themselves and their work, is of little import. We do not ask of them an accounting of their experience that underlies their work or to know them as fellow humans. Typically, we care about the end result of their research, not its inception and its meaning for the researcher. Only in biographical literature can we find descriptions of researchers' immediate experience of their work.[7,8]

When researchers look at and consider their own ties to the subject matter of their projects, they return to their immediate experience, and to the lifeworld,[1] from which their enterprises arise. The lifeworld is first and foremost about intersubjectivity, the world of human relationships.[1,9] In the human sciences, researchers who understand the dangers of objectivism and materialism have particular concern for the nature of the intersubjectivity between themselves and those who benefit from their work. Likewise, every discipline's research has an intersubjective effect because it changes the world, both in concrete ways that can be empirically measured, and more subtly, in our everyday experience of the world, in ways that may not be easily articulated, or expressed only through art. Looking at our immediate experience inevitably opens the door to the values and beliefs that direct our lives and our research. Perhaps a nurse who works in the emergency department of a hospital is faced with supporting families when they lose loved ones. The nurse experiences these death events from a professional competence point of view, but, more important, he or she meets the family of the dying person as another human being who will also some day die. The unanswerable question, "What happens when we die?" lurks behind every act of compassion and professional expertise, eliciting the nurse's personal beliefs about death and existence. Soon, questions begin to formulate: "Are my feelings and thoughts about death similar to this family's?" "What will I feel if I lose someone?" So the bereaved family members are asked if they would talk about their experience, and then a little bit more is understood about that life event and is added to the accrued knowledge of nursing practice.

Researchers in all fields, from the humanities to the sciences, have tremendous influence on the shaping of our society and culture. Because they are so influential, remaining in touch with the lifeworld and their own immediate experience is crucial for the development of knowledge that serves humanity well. In the health sciences, the theories that our research helps create guide the interventions that we design for the welfare of those in our care. When objective knowledge is the primary currency of scientific activities, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that

our theories are generated from the immediate, immeasurable, prearticulate experiences that the theories are created to explain.[2] But by attending to researchers' immediate experience, we are redirected back to the immeasurable and the prearticulate. Contact with our immediate experience keeps us in the "interrogative mode" that for Merleau-Ponty is the source of meaning.[3(p129)] The interrogative mode, or "question-knowing,"[3(p129)] leads us away from preoccupation with merely factual knowledge toward the questions, which take us deeply into our immediate experience of the world and of each other. When we ask someone to talk about his or her bereavement, we might pose as a research question, "What happens in bereavement?" or "What is the experience of bereavement?" Such questions give us positive information: phenomenological research produces a description of the essence of the experience; quantitative research tallies instances of the experience, or compares aspects of the experience, or manipulates the nature of the experience. In each type of result, whether essences or instances, the result is in the form of positive information. But it does not bring us closer to the underlying, intersubjective question, "What is this need to know what others experience?" Underneath our need to know is the basic human condition of isolation, which gives meaning to the relationships with others whom we suppose to be like ourselves.

As researchers, being in the interrogative mode means that we query our preoccupation with facts and with explanations and with the very act of questioning itself. For every research question that we formulate, the underlying question that accompanies it is, "What is this questioning?" In the interrogative mode we wonder about our need to explain and to know. Such interrogation keeps us mindful of the concerns that underlie our research projects, concerns about who we are and what our work means. In this mode we remain alert to the intersubjective relationships that are the raison d'ĉtre of research. Asking of researchers their beliefs and convictions about their work mitigates what Husserl saw as the spiritual bankruptcy of objectivism and positivism, thus keeping our research focused on intersubjective goals.[1] The following report describes just such immediate experience.

EXPLORING THE RESEARCHER'S WORLD

Four men and 3 women who were lifelong researchers in their fields shared their immediate experiences with me. They were faculty at either a private college in the northeastern region of the United States or at a large Midwestern university. Their ages ranged from 32 to 56 years. At the time of the interviews they had been active in research over a span of years ranging from 10 to more than 30. They represented the natural sciences (organic and inorganic chemistry, astrophysics, nutrition/diet therapy), the humanities (Latin and Greek literature), and the nursing profession. All 7 held doctorates in their respective disciplines.

The interviews were conducted in either an academic conference room or in the participants' homes; they typically lasted about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours and were audiotape-recorded. I knew each of the participants personally and approached them individually to request an interview. The purpose of the study was first described to the participants; they were then informed that the interview information would be given in confidence, and that my transcriber was instructed to delete all names from the transcripts and that after analysis the tapes would be destroyed. Reenactment interviewing, in which psychodramatic techniques recreate experience, was used in each interview.[10] Reenactment interviewing is especially effective in eliciting the perceptions and emotions associated with a remembered event. The interview transcriptions were read and passages marked when they seemed significant, even if, at the time, I could not articulate what that significance was. Eventually, the researchers' accounts of their experience were organized under 5 headings: (a) Seeing

the Problem; (b) Loving and Hating the Work; (c) The Inseparability of Researcher and Self; (d) The Transcendent Mind; and (c) Experiencing the Moment.

A synthesis of intentionality[11] was formed by identifying the personal questions underlying several statements of premise that I had written next to passages in the transcripts that I had found meaningful. Assumptions associated with these personal questions were identified. I traced these assumptions back to experiences in my own life. The final step of the synthesis of intentionality was comparing my assumptions with the themes derived from the interview transcripts to see how my preunderstanding influenced my written description. Following is a depiction of the immediate lifeworld experience of the 7 researchers.

SEEING THE PROBLEM

For the participants in this study, being a researcher meant first of all having a question they wanted answered. Sometimes these questions and the associated ideas came all at once seemingly from nowhere and sprang into full bloom in the first moment of the researcher's awareness of it. One of the chemists described the way that his ideas for research projects occur to him:

> I get ideas in strange places and when I get an idea, like driving on the highway, I don't get just one, it just doesn't come and go, I get all kinds of parts of it, it expands itself as I am driving, more parts of it go into place right at that time, it isn't like I get the idea and more of it comes later. I get it almost hitting me all at once.

He was also inspired by conversations with his students, who often did not know of each other's ideas, and whose projects he saw as coming together into a different whole, a process that he was at a loss to explain, "Somehow that generates ideas in my head which don't happen at any other point. . . . It's like two different things coming together. My ideas don't come terribly logically." Similarly, the nurse researcher described the experience of grasping the whole picture and understanding what an interviewee is conveying to her, "I have this kind of groundswell of emotion or sensibility about the whole experience that is there."

Research projects sometimes emerged as seemingly random thoughts, as simply wondering, almost idly, even disinterestedly, why something is the way that it is, with a vague sense that the question would eventually lead to a fully developed research project. The humanities researcher described the moment that eventually lead to a book:

> They had just had the Jonestown massacres, and there was an article in *Time* magazine. . . . I wondered why the martyrs wanted to die, why would you want to kill yourself? And out of the Jonestown thing I wrote this proposal for a presentation at a conference that was coming up soon . . . but it was not anything that I thought out, I had no knowledge about martyrs.

The focus of her research project emerged from simply seizing an opportunity to develop an idea that had not yet been appropriated by anyone else. In addition, she said that her research projects often came unbidden, presented to her at the request of others. She agreed to them for practical reasons and because she wanted to be a researcher and loved learning.

> The first [research project] really changed the direction of [my] scholarship, complete change, [was] absolutely pragmatic in a sense that I had two little boys and I couldn't go anywhere. . . . Somebody asked me, "Would you give a paper, would you do this?". . . I had such a wonderful experience that I kept that up.

Research projects sometimes were the result of frustrations that the researchers experienced in various situations. For one of the chemists, his ideas for a research project began with remembering his own boredom as a student and then wondering how students learn in a chemistry laboratory. "A lab is very, very concrete. . . . I was always struggling to try and find some device to connect the [conceptual with the concrete], to make a jump there."

Similar to seeing a problem was seeing a solution to a problem. Another chemist described how he suddenly grasped the complete picture of a molecular problem, "I saw that there was a big hole there. . . . I couldn't believe it would be that simple . . . as soon as I saw that [the molecular relationship] . . . I said, 'that 's got to be what's happening' . . . it was that easy."

LOVING AND HATING THE WORK

For some of the researchers there was a love-hate relationship with their work. Characteristic of this relationship was constant thinking about a project. The astronomer described being preoccupied with research questions, even feeling consumed by them. He estimated that thinking about his particular research questions comprised 85% to 90% of his professional life. "I'd say even in my personal life it would be like 50% or so. It really is those types of questions that consume me to a certain degree and I'm happy with that. I like thinking about them."

Frustration and discouragement was the darker side of the relationship. For the nutritionist, this meant frequent temptation to give it up: "I still feel the love-hate with research. I feel it everyday. Everyday I feel that tug. Why do I do this? Why do I spend my time?" She continued to explain:

> Right now I'm feeling that it's extremely frustrating. . . . I feel that in a certain sense we (the research team) have failed at our effort . . . we really thought we understood the community, [but] the cultural barriers have just hit me right in the face. . . . I have to reevaluate it, relook at it. . . . Even when you do finish a project and you have information, you are left with more questions, so the reality is that it doesn't end and that's the love-hate for me because part of me loves to have the feeling of just clearing the slate and being done at least temporarily, you know, just to close down things and have it completed.

She acknowledged that she likes the initial idea-forming phase of research but that "the part of research that's routine and mundane and nitty-gritty is hard for me—I have to make myself do it." Occasionally she had thought about giving up research. She reenacted a scene in which she talks with a friend about her research:

> You know, I think I'm just going to cut out all this research stuff and just do my teaching job and focus on that. Wouldn't my life be a lot easier and I would have all this extra time and that would really be great, wouldn't it?

When asked what made her continue her research, she said that "feelings would go around again, and I would be reenergized and I would go back to it."

The nurse relished the business of conducting research. At the time that I interviewed her she was in the process of conducting her own interviews. Reenacting a moment in her car as she drives to see one of her participants she exclaims,

> It's great. I love it . . . I'm looking forward to seeing Mrs. X again. . . . The beauty of this kind of research [is that] I can leave behind . . . problems, the other kinds of things, that I don't want to take with me when I go to see her.

For one of the natural science researchers the joy of his work was simply coming to know, to understand: "I've just been really lucky. By persevering long enough I've been able to solve or figure out almost everything that I wanted to figure out. A lot of it is just luck."

THE INSEPARABILITY OF RESEARCHER AND SELF

Participants conveyed the inseparability of researcher and self, in which research is something that is lived daily. Fascination with the research question to the point of being consumed by preoccupation with it characterized the experience of research for several of the participants. The nutrition researcher, who was excited by the prospect of uncovering potential associations between nutrition and behavior, said that the fascination for her and on which her commitment and perseverance as a researcher was based, was

the long-term relationships with her research subjects. "I think I've seen the struggle it is for [them] to lose weight. It's just a tremendous energy and money that [they] put into it."

The inseparability of self and researcher was apparent when one of the chemists said that an important research project "was just always on the back of my mind." The nurse researcher said, "Many times whether I'm cooking dinner or making beds or whatever, I'm thinking about them (her interviewees), they're just there. They are a part of my life and I think about them." In a different vein, another study participant saw her life as a researcher and scholar apart from her life as a wife and mother. She had the impression that some people do not see her as having a family and a personal life, while others are unaware that she is a scholar. "Most people don't know that I'm a scholar."

The researchers were invested in their projects. The nutritionist said, "I knew I was just kind of like biting off a lot, but I felt that it had to be done. . . . Personally, I mean I think all researchers are, but I was really sort of politically invested in [the project]." Another described her constant intense involvement with her research and the effect that it has on relationships with colleagues,

> I don't think that one can really leave it anywhere because it really becomes part of you, and it also becomes part of the people you're closest to, at least it does for me, and for the people with whom I work on it I become special to them.

She had hired a colleague as a coinvestigator because she felt that he considered her project worthwhile and fired another whom she believed discounted the study and the participants. "I just couldn't tolerate that because it's too important to me to just have someone treated in a cavalier way." Still another was emphatic that research "has got to be interesting to me. I have to be able to relate to it. . . . If [you're] not interested in it you're never going to go anywhere with it, you know, it's just kind of going through the motions."

THE TRANSCENDENT MIND

The capacity for transcendence, the ability to observe and think about one's own reasoning and actions, characterized the participants' accounts of their research experiences. One of the chemists described feeling that he is part of something larger than himself, part of a meaningful pattern. When asked if he believed that he is on the right path in life he paused and responded thoughtfully, "Yeah, I do . . . mhmm, yeah. It seems like I don't have much choice. I make decisions, but after I make them I realize it's just what I should have done." Thinking back over the years, the humanities scholar wondered why some of her projects were not her own original ideas.

Understanding who I am

Finding their paths in life involved the capacity for transcendent thought and self-awareness. Often, knowing what they did not want was the best guide at the time of decisions and led to understanding the direction to take in their lifework as researchers. It took just 3 days in a clinical setting for the nutritionist to be certain that she did not want to be a hospital dietician. She also knew that she did not want to become a physician. "I always enjoyed science. I knew early on that I didn't want to be a doctor. I don't know exactly why, something about, I think I would like health promotion and wellness, which there wasn't even a word for at the time." One of the chemists said, "My parents would have frowned on my having a chemistry set. My mother wanted me to be a dancer or pianist, so I was forced to take both dancing and piano lessons till I finally convinced them it wasn't going to get me too far and that was after about three years."

The astrophysicist knew by the age of 10 that his lifework would be astronomy. He said that he realized it after he overheard his parents reassure a friend who had seen a flashlight moving around in their backyard and wanted to call the police, that their son was just "out studying the stars."

I think at that point it kind of dawned on me when they told me that story when I came in . . . that this was something that really interested me and not something that just passes from here to there. That's when I kind of became self-cognizant of the fact that that's [who I am].

He followed this by observing that at a very young age children often know what they will do with their lives. "Even though they don't *know* it *yet*, it's already there."

The researchers expressed feelings of gratitude, a sense of being fortunate or lucky in finding their lifework. The astronomer described a moment, when as a graduate student, he was entrusted with the telescope at Kitt Peak National Observatory after his advisor had to return home. During his time with the telescope a supernova explosion occurred and he was able to collect data on it. He reenacts the scene:

This particular night there happens to be a supernova explosion of a star. This happens not too often. . . . There's only a couple every decade. . . . This is only the second time that I have been left alone in charge of the whole observatory. . . . I am lucky enough to be at the telescope when it occurs and also fortunate enough to know that because the [other two] big telescopes are clouded out this night . . . this is pretty much it (it is up to him to record the event).

For several of the study participants, the sense of being fortunate often related to their teachers, who had served as models for what they wanted for themselves. Speaking of one of her courses and the professor who taught it, one said,

I remember his mannerisms, his whole presence, and his enthusiasm for the topic. . . . I knew I wanted to feel that way about what I was doing. . . . I was grateful for that experience. . . . I didn't realize at the time that it was going to make such an impression on me.

Another remembered, "I was extremely lucky . . . I always got the teacher that wanted you to succeed rather than wanted to flunk you out."

Love of learning, discovering, and understanding characterized the researchers.

For one individual it was not the knowledge attained but attaining it that was the "fun part. . . . I look at everything as a big puzzle." He described the influence of a teacher. "My high school chemistry teacher . . . turned to us and said, 'One day I hope it happens to all of you, you're going to learn to love learning.' Later, while in college, . . . that's when I really started liking to learn." Another researcher stated that she "was always going to do research. . . . I love the work. . . . I love to study."

Feeling like an imposter plagued one of the researchers in the early years of her work. "Often I felt 'they're going to discover I don't know anything about [a particular topic]. . . . I've written this proposal and they are going to find out I don't know anything."' In contrast, one of the chemists, while yet a graduate student, discovered his own competence and learned to trust his intuition. Reenacting a scene in a laboratory, he showed how he assumed charge when his supervisor panicked at the accidental release of an arsenic compound.

That's when I realized that I have, even though I was just starting out in research, I have my own opinion and actually a great deal of knowledge in [that] area, 'cause I knew that the amount released was not going to be a problem. . . . I actually learned [something] from this incident. . . . Don't just immediately assume because somebody appears to have better credentials than you on paper, it doesn't really mean that's going to be the case. . . . [The supervisor] had a PhD and there I was just starting my second year of graduate school.

Speaking of his supervisor he remarked, "His technique really wasn't that good and it never was, it never really developed."

EXPERIENCING THE MOMENT

Unlike the previous 4 categories, this one describes the participants' experience of reenactment interviewing.[10] When expertly used as an interview technique, reenactment affords interviewees a way to concretely recall their perceptions of physical surroundings,

interaction with others, as well as their own feelings and thoughts in the moment that they are remembering. I have included this category because reenactment, a technique that quickly and intensely moves interviewees into their deepest feelings, produced some of the most vivid descriptions of the researchers' immediate experience. Often, the study participants discovered new insights in the course of showing me their meaningful moments. It is a method uniquely appropriate for phenomenological research.

Reenacting the time with the big telescope, the astronomer describes feeling the portent of the moment, the connection between millions of years ago and the present, the connection with the universe and time and feeling humbled and grateful for his place in history:

Me: "How are you feeling right now? You look excited."

Astronomer: "Excited and nervous . . . nervous about screwing it up. . . . I'm running the telescope all on my own. . . . That's all I [say] all night long, 'Don 't screw up, don't screw up.' . . . Here I am taking data and I'm maybe one of only two people in the world because most of the other major telescopes on this particular night are shut down due to weather. . . . I'm taking data that will make its way into first-year students' textbooks on astronomy and the feeling is exhilarating. . . . Here's a chance that's just been fortuitously bestowed on me . . . to contribute to the field in some small way but nonetheless significantly because understanding how stars work is the first piece to understanding how everything works. . . . I feel like a real astronomer . . . not somebody who's just studying in the backyard. . . . I'm somebody who does research on the cosmos and that's the first time that it hit me—I'm an astronomer."

The sensory experience of working in a laboratory was enjoyed by the chemist who reenacted the arsenic accident:

Me: "Pause for a minute now. . . . How does it feel to be in this lab?"

Chemist: "Oh, I love it, it's very high tech. . . . I always like being in the lab. . . . There's chemicals on shelves all over the place. . . . I feel comfortable when I have a nice supply of anything I might need."

When asked to show a meaningful moment in her career, the researcher of ancient literature recalled a moment just before she was to give a paper at a national conference. In the scene that she reenacted, she is in the women's restroom at the university where the conference is being held. Prior to this moment she has had an unpleasant encounter with a world-famous scholar who is scheduled to present on the same literary topic. He belittled her in an arrogant manner because her paper is scheduled next to his in the same plenary session, something he considers an insult. Because of his renown, the room is packed with conference attendees who have come to hear him speak. Now, looking into the restroom mirror, she realizes the significance of the opportunity before her and it weighs heavily:

There [are] not too many women [at the conference] so there [is] nobody else in the bathroom. I am scared because he's already given me a hard time and he's a handsome guy and I know that I am not the kind of person that would normally be in that slot. . . . I look at myself very carefully. . . . I've got these pains in my stomach to the extent of, like, they are killing me. . . . I'm a nervous wreck and I'm saying, "Don't screw up . . . everybody in the whole field is sitting out there."

She presented her paper immediately after the international scholar. She described the two presentations:

His was good, technically good. It was interesting, but mine was funny [and] they loved it. I mean, it wasn't only funny, I covered everything he did plus had a lot of other stuff. . . . Everybody was literally loving the paper, and at the end a woman said to me, "It was the best presentation in paper at the conference." I'm not boasting, but I knew it was, because everybody was having such a good time with it. . . . It wasn't me who was funny, the text was funny, but of course he [the international scholar] didn't mention any of the funny parts.

Later, reflecting on our interview, she confided, "I never told anybody that story . . . I never had."

SYNTHESIS OF INTENTIONALITY

Our *preunderstanding*, Gadamer's term for the accumulated life experiences that shape our being, draws us in particular directions and guides what we see as important in a study.[12] The impetus for the present study was my frustration with philosophers' seeming inability to connect their ideas with concrete action. During a conversation at a conference on nursing and phenomenology held in Minneapolis, in May 1998, a colleague asked me about my plans for future research and it occurred to me that what I wanted to do was to follow Husserl's notion that phenomenological research is subject to its own methodology.[2] It had long been my conviction that researchers' experience, their intentional consciousness of their work, could be and should be described because it coconstitutes the origins of the research phenomenon.[2] I wanted to find a simple and concrete way for researchers to enact Husserl's charge for a "reflexive self-reference"[2(149)] by describing the intentional ground of our projects. As we talked, the idea for a study began to take form. It occurred to me that I might interview a few of my academic colleagues from various disciplines and ask them to tell me about their lives as researchers, particularly, their experience of specific projects. What I wanted to hear were the most immediate, even mundane, details of the moments in their everyday lives as researchers. The colleague who was listening to my thoughts was the first to volunteer for an interview.

My experience of the present study was described, in part, in a 2001 article in which I suggested returning to interview transcripts to look for an interviewer's preunderstanding to see how associated assumptions influence a researcher's conclusions.[13] I had described the passage in the astronomer's interview transcript where he related how he understood as a child what his lifework would be. His statement had prompted me to wonder how we know what direction to take in life and the impact that the chosen direction has on who we become. While pondering my reaction to the astronomer's words, I had recalled an old childhood assumption of mine that adults do not care about the mundane aspects of life. As an adult myself, I changed my viewpoint, of course, and as a student of phenomenology, my belief in the significance of the mundane world was confirmed. Now, turning again to this transcript for the present study, I discovered that my initial reaction to his experience continued to instruct me about my preunderstanding and the assumptions associated with it. Because I value immediate experience I saw that I had been drawn primarily to those passages in which the participants talked about how they saw themselves in the unremakable, little routines of daily life. In fact, the more apparently trivial the content of a passage, the more carefully that I pored over it, looking for evidence of meaning.

After looking at my reactions to transcript passages and tracing them back to my own experiences, I could identify 3 assumptions that I brought to the study. The first assumption was my belief that anyone who engages in research is first of all a resident of the lifeworld. Like everyone else, researchers are rooted in the "mute life . . . that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection."[3(p102)] My second assumption was that those who conduct research are held in esteem in contemporary society. The third assumption was my belief that our immediate experience of the ordinary lifeworld is laden with hidden meaning that is typically dismissed as unimportant. It was this assumption that seemed to me to outweigh the other 2, a reaction that, in itself, is indicative of my preunderstanding. The dismissal of the significance of ordinary experience is especially true in a society like ours that places heavy emphasis on objective knowledge. When brought out into the open, the hidden, often obscure meaning that permeates our ordinary moments reveals the values and beliefs that makes us who we are and that guide our actions. Learning to cultivate an awareness of the meaning that is

hidden within immediate experience offers a way to balance the preoccupation with objective facts that dominates research in the sciences.

Although my preunderstanding is presented and discussed in this report subsequent to a description of the participants' experience, in fact, it was always active, guiding the study's inception, the decisions for organizing the transcript information, and the choice of written expression.

RESEARCHERS' IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

For the 7 researchers who participated in this study, the interview was an opportunity to express aloud what they may have only tacitly understood about themselves. It was clear that conducting research was a very personal experience for them. The role of researcher was inexplicably connected to the other roles that comprise their identities. Several of them said that this was the first time that anyone had ever asked them about their lives as researchers. They eagerly described the experiences they considered meaningful. All of them understood to a certain extent the origins of their research directions, the events that led them toward their lifework. They relished the chance to revisit particular moments that stood out to them as significant in their lifework and to their development as individuals and as researchers. For some, the interview was an opportunity to ponder what they knew about themselves, to wonder at the events that propelled them in one direction or another, and to see themselves as part of a larger, organizing principle.

Whether in the humanities or the natural sciences, research is never the objective endeavor that we purport it to be, but is always related to those most basic, and universal, questions "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" Although striving to be objective about their methods of inquiry and the data that they collect, researchers are nevertheless subjectively invested in their work. And this is as it should be. The experience of the present study's participants clearly shows that their research depended on their passionate involvement, their prearticulate attunement to the invisible, and their creativity. When these attributes are dismissed as unimportant, or as antithetical to rationality, when the product of the research is deemed the priority, there is the danger that research will become automatic, the cranking out of positive data divorced from the act of research itself and the questions that underlie the search for understanding of ourselves and our world.

In the realm of science, particularly science that contributes to healthcare, researcher-scientists' self-awareness, such as depicted in the present study, can mitigate against the effects of research that is conducted primarily with a profit motive. Researchers who are connected to their immediate experience may be more likely to address the attitude "It is science therefore it is beneficial." Like our healthcare system, which has prostituted itself to the profit motive, there is the danger that science has begun to move in the same direction when, for example, there is competition for the marketplace value of the human genome and when pharmaceutical companies promote new drugs despite information that harmful side effects exist, or cosponsor research that will directly benefit them.[14–17] To be humanly beneficial, research, especially in the health sciences, cannot have profit as its primary motive. I believe that one of the simplest and easiest ways to offset the objectivism and materialism that pervades and threatens the health sciences is to include in research reports a portion of the immediate experience of those who instigated and conducted the research.

The present study is a call for researchers to look at their own involvement with their work. The words of the humanities scholar echo here: "I never told anybody that story." Heeding Husserl's warning to the scientific community of the last century,[1] we can begin to ask researchers about their experience. We can describe, as data, how researchers' experience influences decisions about the direction their research will take and how the

results of the research will be used. Specifically, we can restructure the traditional format of research reports by expanding the way that we address researcher bias to include a brief biographical account of the inception of the research. To this end, the above account of my own experience in the synthesis of intentionality section is presented as a brief example of what a researcher's biographical narrative might look like. Researchers will undoubtedly discover their own style of conveying their immediate, personal research experience. Such personal information elucidates our connections to our work. For the ordinary persons whose lives are affected by our research, biographical information puts a human face on research achievements that have consequences for them. But, more important, biographical narrative offers a way to express deeply held convictions about the ethical structures of our research. Such expression affords us the opportunity to strengthen the intersubjective bond with those who will benefit from our labors.

REFERENCES

1. Husserl E. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.* Carr D, trans. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press; 1970.
2. Husserl E. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy.* Vol 1. Kersten F, trans. Boston: Kluwer; 1998.
3. Merleau-Ponty M. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Lingis A, trans. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press; 1968.
4. Schroeder C. The tyranny of profit: Concentration of wealth, corporate globalization, and the failed US health care system. *Adv Nurs Sci.* 2003;26(3):173–184.
5. von Zielbauer P. As health care in jails goes private, 10 days can be a death sentence. *New York Times*. February 27, 2005:A1,A32–34.
6. von Zielbauer P. Inside city jails, missed signals open way to season of suicides. *New York Times*. February 28, 2005:A1,B6,7.
7. Watson J. *The Double Helix*. New York: New American Library; 1968.
8. Bird K, Sherwin M. *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer.* New York: Knopf; 2005.
9. Gadamer H-G. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Linge D, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1976.
10. Drew N. Reenactment interviewing: a methodology for phenomenological research. *Image J Nurs Sch.* 1993;25(4):345–351.
11. Drew N. Creating a synthesis of intentionality: the role of the bracketing facilitator. *Adv Nurs Sci*. 2004;27(3):215–223.
12. Gadamer H-G. *Truth and Method*. Weinsheimer J, Marshall D, trans. New York: Continuum; 1994.
13. Drew N. Meaningfulness as an epistemological concept for explicating the researcher's constitutive part in phenomenologic research. *Adv Nurs Sci.* 2001;23(4):16–31.
14. Shreeve J. *The Genome War*. New York: Ballantine Books; 2005.
15. Harris G, Koli E. Lucrative drug, danger signals and the F.D.A. *New York Times.* June 10, 2005:A1, C6.
16. Carey B. Most will be mentally ill at some point, study says. *New York Times*. June 7, 2005:A18.
17. McNeill D. Review finds scientists with ties to companies. *New York Times*. July 15, 2005:A10.