

## The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method

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Phenomenology, as a distinct philosophy in the modern sense, began with the publication of *Logical Investigations* (1900/1970) by Edmund Husserl. Husserl's thought developed continuously, if nonlinearly, over roughly a half century in which he was active as a scholar and thinker. He influenced many of the dominant philosophers of the 20th century who worked in the continental tradition (e.g., Heidegger, 1927/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Sartre, 1943/1956) and often the thought of those Husserl influenced became more well-known than the thought of Husserl himself, often unfairly so (MacDonald, 2001), especially in the social and human sciences. Spiegelberg (1982) has written the classic history of this movement, and the reader is referred to his work for more details concerning philosophical phenomenology and its history.

There was also a grassroots American phenomenological movement in psychology that initiated with the work of Snygg (1935) in the 1930s, especially Snygg and Combs (1949) later. However, this development took place without any influence of continental philosophical phenomenology. In essence, *phenomenology* means for this tradition "from the point of view of the behaving organism itself" (Snygg, 1941, p. 406). The major contribution of this grassroots phenomenological tradition were pulled together and published by Kuenzli (1959). This book contains 14 chapters by the major representatives of this approach, including Snygg, Combs, Rogers, and MacLeod. A check of all the references indicates that no major philosopher of the continental philosophical tradition is referenced in any of the 14 chapters. Only in the selected bibliography section at the end of the book are two of Sartre's smaller works mentioned. Moreover, the idea of a phenomenological method as applied in psychology is not articulated in any of the chapters. Mostly the argument was presented as a need for a phenomenological "approach," "perspective," or "frame of reference." This tradition obviously has interesting aspects but it does not touch on the method to be articulated in this chapter. Neither does the defense of phenomenology by Rogers and MacLeod in the famous debate with behaviorism touch on the manner in which the phenomenological method should be used in psychology (Wann, 1964).

Most of the major philosophers in the continental tradition strongly believed that phenomenological philosophy could help psychology in diverse ways. For example, Husserl (1962/1977) himself, in the summer of 1925, gave a course on phenomenological psychology, but it was clearly a philosophical course on the mind and its activities from a phenomenological perspective (Scanlon, 1977). Husserl believed that his approach could help clarify the fundamental concepts of psychology, and as a consequence, psychologists would be able to use the concepts consistently and more accurately. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1964) also wrote extensively about the relationship between phenomenology and psychology and in ways that were quite sympathetic to the psychologist's perspective. He clarified the ideas of eidetic reduction and eidetic intuition and related the latter to the empirical procedures of induction in penetrating ways. However, these analyses were conceptual and philosophical even though they are very helpful to those psychologists who would adopt a phenomenological perspective. How one would apply the phenomenological method in psychology is not detailed. However, the conceptual clarity Merleau-Ponty gives to certain Husserlian formulae and ideas is well worth the reading. Finally, Sartre (1936/1962, 1939/1962, 1940/1966) in his early works also claimed to have helped psychology, even if via "critique." His two books on imagination and his short essay on the emotions begin with criticisms of the assumptions that traditional psychology brings to its labors, and when he presents the phenomenological alternative Sartre would claim that psychology has been significantly helped. Sartre believed that phenomenological philosophical assumptions help one to interrogate the experiential world far more accurately than either positivistic or logical empiricism would. Although Sartre's insights are unmistakably helpful, just how he achieved what he did is not spoken to—that is, he presented results, not processes.

The previous paragraph illustrates how philosophers familiar with phenomenology touched on the helpful possibilities of phenomenology for psychology. It was inevitable perhaps that the opposite effort should also take place; psychologists familiar with phenomenological philosophy would indicate how phenomenology could help the development of psychology. These two efforts are quite different even if the same philosophy is being tapped by representatives of both disciplines because the sensitivities to the weaknesses of the mainstream paradigm differed. The philosophers concentrated on assumptions and concepts and psychologists looked for methodical help. The American psychologist who attempted a rigorous interpretation of how the phenomenological method as developed within the continental philosophical tradition could be adapted and made useful for psychology was the senior author of this chapter (Amedeo; Giorgi, 1985). Cloonan (1995) has provided an extensive history of this development on the North American continent, so we will be brief.

In the early 1960s the senior author had joined a psychology department that was explicitly existential–phenomenological in orientation and his task was to come up with alternative research strategies consistent with the framework of that approach. Having heard that the phenomenological method was well-developed in Europe, the senior author spent more than a year in the 1960s contacting every phenomenologist he could find, but he was disappointed to discover that none of the workers in the field of phenomenological psychology

was actually using an explicit method. They assumed a phenomenological attitude or approach, somewhat like the conceptual work of the continental philosophers quoted earlier, and provided critiques of mainstream psychology (e.g., Graumann, 1960; Linschoten, 1968) but the performance of concrete research with an articulated method that generated data that others could conceivably replicate was not being done. Thus, while Amedeo returned to the United States empty-handed and disappointed, he realized that he would have to take up the task on his own, and in the spring semester of 1970, he introduced a graduate course titled “Qualitative Research: The Phenomenological Method” wherein he put together the experiences he had gained so far in working phenomenologically with psychological data and worked through an interpretation of Husserl’s method adapted to scientific psychological interests. The textual bases for the method were Husserl’s (1913/1983) *Ideas I* where the method was first formulated and Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1962) preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception*. It should be noted that these texts provided philosophical articulations of the phenomenological method, and the only thing certain was that those descriptions could not be imitated precisely because to do so would have resulted in a philosophical analysis, and what was needed was to apply phenomenology to help enlighten situations from the perspective of scientific psychology.

The latter point is important because very often scientific social science practitioners use Husserl’s (or Spiegelberg’s, 1982) description of the steps of the method without modification without realizing that such a description is in the service of a philosophical project. Thus, Moustakas (1994) also provided an independent interpretation of Husserl’s philosophical method, and he used Husserl’s transcendental articulations as a guide. However, our perspective is that the transcendental perspective is wholly philosophical and should not be a guide for psychological analyses. It is psychological subjectivity that interests psychology, not the transcendental one. In any case, there are several other differences between Moustakas’s interpretation of the method and our own, but these differences cannot be pursued in this chapter.

### **Phenomenological Status of the Method**

As mentioned, phenomenology in the modern sense of the term is dated from 1900 when Husserl published *Logical Investigations* (1900/1970), although the phenomenological method itself was not explicitly practiced in that work. It was in *Ideas I* (1913/1983) that Husserl made the method explicit. It is important to appreciate that to make phenomenological claims in the strongest sense one would have to use some version of the phenomenological method, along with certain other key procedures. That is why we will first present the philosophical method as articulated by Husserl, and immediately following, we will articulate a scientific version of the phenomenological method.

Husserl’s phenomenological method consists of three steps. First, one must assume the attitude of the phenomenological reduction. There seems to be great confusion about the phenomenological reduction, in part because Husserl described several of them and kept clarifying them and in part because many

commentators believed that the correct implementation of the reduction was not possible. We will speak only of the two reductions Husserl would want followers to use, either philosophically or scientifically. If one were to perform philosophical phenomenological analyses, then Husserl would want to use the transcendental phenomenological reduction. By the transcendental reduction Husserl means the assumption of an attitude by the researcher whereby the objects and acts of consciousness are considered to belong to any consciousness as such. Specifically, in the interest of the most universal findings possible, Husserl would want to consider the objects and acts under investigation as belonging to any possible consciousness and explicitly as not belonging to a human mode of consciousness. Results of this kind of analysis have universal implications for any imaginable consciousness. That is, a human mode of consciousness is but one type of consciousness: infrahuman organisms or species and imaginably extrahuman species and the way they relate conscious acts to objects would have to be included. It is the essence of “consciousness as such” that Husserl was after.

After assuming the attitude of the transcendental phenomenological reduction, the researcher turns to the object whose essence is to be determined. The object that triggers off the essential search can be a real object or state of affairs or else something fictional. What happens next is that one tries to determine the essence of the “given” object or state of affairs by means of the method of free imaginative variation. The procedure of imaginative variation begins by varying specific dimensions of the given object and one seeks the effect on the object of the removal or variation of the key dimension. If the object “collapses” as a consequence of the removal of the key dimension, then one would have to say that the dimension so varied is essential for the object to appear as whole. If the object is only slightly modified but still recognizable despite the variation of the dimension, then it is considered to be accidental rather than essential.

To take a simple and straightforward example, the essence of a cup determined by means of imaginative variation would be as follows. I can start with a cup with which I am now drinking coffee. It is black, octagonal, and made of ceramic. I then take a certain distance from the specific cup and ask precisely what it is that determines its “cupness.” That is, the specific cup that I am using becomes an example of “cupness” as such. But an example, even a good one, does not articulate essentialness. Discovering essentialness requires a process and the process involves imaginative variation. For example, is color—blackness—essential for a cup to be a cup? No, because not only can nonblack cups be remembered by us, but we can also easily imagine many other colors that a cup could be and it would not affect its cupness at all. Changing colors in imagination would be varying the dimension of color, but it does not affect the “cupness” of the cup. How about material? This cup, we said, is ceramic. But one can easily imagine other materials—glass, wood, metal, and so forth. Cupness can be produced by any of the aforementioned. However, materiality does have its limits. A functioning cup cannot be made of porous material (e.g., net). Thus, nonporous material belongs to the essence of a cup, because if it is lacking the very possibility of a cup collapses. Nonporous materiality is essential to it.

One can do the same with any imaginable variable concerning cups: size, strength, aesthetics, and so forth. Whatever a material cup is made of, it would have to be solid enough to hold a moderate amount of liquid and be graspable by an embodied creature with a free hand. Having a handle is not a necessity. Although we used actual experiences and memorable past moments in my example, the whole process could just as easily have been merely imaginative.

The last step of the method is to describe the invariant aspect of the object, or its essence. This we have done by stating that a cup's essence is to be container of liquids manageable by hands.

Now, one difficulty that is frequently not appreciated is that if one followed these procedures exactly as described, one would be doing a philosophical analysis. The same would be true if one followed Spiegelberg's (1982) more extended but essentially similar method. Rather, what is required are changes that will make the method suitable for scientific analyses rather than philosophical ones. Although the fine line between philosophy and science may be hard to draw, the larger sorts of modifications that we have in mind would not be.

First of all, the order of the steps to be followed is not the same as with the philosophical procedure. For the scientific level of analysis, one first obtains descriptions of experiences from others, then one enters into a scientific phenomenological reduction while simultaneously adopting a psychological perspective, then one analyzes the raw data to come up with the essential structure of the experience, which is then carefully described at a level other than that of the original description. We shall now cover each of these points in greater detail.

With the philosophical method, because all of the work is done by the philosopher him- or herself, it is possible to enter into the phenomenological reduction right away. However, within scientific circles such a step would meet with severe criticisms. It is easy to specify the question that would be effectively unanswerable if one were to do a phenomenological analysis of his or her own experiences: How could I prove, the questioner would ask, that my concrete description was not unconsciously selected and construed to prove that my theoretical analysis was correct? One could answer this question philosophically and theoretically from a phenomenological perspective, but it would not necessarily be effective from the perspective of empirical scientists. Moreover, when the method was initially introduced in the early 1970s, the psychological establishment was dead set against qualitative procedures and so it would have been an uphill struggle to try to justify such a procedure even though it was strictly legitimate phenomenologically. As a consequence, to minimize the number of battles to be fought to introduce qualitative research into psychology in a legitimate way, it was decided not to analyze one's own experience even though this step could have threatened the phenomenological claim that we wanted to make for the method. We decided that the only recourse left as scientists inspired by phenomenological philosophy was to analyze the experiences of others, especially those others who had no knowledge of scientific theories and their vicissitudes.

The reason that this step could have threatened the phenomenological status of our method is that within the phenomenological perspective one is

meant to analyze only that which appears to one's own stream of consciousness. Insofar as we were requesting descriptions of experiences from others, the raw data of our research comes from the consciousness of others. However, this database is prephenomenological, and insofar as the descriptions are careful and accurate depictions of everyday world events undergone by the participants, it seems to us that there are no rational grounds for rejecting them. After all, even if one were to describe one's own experiences, one would expect that other scientists should accept them as accurate depictions of what the participant lived through. Moreover, because the participants know neither the specific purpose of the research nor the specific mode of analysis, they would not know which way to slant their descriptions. They could possibly cover up or not reveal fully certain aspects of their experiences, but there are interview strategies to help overcome such modes. Ultimately, of course, there are no "perfect" descriptions but only adequate or inadequate ones, the former being usable and the latter not. Adequate descriptions are those that are capable of yielding distinctive structures of the phenomenon from a psychological perspective.

It should be noted that the necessity of including the expressions of the experiences of others within a phenomenological framework has not escaped the attention of all phenomenological philosophers. Spiegelberg (1964) has explicitly argued for this move, claiming that it would be an expansion of phenomenology without dilution, although he argued that the rational justification for the practical steps of such a move would have to be carefully worked out. However, it is apparent that the outcome of the analysis is entirely based on the psychological meaning discriminations performed by the researcher, and these are not explicitly stated as such by the individuals having the experience. Thus a case could be made that the meaningful psychological results are all present to the consciousness of the researcher, fulfilling the phenomenological requirement. This also means that the critical check of the original researcher's procedure can be performed by any competent colleague.

The method is also descriptive in the sense that the end result of the analytical process is a description of the structure of the experience provided by the participants. After using the method of free imaginative variation on the elaborated meanings (see later discussion) that the first part of the analysis produces, the researcher has to describe what the essential constituents of the phenomenon are, just as was done with the cup. Because the description of the structure of an experience almost always includes several key constituents, the description must include the relationships among the constituents as well. This will be discussed later when an example will be provided.

Having obtained a description from a participant, the second step at the scientific level is to enter into the phenomenological reduction. It should be stated at the outset that the phenomenological reduction used at the scientific level is different from the transcendental reduction of the philosophical level. The scientific phenomenological reduction used in this instance Husserl called the psychological phenomenological reduction. What this means is that the objects or states of affairs experienced are reduced, but not the acts of consciousness with which the objects or states of affairs are correlated. To say that the objects toward which the acts of consciousness are correlated are reduced is

to say that they are taken exactly as they present themselves except that no existential status is assigned to them. That is, what is experienced is understood to be an experiential given to the person experiencing the object, the person is genuinely experiencing some given phenomenon, but the claim that what is present to the person's consciousness actually exists the way it is given is not affirmed. In other words, in the reduction phenomenologists distinguish between the mode of givenness of an object (its presence) and how it actually exists, which might be determined only after many conscious acts. Phenomenologists recognize that there is a spontaneous positing of the existence of the object that normally takes place in everyday life and in the reduction that positing is withheld. In addition, to use the epoché means to bracket past knowledge about the experienced object to experience this instance of its occurrence freshly. One could say all of this quickly by simply saying that within the scientific phenomenological reduction one takes whatever is given to be a phenomenon, except that we are not sure that the expression would be correctly understood. To be taken as a phenomenon means that everything that is noticed with respect to the given is taken to be worthy precisely as a presence in the manner in which it is present, but one does not have to say that the given *is* the way it presents itself to be. One makes no commitment to the existence of the given within the reduction. This aspect of the reduction is devised to help overcome the natural human bias of stating that things *are* the way we experience them to be without critical evaluation. Often they are, but within scientific circles it is better to be sure, and so the epistemological claim is concerned with what cannot be known in other ways—how things present themselves to persons—but they could exist in other ways. A privileged example of what is referred to would be if one said, "This meal seems salty to me." The person is referring to how the meal presents itself to him or her, but there is awareness that it could be otherwise to others. That is how knowledge claims are to be understood within the reduction.

For the scientific reduction, the acts of consciousness are taken to be acts of human beings who are related to and influenced by the world. The attitude of the transcendental reduction is quite different and that is what prevents it from being immediately useful for human scientific purposes. For this reason, the scientific phenomenological reduction is often understood to be a mixed reduction because the objects or states of affairs are reduced but the acts are not.

When it is said that within the reduction everything that presents itself is to be accounted for precisely as it presents itself, it is a strategy devised to counteract the potentially biasing effects of past experience. When we encounter familiar objects we tend to see them through familiar eyes and thus often miss seeing novel features of familiar situations. Hence, by understanding that the given has to be seen merely as a presentational something rather than the familiar "object that always is there," new dimensions of the total experience are likely to appear. This is what is meant when phenomenologists say that they want to experience things "freshly" or "with disciplined naiveté." Even if objects turn out to be precisely as we first thought, it is more rigorous to give nuances and "taken-for-granted" aspects a chance to show themselves, because phenomenologists do want the totality to be accounted for.

The third step of the procedure is to seek the essence of the phenomenon by means of the method of free imaginative variation, but another difference from the philosophical method is introduced. We are seeking the psychological essence or structure of the phenomenon and not the universal essence or the essence as such. Philosophers tend to seek ultimates and so they always want universal essences. However, universalization often comes at the price of abstraction, but in psychology, the content is as important as the form, and that means that context is also important, so the claim made by the scientific method is only “generality.” That is, because of contextual imaginative variation, one can be sure that the findings of the analysis will hold for situations other than the one in which empirical data were collected, but the same contextual imaginative variation teaches us that universality is equally not attainable.

Thus, the very fact that a psychological perspective is declared dominant in these analyses makes the method greatly different from the philosophical method. However, perspective is critical for all science, and psychology is no different. To do a psychological analysis means to adopt a psychological perspective, and this will ultimately lead to a psychological essence, which will be different from a sociological, biological, or historical essence. Each discipline has to come up with essences that are relevant to its perspective, but care also has to be taken that the disciplinary essence (e.g., psychological essence) is not projected beyond its zone of relevancy. A clash of perspectives or essences would have to be resolved on grounds other than those being formulated in this chapter.

A word should also be spoken about the psychological perspective being discussed. What is being recommended is that the psychological perspective of the practitioner be adopted, and not any specific theoretical perspective such as psychoanalytical, cognitive, Gestalt, and so forth, because all of the latter are theoretical perspectives within psychology. What is being advocated is the adoption of a generic psychological perspective rather than that of another discipline such as sociology or anthropology. We are aware, of course, that theoretically speaking, the articulation of a discipline-wide psychological perspective has not yet been formulated or accepted. Nevertheless, thousands of practitioners adopt such a perspective everyday in their concrete work and happily admit that they are theoretically “eclectic” or neutral. That is the position we are advocating. The living of the psychological attitude or perspective is ahead of its theoretical articulation. This is where the general practitioner dwells, except for those who make a point of positing a theoretical position, and the performance of the phenomenological method is a praxis that requires the same general attitude.

Before summarizing the phenomenological status of the method, one other point has to be mentioned even though it is not an explicit step of the method—that is the notion of intentionality, which is, for Husserl, the key feature of consciousness. To say that consciousness is intentional is to say that every object of consciousness transcends the act in which it appears, whether it is a part of consciousness (e.g., a memory) or outside of it (e.g., a table). For those objects, called transcendent, that are actually outside consciousness but related to specific acts that grasp them, the claim can be made that consciousness relates to objects that are not themselves consciousness and yet the acts that



grasp them leaves such objects undisturbed. What is important for psychology is the fact that behavior is also intentional—in other words, directed to situations that transcend the behavior itself.

By way of summary, then, the philosophical phenomenological method requires the assumption of the transcendental phenomenological reduction, the search for the essence of the phenomenon by means of the method of free imaginative variation, and, finally, a careful description of the essence so discovered. The scientific phenomenological method also partakes of description, essential determination, and the use of a phenomenological reduction, but with differences with respect to each criterion. The scientific method is descriptive because its point of departure consists of concrete descriptions of experienced events from the perspective of everyday life by participants, and then the end result is a second-order description of the psychological essence or structure of the phenomenon by the scientific researcher. As just stated, essential determination of the phenomenon is sought by means of the method of free imaginative variation, but it is a psychological essence rather than a philosophical one. In addition, the imaginative variation is elaborated on an empirical basis more so than with the philosophical implementation of the method and thus is more contextually limited. Finally, there could be no phenomenological method without some sort of reduction, and with the scientific method, the scientific phenomenological reduction is performed, which is not identical to the transcendental reduction because only the intentional objects of consciousness are reduced, but not the acts. The conscious acts are considered to be acts of a human subject engaged with, and related to, the world.

### **The Specific Procedures of the Method**

Thus far we have been mostly theoretical, explaining the basics of the phenomenological approach. Now we shall list the specific steps to be followed and then we shall provide an example of an analysis.

The research always begins with a description of an experience to be understood psychologically. The description, more often than not, is obtained by means of an interview. The purpose of the interview is to have the participant describe in as faithful and detailed a manner an experience of a situation that the investigator is seeking. Thus, one could be interested in learning, anger, frustration, anxiety, or whatever, and the participant's role as an ordinary person from the everyday world is to describe a situation in which he or she believes such an event took place. The transcription of the interview, precisely as it took place, becomes the raw data of the research. Once the researcher has the description, the following steps constitute the analysis.

#### *Read for a Sense of the Whole*

When one has transcribed verbal data, then the data have to be read, of course. The only point to be established is that the entire description has to be read because the phenomenological perspective is a holistic one. One cannot begin

an analysis of a description without knowing how it ends. That is the major point of this first step. One does not do anything about what one has read—the subsequent steps take care of that. One simply needs to know the overall sense of the description before embarking on the next step.

### *Determination of Parts: Establishing Meaning Units*

The ultimate outcome of a phenomenological analysis is to determine the meaning(s) of experience. As a consequence, most descriptions within a research context are too long to be capably handled in their entirety, parts have to be established to be able to achieve a more thorough analysis. Moreover, because the disclosure of meaning is the ultimate outcome, the parts that are established are based on meaning discriminations, and the results are called meaning units. Operationally the parts are determined in the following way. The researcher goes back and begins to reread the description from within the perspective of the phenomenological reduction and with a psychological attitude, mindful of the phenomenon being researched, and every time he or she experiences a shift of meaning in the reading of the description, a mark is made in the appropriate place. One continues in such a fashion until the whole description is delineated with such meaning units. That is the termination of the second step. One has to appreciate that there are no “objective” meaning units in the description as such. The meaning units are correlated with the perspective of the researcher. Moreover, the meaning units are not theoretically weighty. That is, they are merely practical outcomes to help the analysis. All researchers would not have to have identical meaning units for the procedure to be valid. The method is judged by its outcome, not by intermediary stages.

### *Transformation of Meaning Units Into Psychologically Sensitive Expressions*

The reader will notice that there is a progressive refinement of the original description with respect to its sense. At first one merely reads what the participant expressed. Then the next step produces meaning discriminations that are meant to be psychologically relevant with respect to the phenomenon being researched. The third step, which is at the heart of the method and where it bottoms out, so to speak, expresses the psychological meaning of the participant's everyday language more directly with the help of free imaginative variation. The whole purpose of the method is to discover and articulate the psychological meanings being lived by the participant that reveal the nature of the phenomenon being researched. The original description is full of “everyday expressions” and it is full of references to the participant's world. The everyday expressions are often idiosyncratic but still rich with meaning. The meanings expressed by the participants have to be made psychologically explicit with regard to the phenomenon that is being researched and not directly as revelatory of the participant in his or her personal existence.

In articulating these psychological meanings, one has to avoid two errors. Clinicians tend to pursue the meanings with respect to the personal lives of

the participants to the extent that they are available. That would be pursuing the personal interest of the participant too far. On the other hand, to the extent that contextualized personal meanings reveal something psychologically significant about the phenomenon, they have to be pursued for their relevance for the phenomenon. In other words, personal meanings are pursued not for their own sake but for the value they have for clarifying the context in which psychological phenomena manifest themselves, and therefore, for their role in specifying psychological meanings.

Another potential error one should avoid is the use of psychological jargon as it exists in the literature. It is surely a huge problem to come up with original psychologically sensitive expressions on the spot, but it is more deleterious to try to use already established theory-laden terms. Each established psychological perspective has certain strengths, but also certain limits. Because no theoretical perspective is as broad as the psychological perspective as such one never really knows whether the theory-laden term is being used in an area of strength or not. However difficult, the procedure biases itself toward the perspective that demands a creative use of language to come up with careful descriptions of the invariant psychological meanings of each meaning unit. Ordinary language twisted toward psychologically heightened revelations is the recommended strategy. Mere labeling should also be avoided.

### *The Determination of the Structure*

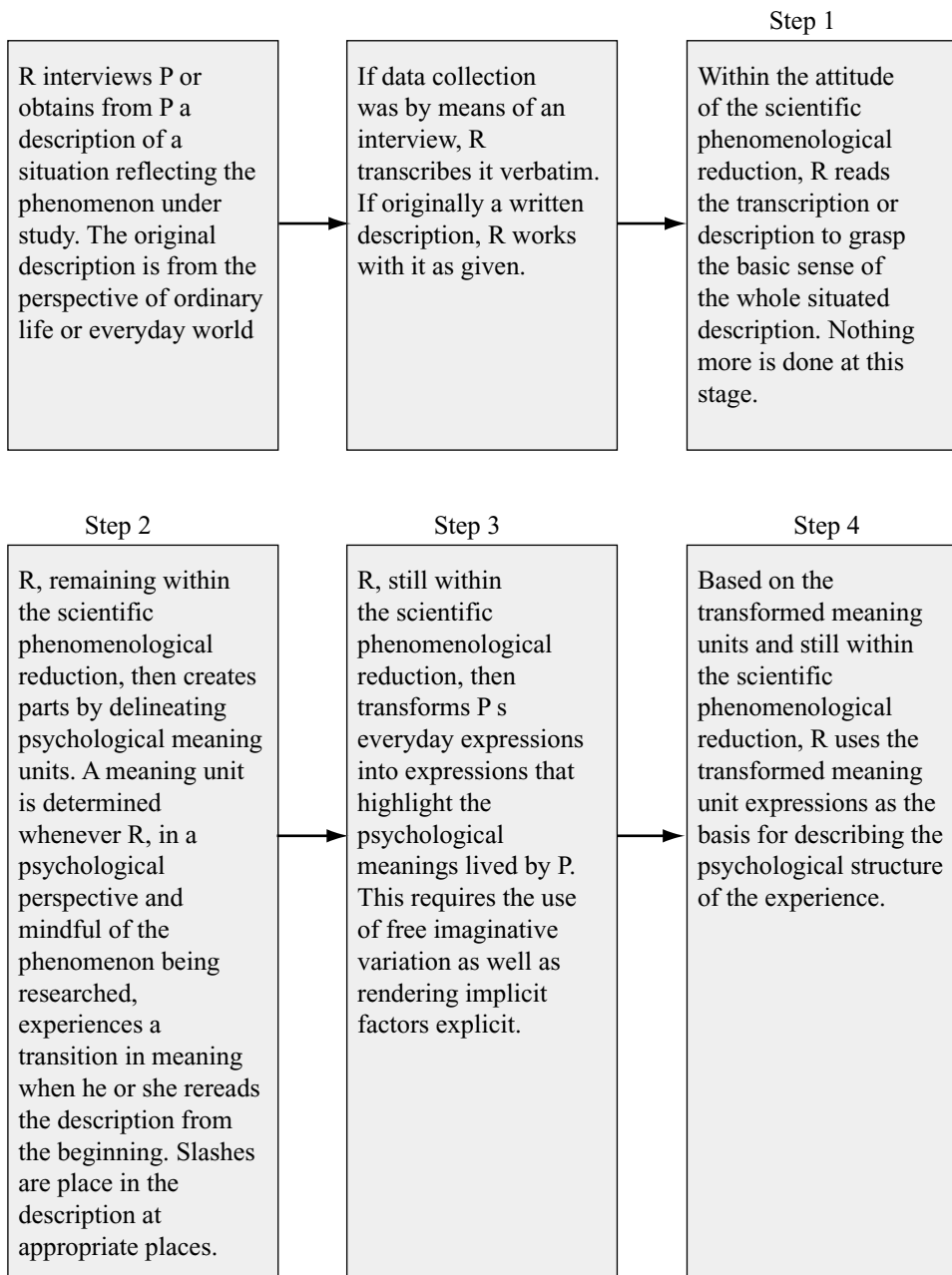
The third step of the analysis ends with a series of transformed meaning units—that is, meaning units that were originally in the language of the participant are now expressed with heightened psychological sensitivity with respect to the phenomenon under study. One then practices imaginative variation on these transformed meaning units to see what is truly essential about them (like with the cup) and then one carefully describes the most invariant connected meanings belonging to the experience, and that is the general structure. It is quite possible that terms not found in the transformed meaning units are required to describe the structure.

Before turning to the example analyses it may be helpful to the reader to see a flow chart of the scientific method. It may also be helpful to the reader to appreciate that each step of the method is a finer and more particular analysis built on the previous step, until the fourth step, which is once again a holistic articulation of the phenomenon, except that it is done psychologically this time. Exhibit 13.1 summarizes the steps that we have been articulating in this section.

### *Examples of Phenomenological Analysis of Descriptions*

We shall now turn to examples of phenomenological analyses. Readers interested in other examples of analyses or theoretical articulations are referred to the following sources: Giorgi (1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1992, 1994, 1997). For the example in this chapter, the data will be taken from a master's thesis (Sorenson-Englander, 2000) performed under the senior

**Exhibit 13.1.** Flowchart Demonstrating the Steps of the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method



*R* = researcher

*P* = participant

author's direction at Saybrook Graduate School. The phenomenon being researched is known as internalized homophobia, although it is not taken for granted that that is what the outcome will be. Two examples of data analysis will be provided because it will help clarify the role of the psychological structure more easily. What follows next are the transcribed interview data. Appendix 13.1 presents the transcripts of the interviews with P<sup>1</sup> and P<sup>2</sup>, the participants in this research.

The two sets of data are exact transcriptions of what the participants said. The method begins with a reading of the entire description, but nothing is done except for a first grasp of what the participant said. The second step is the determination of the meaning units, and these are expressed by the slashes in the texts. The third step demands that the language of the participant be expressed in such a way that the psychological meanings within the description be more explicitly stated. Appendix 13.2 highlights the third step. The column on the left shows the participant's words and the column on the right shows the transformations performed by the researcher to highlight psychological insights. Finally, the structure of the experience is determined by means of imaginative variation of the transformed meaning units. Although there is no space to show the process, the structure itself is presented in Appendix 13.3.

### *Poststructural Analyses*

Although the achievement of the structure is an important step of the analytical process, it is not, as some researchers seem to believe, the final step. The purpose of the structure is to help understand the empirical data in a more methodical and systematic way. Again, a full analysis cannot be done, but key constituents of the structure can help understand the variations found in the empirical data.

First of all, we must remember that what stimulated the study was the sense that male homosexuals might be "internalizing" homophobia and thus experiencing negative feelings toward themselves. The participants who responded to the question posed by the interviewer answered from the perspective of everyday life. It is granted beforehand that the everyday life description is richer than any psychological analysis, but it is also true that the psychological dimensions contained within the description have to be highlighted, made explicit, and thematized. That is why the analyses in Appendix 13.2 are presented. They indicate a thematization of the psychological factors whether they were originally explicit or implicit. But precisely because the participants spoke from the perspective of everyday life, it is not a priori certain that the phenomenon they experienced is psychologically equivalent to the everyday understanding of it. As the reader can see, we have labeled the structure differently. We believe that the complexity of the experience calls for some refinement. There are "moments" where one can detect the acceptance of the judgment of the society at large toward homosexuals, but they are only "moments." The total experience is filled with many other meanings, including genuine fear of consequences of being publicly known as gay. The respect for the complexity of the experience and the refinement of psychological understanding are two consequences of the phenomenological analysis.

**Table 13.1.** Selected Constituents of the Structure Along With Empirical Variations Provided by P<sup>1</sup> and P<sup>2</sup>

Constituents	P <sup>1</sup>	P <sup>2</sup>
Feelings of emotional ambivalence	Some of the people . . . were really effeminate and negative?? . . . maybe this was a good way to let my parents know I was different	I dropped out of the race. Too bad I was ashamed of my decision, but I was more ashamed of being gay.
Feelings of unsafety	My partner and I go to see a therapist to deal with issues like this . . . but it's never going to go away.	I'm still pretty scared of what might happen if I'm really open about being gay, especially with the hate crimes that keep happening.
Curtailing of desires	I couldn't tell my parents that I was gay—not yet at any rate.	I wasn't ready to be openly gay, so I dropped out of the race.
Selective momentary acceptance of judgments of society at large	And shame—at my mother for her reaction—and at myself I guess.	. . . but I was more ashamed of being gay.

*Note.* Not all constituents are listed because the table is for demonstration purposes only.

Now, if we turn to Table 13.1, a demonstration table, we can see how the delineation of a structure can help deepen the psychological understanding of a situated experience. The first constituent listed is called “feelings of emotional ambivalence.” This is a psychological understanding of certain empirical details, which are included in Exhibit 13.1, as well as a generalization of a key psychological factor that belongs to the structure of the experience.

As Table 13.1 shows, empirically P<sup>1</sup> was quite concerned about how to reveal to his mother, who had a negative attitude toward gays, that he himself was gay. P<sup>2</sup> felt ambivalent about becoming class president. He knew that he could do a good job, but was it worth being exposed as gay? He decided that it was not worth it, but not with neutral feelings. He really felt badly that he was not free to use his talents to become a leader of the senior class. Thus, although the empirical details are starkly different for the two participants, they both can be subsumed under the psychological heading “feelings of ambivalence.” Thus, the structure generalizes in a psychologically meaningful way and it helps deepen the essential understanding of the experience by reducing myriad details to their essential components.

The reader can examine Table 13.1 to see how the psychological constituents “feelings of unsafety” and “curtailing of desires” are exemplified. Because “internalized homophobia” was the triggering phenomenon of this research, we have included the moments of acceptance of outside attitudes as well. It is interesting to note that there was first, in both cases, feelings of shame directed toward something else before the shame was directed toward oneself. P<sup>1</sup> was ashamed of his mother first, and P<sup>2</sup> was ashamed that he did not continue to

run for class president. But why, then, should they be ashamed of themselves simply for being gay? Why is this fact worthy of shame unless, in some measure, they looked at themselves in the same way as they believed the straight world did? However, it is possible that the feeling of shame directed toward themselves might not have arisen if shame for something else did not precede it. In any case, it is clear that the whole experience cannot be primarily called “internalized homophobia.” It is even quite possible that without genuine threats from the population at large phobic reactions would also disappear.

More could be said about key psychological constituents and their empirical variations, but because this chapter is primarily methodological, we will move on to other issues.

### *Some Methodological Clarifications*

The first two steps of the method are usually not problematic, but the last two normally require additional comments. Reading a description only to find out what it is about is not difficult nor is the ability to create meaning units once it is understood that anything experienced as a transition even if seemingly arbitrary is a legitimate candidate. Of course, the meaning units have to be large enough to have an explorable significance and small enough to be manageable.

The third step is usually the most problematic because an easily discernible external criterion is lacking. However, this does not mean that no criteria are available. Obviously, persons cannot enter each others' heads to have direct evidence of what is being experienced. That is why the meaning units (parts) are rendered explicit, so that the critical other can know which meaning units are provoking specific forms of psychological explications. However, the meaning units are considered to be constituents that are context-dependent rather than “elements” that stand more or less on their own. This means that there cannot be a rigid one-to-one relationship between meaning units and their transformations. Relevant parts of the context outside the meaning unit can help codetermine the transformation that is articulated.

The purpose of the transformations is to make as explicit as possible the psychological dimensions of the complex concrete experience written from the perspective of everyday life rather than to allow them to remain implicit and inarticulate. As one begins the effort to transform the participant's language, certain intuitions begin to arise in the researcher's consciousness. These first meanings cannot be simply accepted, but they must be critically evaluated by means of free imaginative variation. When the researcher is satisfied that the best articulation has been achieved—phenomenologically speaking, that the fulfilling content matches the emptily presented sense precisely—then that transformation is written down and the researcher proceeds to the next meaning unit and recommences the process.

For example, meaning unit 16 for P<sup>1</sup> is emotionally very powerful. The transformation tries to render explicit in an essential way the network of emotional entanglements that are expressed therein. P<sup>1</sup> observes, but also knew from earlier experience, that his mother reacts and judges negatively to

manifest gay postures and gestures. But then P<sup>1</sup> himself says that he does not like such gestures either although he is gay. Is he identifying with his mother's attitude? But he also did not like how his mother was reacting to the gay person, so one cannot say that there is complete identity with the mother's attitude. Psychologically, P<sup>1</sup> says that he wanted to escape the whole situation, but because the whole reception was centered on him, he knew that he could not do so without grave consequences. He would like to leave but he must stay. Once again, like with his homosexuality and with his observation of his mother toward the manifest gay person, P<sup>1</sup> is trapped within a situation that provokes ambivalent feelings. P<sup>1</sup> was also motivated to tell his parents about his sexual preference, but observing his mother's negative, judgmental attitude he realized that she would not be ready to hear this news about himself in a sympathetic and accepting way. Again, ambivalent feelings prevail because P<sup>1</sup> obviously wants his mother's acceptance at some level and he is fearful that it may not be forthcoming. Still, he seems not prepared yet for a radical solution (breaking with his parents entirely) and so he dwells with myriad conflicting feelings. Meaning unit 16 is basically six lines long, yet we were able to unpack all of the above from those six lines, and everything stated is psychologically very important. To leave all of the above implicit makes the psychological analysis obscure and gives the critical reader no chance to double-check precisely what aspects of the analysis he or she might disagree with.

Finally, the structure is meant to convey what is truly psychologically essential about a series of experiences of the same type. Again, the structure is not meant to be universal but only general or typical. Those aspects of the experience that are highly specific or contingent would not be part of the structure. Only those constituents or relationships that are defining for the phenomenon would be included. The criterion is that the structure would be radically altered if a key constituent were to be removed. For example, neither participant that we have presented has declared publicly that he is gay. Can we imagine gays that have publicly declared their homosexuality also experiencing some moments of homophobia? We suppose so, but the dynamics could not be the same as described by these participants. Their lack of public disclosure hovers all around everything they say. That is why the idea of lack of public declaration belongs to the essential description of the phenomenon.

### *The Scientific Status of the Method*

There are still persons today who equate science with quantification rather than with the most precise knowledge possible, which is what science's ideal is. It is true that numbers can provide exactitude, but when the exactness of the means fits oddly with the mode of questioning and the amorphousness of the phenomenon, then one ends up with much less than the apparent exactness that numbers offer. Quantification is a powerful tool when the conditions of research allow it, but it is not the only means of achieving precision.

Rather, for us the criteria of science are met when the knowledge obtained is systematic, methodical, critical, and general. To be systematic means that there is a connection between various subfields within a given discipline—for



example, between learning and motivation or anxiety and performance and so on. Of course, at any given time in the history of a discipline these connections may not be well-understood, but at least are recognized as problems to be tackled. To be methodical means that certain basic steps that can be followed by many people to test the knowledge claims that any individual scientist can make are available. To be critical means that the knowledge gained by any method is not simply accepted because it has been gained, but that other experts within the scientific community challenge the procedures or the knowledge, including trying to replicate the findings. It also implies that the scientist who obtained the knowledge also tests it or remains skeptical of it as he or she goes along so that greater confidence in the outcome can be established. Finally, generality means that the knowledge gained is applicable to situations other than the specific one in which the knowledge was obtained. The claim is made that the method described in this chapter meets all four of the scientific criteria just described.

**Appendix 13.1.**  
**Interviews Concerning the Experience of Internalized**  
**Homophobia by Two Male Homosexuals**  
**(Raw Data of this Study)<sup>1</sup>**

*Participant 1:*

**I:** Please describe for me a time in your life when you experienced internalized homophobia.

**P<sup>1</sup>:** It happened after my recital for my Bachelor of Arts degree in music performance./ After the recital, there was a reception which had been arranged by my parents. It was held in a really nice hotel banquet room and everyone from the recital was invited. I didn't know about it until the week before the recital and when I found out, I didn't know if this was a good idea./ My parents didn't know I was gay—and some of the people I knew from the School of Music, who were going to be at the recital, were really effeminate and might give me away. Then I thought maybe this would be a good way of letting my parents know I was different./ But I was really nervous.

**I:** Can you tell me more about being nervous?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I had seen the way my mother had acted once before around a gay man. She turned up her nose at him. She said something about him being immoral because what he was doing was unnatural./

**I:** How did your mother know he was gay?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Well, she didn't, really. I mean, not too many people were coming out publicly at that time, but he was really swishy and flamboyant. He was what my friends and I refer to as a "Fifi."/ My parents thought that everyone who acted that way was gay. In this case, my mother was right, even though she was making an assumption. I knew he was gay because, well, because he had come onto me./ But I turned him down. Actually, I made a point to get away from him as fast as I could and then I avoided him after that because he was so—so—affected. And I wasn't really sure if I was gay or not—then./

**I:** What happened next at the party?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I showed up with my partner, who my parents knew as my roommate from college. We had been living together in a walk-up right next to the campus. A lot of young men shared living quarters without being questioned, and my

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<sup>1</sup>The thesis is titled "Alleged 'Internalized Homophobia' as Experienced Among Homosexual Men: A Phenomenological Psychological Analysis" (2000) and it was done by Kristin L. Sorensen-Englander. Data from a master's thesis are being used because doctoral material would be too long for a chapter of this size. Because the method is holistic, it is not possible to use part of the description of any one individual. Normally, special one-page descriptions are used in workshops and demonstrations, but because the descriptions from this thesis are also relatively short, we decided to use them. Two are being presented because the power of the structure of an experience can be more effectively demonstrated with a number beyond one. Although the raw data were taken from Sorensen-Englander's thesis, the analyses and structure contained within this chapter were performed by the authors.

partner and I were not obvious in our behavior or dress./ Most of our gay friends then and now are not obvious. Who would want to draw attention to being a social outcast?/ Anyway, my parents' friends pretty much hung out together by the food, and my colleagues hung out together by the drinks. There wasn't much interaction between the two groups—maybe because of the generational differences—but I think it was mostly because my colleagues made my parents and their friends uncomfortable./

**I:** Can you tell me more about this—about thinking your colleagues made your parents and their friends uncomfortable?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** One guy in particular was holding his cigarette like so (participant demonstrates) and he had his legs crossed—not like a man—like a woman./

**I:** Is there a difference?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Oh yes! Men sit like this (demonstrates). and women—and Fifi's—sit like this (demonstrates).

**I:** I see. So it was the gesture and the posture?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** (nods). My mom reacted exactly the same way as when she had done before. She was disgusted. And angry that I might have invited someone like that. Or that I would even know someone like that. Or that I might even be like that. My parents sort of prided themselves for not having any gay friends. You know how some people will say “Some of my best friends are gay?” Well, not my parents./ Actually, one of my relatives is gay but no one from my family has associated with him for years./

**I:** Was it just this one person, or were there others?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Oh, ya, I guess—one guy was pretty loud—especially after a few drinks. He giggled a lot. Not laughed—giggled./ But the one who really stood out was the guy with the cigarette and crossed legs. And it gave me the creeps when I saw the way my mother reacted. I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. But I was the guest of honor. I realized that I couldn't tell my parents I was gay—not yet, at any rate./

**I:** Have you since?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I waited until I had moved across country with my partner, as far away from them as I could get. It was around my 30th birthday. I wrote them a letter./ At first, my mother pretended she never got the letter. She would call and ask if I'd met any nice women./ My partner and I had a ceremony last year to affirm our commitment to each other, and my mother said I chose to become gay. Both my parents said I should rethink my lifestyle decision. We haven't spoken since./

**I:** Back to the party—what did you feel when you saw your mother react?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Embarrassment—for the way my colleague was acting. And shame—at my mother for her reaction—and at myself, I guess./ You know, I experience internalized homophobia quite often. I can't be around a Fifi. And there are times when I guess that's part of why I continue to see my therapist on a

weekly basis. My partner and I go to see a therapist together, but I see one on my own—to deal with issues like this. It's not always there, but it's never going to go away—until other people get over their homophobia./

### *Interview Participant 2*

I was really competitive and successful in high school until I decided to get involved in politics. I was running for senior class president./ I was pretty active in some gay-related activities but didn't openly admit to being gay. Why should I? After all, a lot of people—straight people—were involved in celebrating diversity./

My opponent in the class elections found out I was gay. I can't remember how . . . but he used that to his advantage. He demanded I withdraw from the elections or else he would expose me./ I wasn't ready to be openly gay. So, I dropped out of the race. Too bad./ I know I would have been a good representative for my class. But I couldn't risk being ridiculed or attacked. I was ashamed of my decision, but I was more ashamed of being gay./

I also stopped hanging out with my gay friends from outside the school. I had been active in a gay-friendly group from the Catholic Church, and volunteered once a week at the Food Bank which was specifically for people living with AIDS./ But I stopped going. I made excuses for not showing up. My therapist says it's typical—dropping out in order to hide from exposure. Exposure makes you vulnerable to ridicule and violence./ No one called to follow up. At first I was angry but then I realized the people from the church and from the Food Bank probably understood more than I about respect and confidentiality./

I'm pretty open now, but only in certain situations. I do this volunteer crisis line counseling once a week which, now that I think about it, probably helps me deal with issues of my own that I don't recognize in myself until after I hear about them from someone else who has had a similar experience./ I am grateful to have a committed relationship. We don't go to the bars. We have a few good friends, who are also in committed relationships./ We would like to think we live pretty normal lives—but I don't think we ever will. I guess I'm still pretty scared about what might happen if I'm really open about being gay, especially with the hate crimes that keep happening./

## Appendix 13.2.

### Complete Presentation of the Analysis of the Raw Data of This Research Reflecting the First Three Steps of the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method

#### *Participant 1:*

1. **I:** Please describe for me a time in your life when you experienced internalized homophobia.

**P<sup>1</sup>:** It happened after my recital for my bachelor of arts degree in music performance.

2. After the recital, there was a reception that had been arranged by my parents. It was held in a really nice hotel banquet room and everyone from the recital was invited. I didn't know about it until the week before the recital and when I found out, I didn't know if this was a good idea.

3. My parents didn't know I was gay—and some of the people I knew from the School of Music, who were going to be at the recital, were really effeminate and might give me away. Then I thought maybe this would be a good way of letting my parents know I was different.

1. \* P<sup>1</sup> designates a time in his life when he might have experienced “internalized homophobia.” He was at a formal social gathering called into being specifically to celebrate his recent achievement (BA degree) and artistic performance (musical recital).

2. P<sup>1</sup> states that the formal social gathering that he attended was arranged by his parents without P<sup>1</sup>'s prior knowledge until it was too late for him to do anything about it except that it left P<sup>1</sup> in a state of doubt about the worthiness of the idea because he was aware of the mixed values that the people coming together would have. The formality of the occasion was heightened by the nice surroundings in which the gathering was to take place and P<sup>1</sup>'s doubts were in part provoked by the idea that all those who attended his performance were also invited to the celebration afterward.

3. P<sup>1</sup> acknowledges that at the time he had not yet revealed his homosexuality to his parents, and yet he was aware that some of the people he knew from his school who would be attending his performance and the celebration following it were blatant in their manifestation of their sexual orientation and he feared that the reading of their behavior by his parents might allow them to infer that he, too, was homosexual. On the one hand this gave rise to the hopeful thought on the part of P<sup>1</sup> that this awkward situation might be the way to inform his parents of his different sexual orientation.

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*Note.* \* indicates that the researcher's question has been incorporated in the transformation.

4. But I was really nervous.

**I:** Can you tell me more about being nervous?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I had seen the way my mother had acted once before around a gay man. She turned up her nose at him. She said something about him being immoral because what he was doing was unnatural.

5. **I:** How did you mother know he was gay?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Well, she didn't, really. I mean, not too many people were coming out publicly at that time, but he was really swishy and flamboyant. He was what my friends and I refer to as a "Fifi."

6. My parents thought that everyone who acted that way was gay. In this case, my mother was right, even though she was making an assumption. I knew he was gay because, well, because he had come onto me.

7. But I turned him down. Actually, I made a point to get away from him as fast as I could and then I avoided him after that because he was so—so affected. And I wasn't really sure if I was gay or not—then.

8. **I:** What happened next at the party?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I showed up with my partner, who my parents knew as my roommate from college. We had been living together in a

4. \*Nevertheless, P<sup>1</sup> asserts that he was nervous about the interactions that might take place at the social gathering because he had observed his mother's reaction to a gay man previously and she treated him with disdain and judged him to be immoral because she assumed the man indulged in unnatural activities.

5. \* When questioned about how his mother knew that the man she judged negatively was, in fact, gay, P<sup>1</sup> responds by stating that she did not really know. P<sup>1</sup> recalls that not many homosexuals were publicly announcing their sexual orientation at that time, but the man that his mother judged was especially blatant and manifest in behavior so that most people would make the inference that he would want to be known as gay. P<sup>1</sup> states that he and his friends even have a special name for gay men who are as blatant and manifest as the man was.

6. P<sup>1</sup> states that he was aware that his parents shared the stereotypical view that if one portrayed himself as gay, then such a person was gay. P<sup>1</sup> confirms that his parent was correct in this case even though it was an assumption on her part. P<sup>1</sup> states that he did not have to assume that the person being discussed was gay because he had made romantic advances toward P<sup>1</sup>.

7. P<sup>1</sup> also states that he had refused the advances of the other man and even with great effort made sure that they did not connect again because P<sup>1</sup> thought that the man was too explicitly manifest in his homosexuality. In addition, P<sup>1</sup> says that he himself was not yet sure about his own sexual orientation at that time.

8. P<sup>1</sup> relates that the next thing about the social gathering that happened was that he arrived with his partner, whom his parents would recognize as his college roommate. They had been living in an apartment next to campus in an area filled with collegians

walk-up right next to the campus. A lot of young men shared living quarters without being questioned, and my partner and I were not obvious in our behavior or dress.

9. Most of our gay friends then and now are not obvious. Who would want to draw attention to being a social outcast?

10. Anyway, my parents' friends pretty much hung out together by the food, and my colleagues hung out together by the drinks. There wasn't much interaction between the two groups—maybe because of the generational differences—but I think it was mostly because by colleagues made my parents and their friends uncomfortable.

11. **I:** Can you tell me more about this—about thinking your colleagues made your parents and their friends uncomfortable?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** One guy in particular was holding his cigarette like so (participant demonstrates) and he had his legs crossed—not like a man—like a woman.

12. **I:** Is there a difference?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Oh yes! Men sit like this (demonstrates), and women—and Fifi's—sit like this (demonstrates).

**I:** I see. So it was the gesture and the posture?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** (nods).

13. My mom reacted exactly the same way as when she had done

and because neither P<sup>1</sup> nor his partner were obviously homosexual by dress or behavior they were never questioned.

9. P<sup>1</sup> also states that neither he nor his partner nor most of his gay friends are manifestly homosexual. The motive that P<sup>1</sup> gives is that to do so is to invite social ostracism, thus revealing that P<sup>1</sup> is aware of the general negative attitude toward gays held by the society at large.

10. P<sup>1</sup> states that there seemed to be a type of segregation at the social gathering because his parents and their friends seemed to congregate in one place (with food) whereas his peers grouped together in another place (with drinks). P<sup>1</sup> was aware that there wasn't much socializing between the two groups and he surmises that perhaps age differences contributed to the segregation, but P<sup>1</sup> believes that another important factor was that his peers made his parents and their friends feel uncomfortable.

11. \*When asked by the researcher to reflect more on the sense of discomfort P<sup>1</sup> perceived between his parents and their friends and his peers P<sup>1</sup> states that there was one peer in particular who was ostentatious in his postures and gestures so that he clearly manifested feminine characteristics. P<sup>1</sup> was able to demonstrate these differences to the researcher.

12. When asked by the researcher whether such a difference was discernible P<sup>1</sup> explicitly answers in the affirmative and demonstrated again to the researcher the differences between masculine and feminine postures and gestures and P<sup>1</sup> affirms that he perceived the gestures and postures to be provocative to his mother.

13. P<sup>1</sup> states that he observed that his mother reacted in this situation the same way that

before. She was disgusted. And angry that I might have invited someone like that. Or that I would even know someone like that. Or that I might even be like that. My parents sort of prided themselves for not having any gay friends. You know how some people will say "Some of my best friends are gay?" Well, not my parents.

14. Actually, one of my relatives is gay but no one from my family has associated with him for years.

15. **I:** Was it just this one person, or were there others?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Oh, yea, I guess—one guy was pretty loud—especially after a few drinks. He giggled a lot. Not laughed—giggled.

16. But the one who really stood out was the guy with the cigarette and crossed legs. And it gave me the creeps when I saw the way my mother reacted. I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. But I was the guest of honor. I realized that I couldn't tell my parents I was gay—not yet, at any rate.

17. **I:** Have you since?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** I waited until I had moved

she had before. He could perceive that she was disgusted and angry that her son might have invited someone to his performance who behaved in such a manner. P<sup>1</sup> then thought that his mother might be upset that he even might know someone with such gestures and postures. Then P<sup>1</sup> intensifies the thought and speculates that his mother might even come to think that he is like that. P<sup>1</sup> was aware that such an identification would violate his parents values because they, on the contrary, would boast that they know no such people. He relates that his parents are the opposite of people who can with confidence say that they are friendly with people who are in some sense socially stigmatized and unlike themselves.

14. P<sup>1</sup> confesses that he is aware that one of his relatives is homosexual but he is also aware of the ostracization status of that individual because no family member has associated with him for years.

15. P<sup>1</sup> acknowledges that there was also another peer who stood out and was loud and who manifested feminine characteristics after drinking.

16. However, P<sup>1</sup> affirms that it was really the first person referred to earlier who stood out at the social gathering with his blatant effeminate gestures and postures. P<sup>1</sup> was upset when he saw how his mother responded to a gay person with exaggerated gestures and postures, no doubt calling to his mind the other instance he had observed. P<sup>1</sup>'s perception of his mother's response aroused the desire in him to leave the social gathering but P<sup>1</sup> appreciated that the whole gathering was there to honor him and thus conflicted feelings surfaced in him. The major implication for P<sup>1</sup> was that he realized that he could not as yet inform his parents about his sexual orientation.

17. P<sup>1</sup> states that he has since informed his parents that he was homosexual, but not in



across country with my partner, as far away from them as I could get. It was around my 30th birthday. I wrote them a letter.

18. At first, my mother pretended she never got the letter. She would call and ask if I'd met any nice women.

19. My partner and I had a ceremony last year to affirm our commitment to each other, and my mother said I chose to become gay. Both my parents said I should rethink my lifestyle decision. We haven't spoken since.

20. **I:** Back to the party—what did you feel when you saw your mother react?

**P<sup>1</sup>:** Embarrassment—for the way my colleague was acting. And shame—at my mother for her reaction—and at myself, I guess.

21. You know, I experience internalized homophobia quite often. I can't be around a Fifi. And there are times when I guess that's part of why I continue to see my therapist on a weekly basis. My partner and I go to see a therapist together, but I see one on my own—to deal with issues like this. It's not always there, but it's never going

a face-to-face setting. P<sup>1</sup> waited until he moved as far away from his parents as he could with his partner, when he was well into his majority, and then he told them by letter.

18. P<sup>1</sup> states that his mother seems to choose to deny the knowledge about his homosexuality because she never acknowledged receiving the letter, and even more boldly, she would ask P<sup>1</sup> if he had met any eligible women.

19. P<sup>1</sup> states that he and his partner confirmed their sexual orientation and relationship with a ceremony the intent of which was to reaffirm their commitment to each other. P<sup>1</sup> then relates that it is his mother's impression that his gay status was a result of a free choice and thus she believes that he can rethink and change his lifestyle decision. P<sup>1</sup> adds that they have not spoken since that discussion.

20. \* In returning to a discussion of the social gathering, P<sup>1</sup> states that when he saw his mother's reaction to the exaggerated gestures and postures, he felt embarrassed as a consequence of the gay man who was behaving that way, especially because it was not P<sup>1</sup>'s own way of owning homosexual identity. Moreover, he felt shame in front of his mother because he could tell that she was not open to a different way of being sexual. Finally, P<sup>1</sup> expressed some shame with respect to himself, he surmises, perhaps indicating some acceptance of the attitude of society at large with respect to homosexuals.

21. P<sup>1</sup> verbalizes that he experiences "internalized homophobia" frequently, but that may not be the best expression for his feelings. He gives the example of exaggerated and manifest gays, but it seems to be more the style that is antipathetic to P<sup>1</sup> than the fact of homosexuality. He also admits that there are situations in which he does not reveal his homosexuality, but he does not clarify further.

to go away—until other people get over their homophobia.

22. P<sup>1</sup> states that he hates himself for not always revealing his sexual orientation, but again it is not clear that the lack of revelation constitutes homophobia. P<sup>1</sup> hypothesizes that perhaps those feelings are the reason why he sees a therapist on his own in addition to seeing a therapist with his partner, also on a weekly basis. P<sup>1</sup> claims that his solitary therapeutic appointments are to deal with alleged “internalized homophobia.” Still P<sup>1</sup> offers the opinion that although the feeling is not always with him, he guesses that it will never go away until nongays get over their homophobia. This seems to be an acknowledgment that it is not so much a “phobia” that P<sup>1</sup> is responding to as actual feelings of bias against homosexuals by the society at large.

### *Interview Participant 2*

1. I was really competitive and successful in high school until I decided to get involved in politics. I was running for senior class president.

2. I was pretty active in some gay-related activities but didn't openly admit to being gay. Why should I? After all, a lot of people—straight people—were involved in celebrating diversity.

3. My opponent in the class elections found out I was gay. I can't remember how. . . but he used that to his advantage. He de-

1. P<sup>2</sup> states that in many ways he was a full-fledged successful typical high school student freely participating in high school activities until he decided to enter politics at the high school level by aspiring to become the chief representative for his class. This would be a position in which P<sup>2</sup> would really stand out.

2. P<sup>2</sup> states that at the time he made the decision to become politically active he was involved in some gay-related activities but he did not admit to being gay to the public at large. P<sup>2</sup> did not see any reason why he should divulge his sexual orientation because he was aware that many people were involved in celebrating diversity and his involvement took place under that rubric. That is, P<sup>2</sup> took advantage of a situation that allowed him to keep his sexual identity undisclosed.

3. P<sup>2</sup> states that his opponent for the position of chief representative of his class, in a way unknown to him, found out that P<sup>2</sup> was gay and used that information to his (i.e., the

manded I withdraw from the elections or else he would expose me.

4. I wasn't ready to be openly gay. So, I dropped out of the race. Too bad.

5. I know I would have been a good representative for my class. But I couldn't risk being ridiculed or attacked. I was ashamed of my decision, but I was more ashamed of being gay.

6. I also stopped hanging out with my gay friends from outside the school. I had been active in a gay-friendly group from the Catholic Church, and volunteered once a week at the Food Bank which was specifically for people living with AIDS.

7. But I stopped going. I made excuses for not showing up. My therapist says it's typical—dropping out in order to hide from exposure. Exposure makes

opponent's) advantage. The opponent demanded that P<sup>2</sup> drop from the race for chief representative of his class or else he would announce publicly that P<sup>2</sup> was a homosexual. Explicitly or not, the opponent used his awareness of the prejudices against gays by the population at large as a means of gaining unfair advantage over P<sup>2</sup> and the threat was real enough for P<sup>2</sup> to terminate his ambition. It seems that P<sup>2</sup>'s response was not phobic but realistic.

4. P<sup>2</sup> states that at that time he was not ready to publicly announce his homosexuality so he withdrew from the election race. P<sup>2</sup> expresses disappointing sentiments probably reflecting his own awareness of his competency for the office.

5. P<sup>2</sup> states with some confidence that he knew that he could have been a good representative for his class, but he felt that he could not risk being exposed to psychological or physical harm. P<sup>2</sup> says that he was ashamed of his decision, probably reflecting a disappointment that he would not stand behind his actual identity, but then states that he was more ashamed of being actually identified as gay, possibly because of his awareness of the stereotypical social attitude of the population at large toward gays. This is a possible moment when P<sup>2</sup> is accepting and identifying with the attitudes of the general population toward gays

6. P<sup>2</sup> states that he also ceased associating with his gay friends outside the center of his life space. He had been active with gay-friendly groups related to church and charitable organizations. It seems that the impact of possible exposure had a withdrawal effect on P<sup>2</sup>.

7. P<sup>2</sup> reiterates that he stopped all extracurricular gay activity. He did not admit the true reasons for his withdrawal but made excuses for his cessation of helping activity. P<sup>2</sup> relates that his therapist helped P<sup>2</sup> under-

you vulnerable to ridicule and violence.

8. No one called to follow up. At first I was angry but then I realized the people from the church and from the Food Bank probably understood more than I about respect and confidentiality.

9. I'm pretty open now, but only in certain situations. I do this volunteer crisis line counseling once a week which, now that I think about it, probably helps me deal with issues of my own that I don't recognize in myself until after I hear about them from someone else who has had a similar experience.

10. I am grateful to have a committed relationship. We don't go to the bars. We have a few good friends, who are also in committed relationships.

11. We would like to think we live pretty normal lives—but I don't think we ever will. I guess I'm still pretty scared about what might happen if I'm really open about being gay, especially with the hate crimes that keep happening.

stand that his withdrawal was a typical strategic response to the risk of exposure of his sexual identity. He was aware that exposure made P<sup>2</sup> vulnerable to possible physical and psychological harm.

8. P<sup>2</sup> states that no colleague associated with his extracurricular activity called to inquire about his absence. Initially, this angered P<sup>2</sup>, but over time it dawned on P<sup>2</sup> that his co-workers probably understood more about the difficulties surrounding being gay and hence they showed greater respect and sensitivity to issues of confidentiality than he at first realized and he came to appreciate their stance.

9. P<sup>2</sup> states that he is more open now, but still only in restricted situations. This restriction to partial openness seems to be a reflection of genuine fear on the part of P<sup>2</sup> rather than anything phobic. P<sup>2</sup> now has committed himself to a type of volunteer crisis counseling that he now realizes probably helps him deal with many of his own issues concerning homosexuality. Often P<sup>2</sup> only recognizes the personal relevancy of the issues after talking about them with others who have had a similar experience.

10. P<sup>2</sup> states that he is thankful for being in a committed relationship with someone who seems to share his values. P<sup>2</sup> and his partner do not go to bars and they are able to socialize with other gay friends who are also in committed relationships. This type of social life minimizes the threat of exposure to those to whom he does not wish to reveal his genuine sexual orientation.

11. P<sup>2</sup> states that he and his partner are aware that they have achieved a relative sense of normal living, but P<sup>2</sup> is skeptical about ever achieving an indistinguishable normalcy. P<sup>2</sup> still harbors genuine fears about a full and open acknowledgment of his homosexuality and he cites as factors for these fears the hate crimes that are still being carried out against homosexuals that often make the news.

**Appendix 13.3.**  
**The Structure of the Experience of Being the Recipient  
of Socially Negative Judgments and Consequences  
on the Part of Nonpublicly Declared Homosexual Males  
by the Heterosexual World**

For P, who is a homosexual who has not publicly declared his true sexual identity, the possibility of being the recipient of socially negative judgments or harmful consequences is experienced as a constant horizontal threat that induces feelings of emotional ambivalence, unsafety, and the curtailment of desires. There is genuine fear of premature and undesired full exposure of one's sexual orientation before significant others as well as a segment of the population at large. The risk of physical or psychological harm as a result of open declaration is also constantly present. Part of the ambivalence that is felt is a result of the participant's recognition that despite potential negative consequences, the person's authentic sexual orientation is homosexual and thus remaining undeclared feels inauthentic. The perceived lack of the possibility of being sexually authentically oneself and yet retain the approval of significant others, the society at large, intimates, seems perennially to place the person at the center of disharmonious feelings, including momentary acceptance of the judgments of the society at large.

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