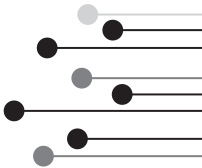




Introduction & Literature Review



A common misconception about phenomenological research is that the researcher begins the research without reviewing literature. Concerns about literature reviews span several topics with regard to the integrity of method. For instance, there is a risk of introducing or suggesting ideas to participants during the interview process as well as the concern of increased researcher bias. While these concerns are noteworthy about phenomenological research, it is unrealistic to assume that anyone will allow research to be conducted without a proposal, which highlights why the study is needed through arguments found in literature. Students need to present why the proposed study is needed and present it against the background of what is known and not known about the topic. Hence, a thorough literature review is necessary in all research, including phenomenological studies.

When writing a review of the literature on a proposed research topic, students determine whether the specific topic is worthy studying. When the exact topic is deemed thoroughly researched, the literature review is useful in helping the dissertation student refocus the scope of the research study to an area that deems inquiry. A thorough research of the literature assures that a research topic can and should be researched. Even though the literature review is the second chapter of the dissertation, students begin this process first since an extensive review of the literature is necessary for developing a proposed research topic.

Beginning the Literature Review: What's Your Topic?

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Before any steps are taken, a dissertation student must first specify a research topic to study. Topics can be general to start and will, most often, become more specific as the review of the literature progresses. Perhaps a student researcher proposes “the experience of stress on doctoral students in dissertation writing” or “the experience of being homeless.” A few words are acceptable to begin the process of reviewing literature.

Literature Search Strategy

After students choose a general topic of study, they should find journal articles and scholarly sources related to that topic. Students can do this in many ways depending on their organizational styles, but one piece of essential advice would be to create an outline. What information is missing in our field that needs to be explored further? This is the beginning of the search. Students should write this at the top of the outline as the title. This title may change as literature review progresses, and students can expect to revise it many times as necessary. An outline of the literature review will allow students to stay organized, stay focused on the topic, and create a proper funnel effect.

Create an Outline

A good literature review should flow from broad to specific. By creating a funnel configuration, a literature review will move from establishing the importance of the topic (WHY this is worth researching) to the specific research questions (HOW the answers will be acquired). A funnel will allow students to frame their arguments with sufficient detail so that readers are able to follow the logic and sequence of all major points.

Literature review outlines serve as a preview tools that allow dissertation students to see their literature review plans at a glance so that they can revise them as needed. By looking at the outline, students will be able to assure that their literature review has a proper scope and direction as well as proper organization. Outlines will differ among students' organizational styles but should typically follow a structure such as this:

Title (main topic)

1. First Main Idea (*broadest or most general*)
 - a. First supporting argument
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - ii. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - iii. Evidence or example (include citations)

- b. Second supporting point
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - ii. Evidence or example (include citations)
- 2. Second Main Idea
 - a. First supporting argument
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - b. Second supporting point
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - ii. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - ...
- 3. 15. Last Main Idea (*most specific to research question or questions*)
 - a. First supporting argument
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - b. Second supporting point
 - i. Evidence or example (include citations)
 - ii. Evidence or example (include citations)

After the completion of the literature review outline, a student will have enough literature collected and organized (sufficient detail to allow readers to follow the logic and sequence of main ideas along with citations) to construct a proper problem statement and begin writing an effective first chapter of the dissertation. At this point, formal completion of Chapter 2 follows completion of Chapter 1 (this book chapter is organized to help students in this order).

Writing the First Dissertation Chapter: The Introduction

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The first chapter in the dissertation is the Introduction and is written to inform readers about the topic researched, its significance, and how the research will be conducted. A literature overview

is included, where the students write summaries to show what is already recognized about the proposed research issues and to demonstrate the cognizance of a dissertation student on the topic. The precise configuration of this chapter will vary depending on university expectations and students' organization of the sections. Typically, a standard qualitative dissertation Introduction includes the Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Theoretical Framework, Definitions, Limitations, Delimitations, Ethical Issues, and a Summary. Longer sections can be divided into subsections, which can be further divided if needed. The introduction of a phenomenological dissertation should introduce the study in such a way that it simultaneously provides details of the study and an overview of the study's conclusions. Students will usually begin the introduction with a statement related to the human or social problem they are discussing in their phenomenological study.

Before writing the formal problem statement, students may want to begin with a short introductory paragraph or a few paragraphs to introduce their chapter. While starting with a "hook" to get a reader interested in a writer's topic is often encouraged in writing standard papers, it is not required in research papers. With that said, it can enhance the introduction and is certainly acceptable. Students may want to write something that engages readers with provocative quotes, disconcerting statistics or interesting stories. If a more straightforward approach is warranted or desired, students can simply state the problem explicitly, beginning their introductory paragraphs with declarations like, "I will illuminate" or "I seek to understand." Following that, students should write a paragraph that gives readers an idea of the structure of the rest of the document. For example,

In this chapter, I will discuss relevant literature that relates directly to my study about the lived experiences of teachers working with student who have experienced trauma. I will then explain the method of this research, followed last by . . .

Example of an Opening to Chapter 1

Christian men spend more time exploring their understanding of masculinity than other men (Singleton, 2004), and self-help literature for Christians is usually written by evangelical Christians (Donovan, 1998; Singleton). Evangelicals quite often have a different understanding

of psychological problems than the rest of the population so the implications of healing from sexual addiction can be quite different for evangelical Christian men when compared to others. Many evangelical people believe that psychological problems are the product of a “sinful and spiritually fallen condition” (Kwee, Dominguez, & Ferrell, 2007, p. 4). Many evangelical insights are discussed in self-help literature that is targeted for evangelicals, but research about evangelical belief systems is limited in general scholarly literature. Hence, counselors who do not work with evangelicals or are not aware of evangelical belief systems are limited in their abilities to work effectively with this population. This qualitative investigation is specific to evangelical Christian men who classify themselves as sexually addicted and is aimed at focusing on these men’s lived experiences of sexual addiction through their evangelical perspectives. This research will provide counselors with an enhanced understanding of evangelical Christian men who struggle with sexual addiction issues so that they can work with them more effectively.

After this, the problem statement will follow under a new heading.

Problem Statement

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Phenomena are not problems by definition, so writing a *problem* statement is not always in line with phenomenological research. For example, the phenomenon of discrimination may be a problem, but the phenomenon of prayer is not, at least in the social sciences. While in most cases, phenomenological studies are not aimed at solving problems at all, they can still be a phenomenological problem. Discrimination and prayer would be problematic in the sense that they need to be explained. What is the essence of prayer? What is the essence of discrimination? Those are the problems of phenomenological inquiry. While phenomenological methods are used to illuminate phenomena and reveal complexities of different experiences, they also often *create* problems to solve.

Regardless of the problem statement debate in phenomenological inquiry, students still need to write section that helps the dissertation committee understand that the proposed phenomenological research will fill a meaningful gap in current literature for the field. If a university allows, the “Statement of the Problem” can be omitted, or rather, renamed to something more suitable

like “Significance of Research.” Since many colleges and universities devise specific dissertation requirements that obligate students to follow a necessary structure that includes clear headings such as Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, and Research Questions, and so forth, many students must state a problem statement regardless of the proposed methodology. For ease and clarity, this chapter is written using universal dissertation headings to help students write their phenomenological dissertations within the most common dissertation configuration. Students are encouraged to deviate from this heading structure as their universities allow.

Typically, the problem statement is the center of the dissertation, and this will be the place that most committee members will read first to identify and assess the importance of the proposed research. The problem statement is also one of the most difficult portions of the dissertation to get right. From reading a problem statement, a reader should know what the problem is, why it needs fixing, and how that’s significant to the field of study. Then students should propose how their research will solve that problem. After reading the problem statement, committee members should know why a student is doing a study and be convinced of its importance. It is clear how the research fills a meaningful gap that is absent in the literature.

Students often misinterpret the requested “gap” they need to produce in literature to mean that the topic presented is simply missing or limited in current research and bears further study, thereby supporting their proposal to study it. While a “gap” in current research literature is certainly missing or limited in information, that missing or limited information is not necessarily a problem. For example, in the counseling field, one may not know how much wood a woodchuck would chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood. This is clearly missing in counseling literature. However, students need to ask themselves if this is a problem for counselors! Probably not. So while there is a technical “gap” in woodchuck-chucking behavior in counseling literature, it is not a “meaningful gap.” Counselors do not need to know this information to enhance the counseling field, and a counseling student might have significant difficulty proposing this topic as a problem statement.

Problem statements should also be succinct yet thorough. Students need not elaborate on every study in the problem statement.

Save that type of writing for the literature review. Problem statements can stay within the length of one to two paragraphs. Briefly write what is relevant to highlight the problem. With that said, dissertation writers should still explain everything to their readers without assuming their readers automatically know what they, the writers, mean. Just because a problem is noted does not mean that the reader knows the solution for the proposed field of study. Students need to do this all for their readers. Be succinct and thorough. Below are five points that students should present in their problem statements.

1. State the dominant problem.
2. State the population that is affected by this problem.
3. State the type of phenomenological study (transcendental, hermeneutic, or hermeneutic with a supporting theory).
4. State what type of data will be gathered (lived experiences).
5. State how understanding the lived experiences of said population will help resolve the problem.

Here is an example of how a student might write the fifth point, which is often the most difficult:

Because interviews provide deeper insights into the intricate interactions of this population's experiences, this phenomenological investigation is best suited to exploring and identifying the specific issues of women who work in male-dominated work settings. Understanding the lived experiences of women who work in male-dominated work settings can assist in helping career counselors create stronger therapeutic alliances by offering a clearer understanding of this population's individual experiences through narrative. By illuminating specific issues of women who work in male-dominated work settings that are separate from other work settings, this phenomenological study could also help add rich information for future creation of career development tools.

In reviewing the final problem statement for quality, students should be able to respond affirmatively to the following questions in the following box:

How to Create a Quality Problem Statement

1. Do I present the research problem succinctly and thoroughly?
2. Do I present the problem in a way that responds to previous research studies?
3. Do I provide evidence that the problem is currently relevant to the field or discipline of study?

Purpose Statement

The aim of a purpose statement is a concise statement that connects the problem being addressed with the focus of the study. The purpose statement is made up of three major components: (1) the motivation driving the dissertation; (2) the significance of the research; and (3) the research questions addressed. Students must not forget to include that the intended research is phenomenological (and what kind, hermeneutic or transcendental, for example). Below is an example of all three components included in a concise paragraph:

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study is to illuminate the experiences of male counselors who work with women who experience trauma. By interviewing male counselors at trauma centers throughout Alabama, I will describe the phenomenon of the male counselor's experience of working with traumatized female clients. As a result of this study, counselor educators can better explain how their male students might experience female clients' traumas, potentially highlighting the topics of building resiliency and implementation of self-care. The question, "What are the lived experiences of male counselors who work with female clients who have experienced trauma?" is the focus of this research study.

In reviewing the final purpose statement for quality, students should be able to respond affirmatively to the following questions in the following box:

How to Create a Quality Purpose Statement

1. Do I begin my statement concisely (“The purpose of this study is . . .”)?
2. Do I state that this study is qualitative, phenomenological, and the specific type of phenomenology?
3. Do I state the central phenomenon to be explored?
4. Do I use qualitative terms such as *illuminate*, *explore*, *describe*, *discover*, or *understand*?
5. Do I describe the participants in the study?
6. Do I note where the study will take place or from where the data will be collected?

Research Questions

Phenomenological research questions have one unwavering rule. The inquiry must always be about experience as lived. Phenomenological inquiry is only about experience and nothing else. To ask people’s views about something is not phenomenological. For example, “How do teenage girls describe friendship in high school?” is not a phenomenological question since opinions and descriptions are the focus. A phenomenological question could be created by changing the focus to experience: “What are the lived experiences of friendship among teenage girls?” Students can also add sub-questions to focus more on specifics, but they are not always necessary. A sub-question might be, “How do teenage girls experience friendships in relation to social pressures?”

Research questions must not assume that something is present. Above, it was stated that teenage girls experience social pressures. Was this an assumption? No, because the phenomenon of social pressures among teenage girls has been proven throughout literature. However, if there is no connection made in the literature between the population studied and a certain phenomenon,

it should not be assumed in a research question. For example, when dissertation students ask the research question, “How do teenage girls experience friendship amid homework stress?” they assume that all teenage girls are stressed about homework. That may not necessarily be the case. If the case of homework stress among teenage girls has not been studied and proven in literature, dissertation students should not assume it exists. However, if homework stress is the focus of the dissertation in relation to friendship, then it cannot be omitted, of course. Hence, the two words, “if any” often rectify the research question easily. For example: “How do teenage girls experience friendship amid homework stress, if any?” In this way, all necessary components are included in the research question without leaping to an assumption.

In each research question, students should succinctly describe what they want to understand. All major components of that population should be included. For example, if students want to ask about the marital experiences of male veterans struggling with PTSD, five components must be included among the research questions: experience, male, veteran, PTSD, and marriage. The most basic phenomenological question is phrased simply, “What are the lived experiences of such and such population?” Flow is also important, however, and “What are the lived experiences” format may not always work best. In this example case, a student might ask, “What are the lived experiences of marriage in male veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD?” but that sounds a bit awkward. A student can begin there and then reorganize. One suggestion might be, “How do male veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD experience married life?”

How to Create Quality Research Questions

- Do all the research questions ask about experience?
- Are the research questions free of assumptions?
- Are all the components of the study included in the research questions?
- Are the research questions easy to understand with no need for clarification?

Theoretical Framework

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Theoretical frameworks exist in research because, to increase objectivity, a researcher must take others' thoughts into consideration. By looking at phenomena through different perspectives, researchers are able to broaden their understanding of those phenomena. In phenomenological research, the framework is phenomenological philosophy. A better heading would be Grounding Philosophy or Philosophical Framework, if renaming general headings is allowed by the committee. Phenomenology is the essence of something as it is described and how the essence of something is described in terms of how it functions in the lived experience and how it shows itself in consciousness as an object of reflection.

The two main theoretical frameworks that dissertation students can use to frame their phenomenological studies are the philosophies of Edmund Husserl (for transcendental or descriptive phenomenological dissertations) and of Martin Heidegger (for hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenological dissertations). These are the foundational philosophers. Students can use additional frameworks to frame their phenomenological studies (like feminist theory or developmental theory, for example), but only with hermeneutic studies (i.e., Heidegger). However, if students choose to use a secondary theory as a lens in their hermeneutic phenomenological study, the research would be a hybrid and should be titled that way. Students utilizing developmental theory would have a developmental-hermeneutic phenomenological study, for example.

While phenomenological researchers can use various phenomenological philosophers to frame their studies, Husserl and Heidegger are foundational and will always be included. Since most dissertation students are novice researchers who are new to phenomenological philosophy, it is best to choose either Husserl or Heidegger as the main philosophers and keep it straightforward. To identify the best philosophy for their dissertations, students will need to decide how they comprehend understanding. Husserl and Heidegger differed on this matter, and created two very different phenomenological philosophies. Below is a short summary of each philosopher's approach.

Edmund Husserl

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is considered the father of phenomenology. He believed that phenomenology was presuppositional. This means that, when using transcendental phenomenology, there can be no use of theoretical frameworks. His philosophy does not allow for that. Husserl believed that nothing should be assumed or taken for granted when trying to understand a phenomenon.

Husserl wanted to get to the pure essence of a phenomenon, of the way one looks at something. **Intentionality** is the fundamental property of consciousness, of looking at something. It is our awareness of something. This is the principal theme within his philosophy. **Reduction** is also a term that Husserl uses. It is basically the intentional consciousness of using the process of **bracketing (epoché)**, or, as it was once aptly called, phenomenological vigilance (van Kaam 1966, p. 259). What that means within reduction is suspending your judgments to focus on the studied phenomenon. It is not about eliminating biases but suspending them or setting them aside. **Noesis** means to thinking about, and **noema** is the thing that is thought about so those two go hand in hand. The horizon is the present experience that you are having right now. Right now, you are reading this book, that is, the experience you are having in the present, the **horizon**. This present experience that you are having cannot be suspended or bracketed because you are currently in it. Everything has a horizon when we look at any phenomenon—there is always this present experience. Therefore, nothing can be fully seen in its entirety unless you were omniscient (all-knowing) which of course, no human is. So, when we look at something, even though we suspend our judgments to try to get this pure essence of something, we come to the horizon, and the horizon is the understanding that we have.

Husserl applied to research

Bracketing is having this position so that the researcher becomes like a stranger in a strange land—kind of like an alien coming down to planet Earth for the first time. So the biases that this alien has are already suspended because the suspension is putting oneself into a position of being a stranger in a strange land. What if I didn't understand what trauma is? What if I didn't understand what rural area is? This state of being a stranger in a

strange land is bracketing. In this state of intentional suspension, one can get to the essence of something. So one can see how using another theoretical framework is impossible in Husserl's philosophy. If you are suspending all other understanding in the process of bracketing, you would have to suspend any additional frameworks too. You couldn't get to the essence of something with an additional framework.

Husserl believed that all human thinking was linked to something, which simply means that when people think, they always prescribe an ending point to their thinking. Essentially, all thinking, for Husserl, was thinking something. Husserl also believed that everything we know has an objective existence, independent of ourselves, but when we discover it or know about it, that act of knowing makes that thing subjective as well because we name it, essentially. In other words, when we name something, the name becomes an obstacle between us and the object (or the things themselves). Husserl believed that it was impossible to use any kind of thinking and knowing that was not linked to language to really understand something in its essence. His fundamental premise of **intentionality** stated that the very act of thinking bonds us to the thing we think about. So, to minimize the problem of having the subjective thought overwhelm the objective existence of something as we aim to know it, Husserl proposed that individuals need to position themselves differently in the world and how they think about things.

People think when they analyze, categorize, generalize, and discriminate between things (Willis, 2001), and there are other times when people's minds are really struck by certain ideas, being moved by them. In the latter case, people are receptacles of ideas that incite in them certain feelings. The former ways of thinking are more proactive ways of thinking about something. Both exist within human thinking. Husserl believed that the more people thought about their thinking, the more they could know something clearly. They could then move from naming experiences to ordering them into more general categories within their language and how they see the world (Willis, 2001).

Key terms to include in the framework

1. **Bracketing/Epoché**—suspending judgments to focus on analysis of experience

2. **Horizon**—present experience, which cannot be bracketed; therefore nothing is fully seen in its entirety as none of us are omniscient
3. **Intentionality**—fundamental property of consciousness and principal theme of phenomenology; our awareness in a sense
4. **Noema**—what is thought about
5. **Noesis**—thinking about or interpreting
6. **Phenomenological reduction**—intentional consciousness using process of bracketing or *epoché* (suspending judgments to focus on analysis of experience)

Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) branched off from Husserl and created his own philosophy (hermeneutic). He believed that there was no way we could bracket our experiences because we are always in the world with others in the circumstances of existence. There is no way to separate yourself from being within the world, and this state, this being in the world meaning *Dasein*, literally being there. *Dasein* is what Heidegger talks about when he talks about the self. Myself, yourself, each person is *Dasein*, in the circumstances of each one's own existence. If bracketing is not allowed, how can you get to the essence? If we cannot suspend our judgments to get to the essence of a phenomenon, can it really be understood? Heidegger's solution to this was the **hermeneutic circle**. He talked about it as a revisionary process. Heidegger called preconceived knowledge **fore-sight** or **fore-conception**. As we begin to understand and interpret something, our fore-sights (biases or understandings or judgments) are revised. The hermeneutic circle is a description of the process of understanding. It is not a technique that you use. This is the philosophy—What is understanding and interpretation? This is what Heidegger's philosophy encompassed—how people make sense of the world. However, in data analysis, the philosophy of the hermeneutic circle is used in this way:

When you analyze data, there is an understanding of the whole (the entire transcript) and analyzing the whole as you read it, and then there is an understanding of parts (codes and themes).

As you are analyzing data, you break down information into parts and then synthesize, and you look at the whole again (the entire transcript). That is the new understanding. And then as you move through it again in analysis, the parts make sense of the whole and the whole makes sense of the parts, and this hermeneutic circle continues until a new understanding emerges. Analysis is not a linear process; it is circular, or a better explanation is that it is *spiral* since *circular* would mean that one's understanding does not really change since a circle gets back to the same point. In a *spiral* process, understanding increases by moving from the understanding of parts to the understanding of the whole and again back to parts, continually changing as new data are introduced.

This is how Heidegger understood interpretation. This is how people make sense of a phenomenon in the world. He believed that interpretation is a constant revision. As I am interpreting something, I have a pre-understanding of the phenomenon, and as I get new information, there is a revision of that understanding. As a researcher, I grasp the whole text in individual parts and also as a whole again and again in a circle until there is a full understanding of the phenomenon. As I look at little pieces, I get these “aha” moments in relation to the whole. So you can sort of think of something you have experienced in your life and you might understand parts of it, and in 3 years you have new experiences, and you can think back on past moments, and they are understood in new ways as you have learned new things throughout experience. This is how the whole has an impact on the individual parts and how the individual parts have an impact on the whole. There is always a moving from the object that is to be understood to the personal comprehensions of the researcher and then back to the object (Heidegger, 1971).

Heidegger applied to research

Heidegger's framework can be seen as the use of lenses. In the technique of using the hermeneutic circle, you want to make your personal biases or judgments explicit, either by writing them in your dissertation or journaling about them somewhere before you analyze data. As you write before the process, why did you understand something some way? For example, if someone uses a term, you might know exactly what they mean because you “get” that context. In Hawaii, there are many common terms used. If a participant said, “We are ohana,” you might understand that to clearly mean “we are family” in a specific way because you understand Hawaiian culture,

either because you live there or in other ways. Husserl would go back to the participants and ask, “What did you exactly mean by this?” because he would not take that for granted. He is a stranger in a strange land, but in Heidegger’s framework, one may have some pre-understanding and can incorporate it as appropriate. Being in a certain gender, race, experience is incorporated into data analysis. So with Heidegger, a researcher would make personal biases explicit; however, in bracketing, it is unnecessary because all personal understandings are irrelevant. Why bring them up if the goal is to suspend them? Some may argue that one needs to put biases in front of consciousness so that one knows what biases to suspend, and there is certainly an argument that can be made for that. However, biases are bountiful, and some may be subconscious. To journal about every personal bias about a phenomenon is unrealistic, maybe impossible. Hence, journaling would typically not accord with bracketing, but it would with the hermeneutic circle.

Gadamer took Heidegger’s concept of the hermeneutic circle and further developed it, so if you are doing this research, get his book, as it’s essential to understanding the hermeneutic circle in depth. The lenses discussed in the Heideggerian framework above are **pre-understandings**; Gadamer calls them **fore-conceptions**. A person modifies the nature of understanding by this constant process of renewed projection (interpretation). This happens through each lens. By looking through one’s biases and understandings (instead of trying to suspend them), researchers revise understanding. So researchers are always looking through these changing lenses (new understandings) in order to understand a phenomenon. Each lens is created as the process of interpretation continues. So one can see how this allows for another theoretical framework. If a researcher is using attachment theory, for example, pre-understanding would be one lens, attachment theory would be another lens, and a new understanding would emerge from each lens.

Key terms to include in the framework

1. **Dasein**—“being there”
2. **Fore-sight/fore-conception**—preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon
3. **Hermeneutic circle**—interpretation as revision, it is a description of the process of understanding and not a technique

How to Create a Quality Theoretical Framework

- Is the main philosopher introduced with all key terms?
- Are connections among key terms of the framework logical and applicable to the research?
- Does a secondary theoretical framework follow (only in hermeneutic phenomenology) in terms of how it will be used as a lens?
- If using a secondary framework, is there a final summary of how both frameworks will work together?

Definitions

In this section, students should provide succinct definitions of the primary concepts discussed in their dissertations. Terms that may have multiple meanings should be defined as well. Definitions that do not need to be included would be common terms or terms that can easily be looked up. Students should include citations for each definition.

Assumptions

In hermeneutic phenomenological dissertations, it is particularly important to discuss assumptions or biases about the research topic. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the understanding is that biases cannot be set aside or bracketed, and therefore, they need to be recognized and later revised as new information is discovered. If doing a hermeneutic study, students should elucidate aspects of the study that are assumed but cannot be established as fact. Only assumptions that are essential to the meaningfulness of the study should be described and why those assumptions are necessary to illuminate in the context of the study. In transcendental phenomenological dissertations, biases are irrelevant. They are set aside and should not be made explicit. Highlighting biases in a transcendental phenomenological study is counterintuitive to the process. Students may want to note this in an Assumptions section

if it is required by the university. They can discuss the process of bracketing a bit more here to demonstrate how assumptions will be handled and why it is essential not to highlight them.

Delimitations and Limitations

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Delimitations are different from limitations, and it can be confusing to delineate the two. In summary, delimitations are choices made by the researcher which should be mentioned. They describe the boundaries that you have set for the study. This is the place to indicate the things that you are not doing and explain why you have chosen not to do them. Limitations are methodological weaknesses. They are influences that are out of the researcher's control. Any **limitations** that might influence the results should be mentioned. Common limitations for phenomenological dissertation studies are small sample sizes, time limitations, and bias in the participant sample. Note that the Limitations section should be relatively brief and straightforward, simply mentioning major concerns and reasonable measures to address those concerns.

Significance

In describing the significance of a study, students should discuss how their research would benefit or have an impact on others. In essence, readers should be able to understand how individuals or groups of individuals could benefit from the proposed research. Students should identify how the study would advance knowledge in the field of study and, if applicable, how the study could contribute to or have an impact on certain practices or policies in the field of study. Potential implications for positive social change can also be discussed here as long as they are restricted to the scope of the study. Students should use the problem statement to guide them in identifying the significance of their study. They should also write from general to specific, like the funnel system in writing a literature review. Begin with the general contribution of the study (How does this study contribute to society?) and continue to narrow the focus toward the field of study and research question (How does this study contribute to understanding of PTSD among teenagers?). This type of writing enables readers to understand the problem and solution generally and then more specifically in a logical way.

Summary Sections

The Summary section should not be too long but should have purpose. Students should summarize the main points of each chapter and provide a transition to the next chapter. This portion of the chapter is a succinct paragraph.

Completing the Literature Review

Once the Introduction is finished, students will finish writing the Literature Review. If all steps were followed, a good part of the literature review was started along with a preliminary outline, which can be expanded as necessary. Students should be careful not to write a literature review that has little to do with their research questions. This type of disorganized writing is avoided by following the literature review outline initially created in the literature review strategy. In a well-written literature review, a reader reads the research question or questions toward the end as a natural progression from what was stated above. A proper order, from general to specific, will allow the reader to think in a deductive way and stay focused on the research topic.

Another important strategy for creating a quality literature review is how journal articles and other relevant literature are presented from each section of the outline. Dissertation students should not write literature reviews by writing a series of article critiques one after another. This kind of writing will destroy the flow of the manuscript. Ideally, the literature review should begin with the problem statement as the introductory paragraph followed by studies that support the introductory paragraph in more detail. Similar studies should be discussed together, with an emphasis on more relevant studies. For example, if a dissertation topic is about the lived experience of stress on teachers in rural areas, the literature review should be written in a way that would present teaching stress literature as a group and rural area literature as a group. Throughout the process of appropriately grouping similar articles, students should also present similar research findings together. If a few studies on teaching stress have the same finding, students should state the finding and then cite all the studies with that finding. Only studies that are similar to the dissertation topic should be described in great detail. Using sub-headings is also

beneficial for organizing a literature review and should be used when appropriate.

Lastly, literature reviews should be balanced. Relevant research needs to be presented in terms of strengths and weaknesses along with alternate studies that present differing results. All studies should be synthesized in a way that they are relevant to the dissertation research questions.

How to Create a Quality Literature Review

- Are studies related to the research topic and phenomenological method presented from general to specific?
- Is the literature review organized by topics rather than by author or date?
- Are similar studies grouped together with major studies discussed in detail and minor studies with more restriction?
- Is relevant research compared and contrasted, nonconclusive results noted, and described in terms of its strengths and weakness along with alternate studies? Can readers draw their own conclusions?
- Can readers summarize what is known as well as what is not known about the research topic in the related discipline?
- Are studies reviewed and synthesized as they relate to the research questions?
- Are most articles current (within 5 to 10 years) and recent developments in the problem emphasized?
- Does the literature review provide a complete explanation of the problem and how the dissertation study will fill a meaningful gap in the literature?
- Are all necessary citations provided for statements of fact with no assumptions or leaps in logic from the author?

Literature review exercise

Below is a portion of a literature review example uploaded from University of West Florida's website (Literature Review: Conducting & Writing) with some of my editing for easier reading and clarity. Overall, the student did a nice job of covering the information needed to support her research question about communication in the family after a family member is diagnosed with a chronic illness. Notice the funnel effect from general to more specific and ending at the proposed research question, how the student mentioned some studies in more detail than others, and how the narrative flowed from one thought to the next instead of listing one study after another. There are many ways that this literature can be improved as well. It might be helpful to look at the table above on how to create a quality literature review and check where the student was successful and what areas needed improvement. You can also check the student's original literature review online or in Appendix E to see where I edited the literature review for flow and grammar (something that is beyond the scope of this book but still important to learn).

Literature Review

Chronic physical illness and chronic mental illnesses are reviewed separately in this literature review due to the tremendous differences in the two. In this study, they will be compared against one another to cross-analyze the differences and similarities in how the family member is treated depending upon his or her type of illness.

Chronic Physical Illness

Chronic physical illnesses vary in types and intensity but have one characteristic in common: They recur throughout time, usually at random intervals. The uncertainty that comes along with a diagnosis along these lines can greatly affect family communication and relationships.

Marriage. Marriage is the basis of most families in many cultures. Keeping the marital bond strong could be very difficult in the face of a chronic physical illness. A chronic physical illness could potentially

change the daily lives and interactions of the entire marital relationship. It is important to discuss the communication that occurs around these illnesses in order to understand how those who have one have been treated since their diagnosis based on research already conducted around similar communication processes. Couples that used relationship talk or talking about the nature and direction of the relationship, chronically ill couples had more benefit than a couple that did not include someone who had a chronic physical illness did (Badr & Acitelli, 2005). This literature proves that in a situation where a spouse is chronically ill, it is important to use communication to make one another aware of certain things such as how one felt about a situation, or what one needs or expects from his or her partners. Talking about the state of the relationship can be helpful for chronically ill people to express fears in relation to their illness and the marriage. Collaborative talk is the type of communication that is commonly correlated with positive results (Berg & Upchurch, 2007). This shows that it is important for married couples to talk about their situation together to keep their relationship strong since these tactics have been proven to be helpful for the couple. Couples that are aware of their partner's expectations of communication in the marriage are more successful in supporting one another (Shuff & Sims, 2013). Being aware of the partner's desires and being able to fill them is central to satisfaction in the relationships' functioning. Marital coping and sharing are not limited to relationship talk though. Another powerful way of sharing within the family is through narrative.

Narratives. Something that is strongly recognized and praised throughout literature on chronic physical illnesses is narratives. Several studies (Freeman & Couchonnal, 2006; Ott Anderson & Geist Martin, 2003; Walker & Dickson, 2004) stress the importance of narratives for the family healing process. Narratives are beneficial because they allow research to capture personal accounts of illness, and let the ill person be a gatekeeper to his or her own information about the illness. Ott Anderson and Geist Martin (2003) state that those with a chronic physical illness are more likely to actively share if their feelings and perceptions are confirmed by other people, especially friends and family. Some chronic illnesses have a negative social stigma to them, and confirmation that people will be respectful is important to getting the patient to open up about their experiences. Narratives and storytelling help families to communicate about changes that have taken place. Ott Anderson and Geist Martin (2003) conclude that the ever changing identity in the face of illness never stops, it is an endless development.

Sharing through narrative in cases of chronic physical illness has the potential to better family communication because the patient is able to clearly and concisely explain what is happening to him or her from their personal point of view. This can help the family identify what the patient has gone through, as well as understand new emerging identities. However, Lorde (1980) points out an important paradox where sometimes patients may be empowered by giving a narrative account of their story, while others may feel anxiety from reliving those moments of their life. When participants used communication to reduce their fear of their illness, they were likely to communicate about their illness more often (according to Grotcher & Edwards, 1990). Narratives are important in understanding and meeting the expectations of the family members when they are chronically ill (Walker & Dickson, 2004). Often, people will have expectations for their family members without verbally expressing them, leaving family members more often than not confused about what direction to take. However, a narrative or forms of storytelling in the case of a chronic physical illness may reflect some of the patients unfulfilled needs and help family members to identify them.

Chronic Mental Illness

A chronic mental illness can be extremely hard for families to cope with given the negative social stigmas that exist about the illness in most societies around the world today. A chronic mental illness in a family member could lead to almost constant care and monitoring, depending upon the illness and the intensity. Families may find it difficult to cope with or come to terms with a family member's diagnosis of a chronic mental illness due to the many challenges it presents. Much of the literature surrounding mental illness in the family is psychology based, and there is a strong need for communication-based studies to better understand these unique families.

Marriage. An important aspect of the family dynamic is marriage. It is the foundation of most families and gives people feelings of stability. Communication is essential to marriage, but little literature exists exploring the communication around a diagnosis of a mental illness. However, much literature exists on its effects on marriage. Perry (2014) focused on social networks and stigma in relation to those with a serious mental illness. A spouse is a very prominent and strong part of a married person's social network. If someone is entering or exiting a marriage, his or her social network changes in different ways. Perry (2014) found that

the stigma of a mental illness had contact with the social network and the relationship between the two works ambiguously together. Meaning that the social network responded to the mental illness through their own thinking and proving that spouses typically control family conversations. Spouses decide the climate of the family views and values toward different topics as they raise their offspring, if they choose to have any. There is a strong call for communication scholars to explore the way that families interact, especially about mental illness, and that a positive or a negative attitude can set a precedent for what future family communication will be like based off of how spouses interact (Segrin, 2006). The different communication processes that couples partake in set examples for how children interact.

Wives who are depressed are more likely to make an aggressive comment to their husbands than wives who are not depressed would, and depressed wives have less positive discussions than their counterparts (Schmaling & Jacobson, 1990). These aggressive statements could likely become a stressor for the marriage or produce a negative schemata of marriage for children or adolescents in the family. Depression has a large impact on the family, and usually just creates more problems that tends to result in fueling depression (Segrin, 2006). However, this assertion could also be true of the communication patterns surrounding many other types of mental illnesses in the family.

Parent–Child. Looking at the parent–child relationship in reference to mental illnesses, it is known that parents are the primary caregivers to children and adolescents with chronic mental illnesses. Literature mainly focuses on the illness from the parents' perspective, rather than the child's, suggesting that little is known about children's perceptions of their parents' mental illnesses. Parent's feelings of loss about an adult child with a mental illness focuses on grieving about ambiguous losses, like the child's loss of self or identity (Richardson, Cobham, McDermott, & Murray, 2013). This loss and grieving process has the potential to shape the families' behaviors and patterns of communications. Since there are usually no tangible effects of a mental illness, parents may often find it hard to cope with a diagnosis and come to terms with it. Even harder for families to process is the fact that in most cultures and societies in the world, there is a negative social stigma to having a mental illness. Parental grief over a child's mental illness is not socially acceptable (Richardson et al., 2013), and several studies noted that parents felt as though they needed to hide their child's illness or their grief

about that illness (Chadda, 2014; Richardson et al., 2013). Most of the struggles that parents in this situation face are with the topics of self-concepts and identities, with variance to whether it is their own, or their child's. Richardson et al. (2013) found that the child's illness changed the parents own identity. Since the identity and self are such fluid concepts, it is important to understand the self and different identities as well as the changes that occur with the two in accordance to both the parents and the children. There is little literature about mental health's effects on self-concepts and identities.

Hamond and Schrodt (2012) explored the effects of the different parenting styles on children's mental health and concluded that there was no statistically significant evidence that the different styles had an effect on mental health. However, acts of affection and authority make limited, but important, improvements to the child's mental health (Hamond & Schrodt, 2012). When it is the parent in the relationship who is mentally ill, the communication process is entirely different. When adolescents internalize and externalize behaviors were correlated to parents' mental illness, parents with mental illnesses were found to have a negative effect on the adolescent or child, the whole family, and even the parent and child's interactions (Van Loon, Van de Ven, Van Doesum, Witteman, & Hosman, 2014). This literature exemplifies that parental mental illness controls more channels of communication than a child or adolescent's mental illness does. While much literature exists about families and mental illness, unfortunately very few scholars focus on the talk that occurs about the family member with the illness and the communication around this topic.

Reviewing the literature leads back to the question: How are those with a chronic illness treated by their families since their diagnosis? Analyzing both mental and physical illnesses and the family communication processes around them are essential to furthering the conversation that communication scholars are creating to understand these unique families.

While the literature review example above is not perfect (Whose dissertation is perfect? After all, this is typically the first attempt at research by a student.), it is a suitable example to illustrate how to discuss topics in a funnel effect so that the discussion ends at the research question. Students should use headings to delineate different topics from more general to most specific. If an outline was created prior to writing the literature review, creating headings should be fairly straightforward.

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Literature Review Example

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