Original Article

Methodological Innovations
May-August 2019: 1–13

DOI: 10.1177/2059799119840977
journals.sagepub.com/home/mio
SAGE

Innovating the Craft of Phenomenological Research Methods Through Mindfulness

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Abstract

To conduct qualitative social research requires not only a declarative knowledge of the research methods and methodology, but also a set of honed practical, applied skills. For beginning researchers, particularly those undertaking phenomenological research, the skills of bracketing, the phenomenological reductions and having an awareness of one's positionality or relationship to their chosen research methods, participants and contexts is of significant importance. More generally, these skills are also required in other qualitative research disciplines under the guise of reflexivity or critical reflective practice. Regardless, these are notoriously slippery and require more than prior reading to translate from theory and philosophy into practice. There is literature which also identifies and highlights the disparity between theory, skill development and practice; however, these practicalities of how one can bracket or bridle and undertake reductions require further elaboration and guidance for how researchers can develop these applied skills of research. In this article, I propose and demonstrate that the therapeutic tradition of mindfulness as specifically practised in dialectical behaviour therapy can be used to de-mystify the practices of reflexivity and work specifically within the tradition of phenomenological reduction and bracketing. I also assert that this innovation can provide a practical tool to craft qualitative and phenomenological research and make achievable the original philosophical ideas which underpin phenomenological research. I begin by focusing on the theory of bracketing and reduction from the philosophic tradition of phenomenology as a framework for research methodology and methods, and then introduce the practical skill of mindfulness as prescribed in dialectical behaviour therapy as an innovation which can assist the researcher in developing these skills. I finish by illustrating the usefulness of mindfulness in undertaking phenomenological research drawing on examples from a current research project.

Keywords

Researcher reflexivity, skills for phenomenological research, mindfulness, phenomenological reduction as praxis, skills of dialectical behaviour therapy in qualitative research, orchestra music listening

Introduction

As a beginning researcher, the notion of researcher reflexivity and critical reflection in qualitative research seems theoretically simple during preparatory reading. However, in the field and when going about generating data, the actual practice of being reflexive and reflective while undertaking research becomes something far more elusive and slippery (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Harvey (2013), Pillow (2003) and other voices in the qualitative methodological literature have described the difficulty of practising reflexivity as a lived aspect of undertaking qualitative research; particularly, the disparity which is often encountered between knowing that and knowing how. As Berger (2015) alludes, this aspect of doing research has the quality of being 'here and there, now and then becoming… [an issue of]… now I see it, now I don't' (pp. 219, 226).

Indeed, there is a significant body of literature and many fine textbooks which describe and outline skills and theory relating to crafting successful qualitative research (e.g. see Bickman and Rog, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2009; O'Toole and Beckett, 2010). Likewise, there are guides aimed at describing how critical thinking and reflection in research can be developed (Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 2009; Merriam,

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2009). However, while the knowledge about these issues can be learnt, the skills and 'knowing how' take work and ongoing development to master – if this is even possible (van Manen, 2015).

These things are part of the craft and ongoing development we as researchers undergo in undertaking social research. Furthermore, and more importantly, the effectiveness and rigour of any research method employed ultimately relies on the learning and crafting of these knowledge and skills, because the researcher is both the tool which implements both the data generation with participants, and the analyser-interpreter of the data (Wiles et al., 2013).

While the examples and theory explored in this article are drawn from the tradition of phenomenology as a methodology and method for research, there are similarities to be found between the phenomenological practice of bracketing and reduction, and the broader qualitative practices of reflexivity and critical self-reflection. Sometimes, these terms are used interchangeably in the methodological literature and at other times they are defined separately (Berger, 2015; May, 2010). However, for clarity and the discussion ahead, I will delineate them. Otherwise, these terms may become as May (2010) warned, 'unduly philosophical… and at worst, destructive' (p. 24).

Reflexivity, in the qualitative research tradition, is a practical skill and attitude by which a researcher is systematically aware of and attends to how knowledge is being constructed (Bloor and Wood, 2006). Elaborations on this basic definition have been offered by various authors and theorists within the field of qualitative methodology and methods such as consideration of what impact the researchers themselves make while researching or what Harvey (2013), Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2014) call the 'researcher footprint'. Ho (2006), O'Toole and Beckett (2010), and Denzin and Lincoln (2002, 2008, 2009) also elaborate that the practice of conducting research reflexively includes the researcher having awareness and then actively mitigating their own biases, power and positionality in relation to research participants, the data generation processes, data analysis and the synthesis of writing. While this does not result in 'objective research', the empirical stance is formulated in accordance with the underlying ontological and epistemological foundations (Carter and Little, 2007; Creswell, 1998).

Like reflexivity, the notion of phenomenological reduction is similarly well theorised, which yet still becomes elusive when applied within the research tradition of phenomenology. There is a thicket of theoretical dispute which stems in part from philosophical roots, and these have resulted in diverse terminology being used within the literature, including the epoché (Husserl, 1964; Husserl et al., 2002), the eidetic reduction (Russell, 2006; van Manen, 2014), bracketing (Chan et al., 2013; Dowling, 2007; LeVasseur, 2003) and more recently bridling[1] (Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2004; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2009; Vagle et al., 2009).

However, these theoretical issues, like reflexivity explained above, are also practical skills which are learnt behaviours and therefore must be intentionally developed, practised and continually applied. They are essential skills involved in the very work of 'doing research' and crafting a viewpoint from which the researcher meta-cognates or thinks about their own thinking while undertaking research, and in doing so maintain a series of internal dialogues in various tensions with literary discussions, personal worldviews and theoretical frameworks (Engelsrud, 2005; Hammond, 2018; Subedi, 2006). As a result, be it the practice of reflexivity within the broader notion of qualitative research or within the specific practices of reduction within the phenomenological research tradition, there is a need for pragmatic guidance for beginning researchers in guiding them to develop these practically slippery skills essential to carrying out rigorous work in qualitative research (Berger, 2015; Depraz, 1999; LeVasseur, 2003; Pillow, 2003).

In this article I argue that mindfulness, particularly as practised in the 'how' and 'what' skills of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), presents practical skills for researchers to develop the required reflexive, critically reflective thinking skills required when undertaking qualitative research, specifically bracketing within phenomenological research. Specifically, I posit that the DBT approach to mindfulness is particularly helpful in developing skills to bracket the natural attitude and undergo the early reductions or epoché when studying participants' and their own experience or lifeworld in phenomenological research. To begin with, I will briefly explore the philosophy which underpins a phenomenological approach to research and informs its application to social science research, then identify and analyse the common ground found between phenomenological research methods related to bracketing and the reduction and mindfulness. I conclude with a short explanation of how mindfulness was used in a recent phenomenological study to develop researcher reflexivity and the skill of bracketing which contributed towards the process of the early phenomenological reductions towards the epoché.

Phenomenology: an outline of the philosophy as a framework for research methodology and methods

Phenomenology is both a philosophy[2] and a methodological[3] basis for undertaking qualitative research. Three fundamental concepts frame both: *lifeworld, intentionality* and phenomenological *reduction* (Cerbone, 2006; Smith and Woodruff Smith, 1995). The first, *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt)*, is the central focus of phenomenology, the individual's experiences, pre-reflectively and as free as possible from interpretation and cultural context (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Moran and Cohen, 2012; Wilson, 2015). Husserl's insistence on the primacy of lived experience, developed particularly in his text *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl), rejects the notion of

naturalism and the sovereignty of empirical science as the arbiter of truth (Husserl, 1960; LeVasseur, 2003). Instead, Husserl (1999) asserted that the real foundation is the lifeworld, 'the absolute here' (p. 153) or what he also called the natural attitude which is distinct from the scientific or theoretical attitude. This new basis for understanding is what sets phenomenology and the vast majority of social science research disciplines as distinct from previous philosophies which were concerned with the substance of knowledge (ontology), how what is known becomes known (epistemology), ethics or law (Bernet et al., 1993; Gadamer, 1976). Husserl (1999) explained why phenomenology offers a new philosophy of empirically understanding the world around us, including social and cultural dimensions:

> The pre-given lifeworld is a subjective structure, it is the achievement of experiencing the prescientific life. In this, the meaning and the ontic validity of the world are built up of that particular world… which is actually valid for the individual experience. (p. 360)

The second fundamental concept, *intentionality* describes 'the property of being conscious of something' (Husserl, 1999: 70), which in itself is an easy statement to grasp, but practically is much harder to achieve, particularly for the beginning researcher. Intentionality represents the idea that one's consciousness is always actional, meaning that consciousness is not so much something that one has, as it is something that one does (Moran and Cohen, 2012). Intentionality is also directional or pointed at something other than itself, and at the same time is indivisible from thinking or experience (LeVasseur, 2003).

Connected with the lifeworld, intentionality is consciousness oriented to the lifeworld and the outward experience of the natural attitude. Therefore, and importantly for developing the skill of reflexivity as a researcher, we need to become aware that as researchers we are simultaneously in and of the world. In other words, things around us or phenomena present themselves only partially or from the perspective to which we are presently oriented. The imperative of intentionality for the researcher then asserts the need and the possibility to understand the perspectives we as researchers inherently occupy and how we might gain a broader and more objective view and understanding in the process of conducting social research.

However, when reflective awareness (intentionality) is directed at one's own experience of the lifeworld, the result is a shift in attitude from the natural to the phenomenological (van Manen, 2014; Wilson, 2015) or what has become known as *the reflexive researcher stance.* This shift indicates the third fundamental concept essential to undertaking phenomenological research which occurs in two stages called *reductions*. The first reduction, called the epoché, transcendental reduction or bracketing (all terms are used interchangeably in Husserl's early works), was considered by Husserl as the indispensable method that the philosopher (or, in the case of phenomenological research, the researcher) must follow to observe the phenomena from all perspectives and draw together as much as possible a pure subjectivity (Bernet et al., 1993). The epoché is characterised by a 'pure mode of apperception' (Bernet et al., 1993: 62; Husserl, 1964) in which the researcher suspends or brackets out the natural attitude to gain as much as possible a non-judgemental and unbiased view of the lifeworld to reveal the underlying noetic-noematic structure of the lived experience of the research subject or phenomena as it is (Depraz, 1999; Moran and Cohen, 2012).

In phenomenology, after the *epoché or transcendental reduction* phases, one can undertake a second reduction to uncover the essences of experience and the lifeworld called the *eidetic reduction*. The eidetic reduction aims to understand the invariant meaning of objects or experienced phenomenon by bringing about moments of intuition about the object's essence through the process of imaginative free variation (Depraz, 1999; Moran and Cohen, 2012). In imaginary variation, the inquirer varies all the possible attributes of the phenomenon in order to explore what is truly necessary or essential for the object or experience to be what it is. In a way, through these two reductions, the valid and subjective experience of one person is able to observe as objectively as possible observed with other experiences to find the universal truths or essences which make the experience or phenomenon what it is and not something else (Husserl, 1964; Husserl et al., 2002).

Although not identical or synonymous, in many ways the epoché and eidetic reductions can be equated with the reflexivity and reflection necessary to undertake rigorous and reliable qualitative research. Each time the researcher returns 'back to the things themselves' there is a necessity to lift the natural attitude which is accompanied by unhelpful judgements, past or present connections and the various lenses. Without the phenomenological reductions the lifeworld of the researcher is projected onto the phenomena under study, the research process, the data generation and analysis (Smith and Woodruff Smith, 1995; Todres and Wheeler, 2001; van Manen, 2002). Truly, the epoche and eidetic reductions enable the phenomena to be researched as it is, but these are learnt habits necessary for each effective qualitative researcher. It cannot be understated that the skills and knowledge to do this is not a natural aspect of the human psyche, but rather is something that researchers must learn, refine and apply throughout the research process and career.

Problematic praxis in phenomenological research

This notion of reduction or bracketing as it is referred to in phenomenological research has attracted significant attention in the methodology and methods literature (Dahlberg, 2006; Dall'Alba, 2009; Depraz, 1999; Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 1999; Todres, 2007; Vagle, 2014). Perhaps of most

significance has been the criticism of whether the methodology and methods can ever be fully separated from the researcher, their biases and pre-existing knowledge and which language should be used to explain the mechanisms of what the researcher does while undertaking phenomenological research[4] (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2009; Vagle et al., 2009). As van Manen (1997) explains, to *do* 'phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that the lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal' (p. 8). In response to this problem, philosophic phenomenologists and phenomenological researchers have developed protocols, processes, vocabulary, lists and ideas to attempt to bridge these gaps between philosophy and practice (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2004; Holloway and Todres, 2003; May, 2010; Wiles et al., 2013).

Armedio Giorgi (1997) was one of the first to apply the philosophy and fundamental concepts of phenomenology to empirical research by attempting to understand the qualitative meaning of experiential phenomenon rather than its measurement (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Dall'Alba, 2009). Giorgi articulates that for a study to qualify as phenomenological and faithful to the original Husserlian philosophy, the researcher must employ three linked elements. First, *description*. Second, that the description be completed with the attitude of the *phenomenological reduction*. Third, that in doing this, the most *invariant meanings* can then be found within the set context (Giorgi, 1997). Giorgi (1997) also highlighted that terms such as 'experience' and 'phenomenon' require more precise definition within the specific research context and that the role of consciousness (i.e. intentionality of consciousness) must be actively accounted for rather than ignored (Coffin, 2014).

Others, such as Creswell (1998) and Finlay (1999), established parameters which researchers can follow to ensure their research aligns with phenomenology's clear epistemological position and strong philosophical grounding. Primarily, researchers must have a strong understanding of the underlying philosophical tradition of phenomenology (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). Palmer et al. (2010), Sorrell and Redmond (1995) also make recommendations for selecting methods, such as using in-depth interviewing with a small (up to 10) sample of participants, and reporting findings in highly descriptive ways such as using thick and rich description. In undertaking analysis, particularly in research seeking to understand the meaning of the lifeworld, Smith and Osborn (2008) and others espouse interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a two-stage interpretation process which creates a double hermeneutic (Joseph, 2014; Palmer et al., 2010). However, Vagle (2014) explains that this can perplex the researcher when trying to grasp the studied phenomenon and other authors such as van Manen (1997, 2014) and Vagle (2014) have critiqued IPA for similar reasons.

Although these researchers and theorists address some of the procedural issues of translating the philosophy of phenomenology into research methods and practices, there remains significant difficulty in realising the practice of the epoché and eidetic reductions (Finlay, 1999; Vagle, 2014). There is trouble for phenomenological researchers when selecting and using interview methods to elicit the participant's experiences rather than affirming their own perspectives or opinions. There is also a tension between description and interpretation, and whether it is practically possible for the researcher to ever fully remove themselves from the phenomena and its observation (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2004; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle and Hofsess, 2016). As Holloway and Todres (2003) challenge, how does one remain consistent and coherent with the philosophy of phenomenology while developing a flexible method to research the given context? Furthermore, how does the researcher develop an awareness of their own experience and bias in the first place (Kordeš, 2013; Williams and Treadwell, 2008)? And, how does a researcher learn the practice of reduction and continually bracketing or suspending their own assumptions, especially in an interviewing process? (Depraz, 1999; Engelsrud, 2005; LeVasseur, 2003). In addition to these practical problems, there are complex decisions to be made by the researcher in deciding if, when and how their own views should be integrated into the reporting of the study (Chan et al., 2013; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Drummond, 2007; Finlay, 1999; Vagle and Hofsess, 2016).

The problematic praxis of researcher reflexivity in undertaking qualitative research

These practicalities explored above also resonate with the related practices in qualitative research of researcher reflexivity and critical reflection. Berger (2015) explains that the goal of reflexivity is to allow the researcher to be aware, monitor and account for their values, beliefs, knowledge and biases impact the data generation, relationships with research participants and data analysis. Pillow (2003) extends this assertion stating that reflexivity and critical reflection are also a part of researcher practices to legitimise, validate and question research and are essential methodological tools necessary in all effective qualitative research. In many ways, these practices, synonymous with the phenomenological notion of bracketing, are essential to undertaking qualitative research (Bickman and Rog, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007). Likewise, the praxis of reflexivity is not an innate human skill, but rather like bracketing in phenomenology is one which has received significant commentary and remains a practice which must be both theoretically and practically developed.

In response to these practical challenges, I propose that mindfulness can provide explicit and practical skills needed to develop researcher reflexivity, and specifically the

practices of reduction when undertaking phenomenological research. I assert that in addition to providing practical guidance in skill development and protocol to enhance research practices in the field, mindfulness can also assist the aspiring researcher in remaining faithful to the underlying methodology and philosophy of phenomenology. There is a beginning field of scholarship in this area to which I am adding my own practice and experience (e.g. see Gokhale, 2016; Lemon, 2017; and Patrik, 1994). In the following section, I describe mindfulness and present the particular approach to mindfulness used in DBT as a practical framework to guide skill development, parallel with a phenomenological approach to data collection in qualitative research.

From the outset, I emphasise that mindfulness is not a catch-all or panacea for the limitations and challenges of undertaking research in a phenomenological way. Neither is mindfulness being recommended here as a 'how to do' phenomenological research. Rather, mindfulness can be enacted by researchers as a skill to bracket or reflexively work through critical thinking so that the natural attitude of the researcher which constantly thinks, analyses, makes connections, gets excited and distracted by the possibilities might be laid aside so that the researcher might instead 'return to the things themselves' (Husserl, 1964: 77). Mindfulness as a practical tool in phenomenological research is being suggested here as something that adds to the *lived craft* of phenomenology and assists researchers within other traditions in developing their reflexivity and skills in critical reflection.

Introducing mindfulness

'Mindfulness' connoting awareness, remembering and attention (also known as *sati* in the writings of the Buddha in Pali language) is an ancient practice and vital aspect of the ancient practice of Buddhist psychology found in all three originating paths (yanas) of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Gokhale, 2016; Rosch, 2015). In the Western world, mindfulness – or paying attention with awareness to the present – now incorporates an extensive range of practices and ideas which are distinctly non-Buddhist (Rosch, 2015; Siegel et al., 2009). Some of these have recently come into vogue in popular culture in the form of colouring in books, apps and activities for health and well-being, often aimed at helping the user to become calm, centred or at peace. However, whether Buddhist or therapeutically based, calmness is not the end-goal of mindfulness (Hassed, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to clarify the definition of mindfulness before moving forward (Bishop et al., 2004).

Mindfulness has been empirically taken up by the field of psychology and therapeutic practice, which has resulted in a 'thicket of terminological and interpretive dispute' (Rosch, 2015: 274). The leading pioneer of mindfulness as espoused in therapeutic uses of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), defines mindfulness as 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding experience moment to moment' (p. 145). Bishop et al. (2004) published a seminal paper co-authored with 10 other researchers and practitioners to establish an operational definition of mindfulness. They suggest that mindfulness is 'self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment… adopting a particular orientation toward one's experience that is characterised by curiosity, openness and acceptance' (p. 232). Others such as Hassed (2011) emphasise the importance of acceptance, suggesting that a moment of mindfulness occurs when the above-described awareness of the present experience simultaneously happens with acceptance (Siegel et al., 2009).

In the empirical Western therapeutic tradition, mindfulness practice is practised in two modes: focused attention and open monitoring, both of which derive from Zen, Vipassana and Tibetan Buddhism meditation traditions (Colzato et al., 2012). In focused attention, the consciousness is focused on a given object, for example, the breath, a particular somatic sensation or a tangible object, and the attention is continually brought back to the object when the mind wanders. This is usually a part of the earlier stages of mindfulness training in both Buddhist and therapeutic applications, which overtly practice and build the ability to 'contain the beam of attention' (Travis and Shear, 2010: 114). Open monitoring involves 'the non-reactive monitoring of the content of ongoing experience, primarily as a means to become reflectively aware of the nature of emotional and cognitive patterns' (Travis and Shear, 2010: 114). Open monitoring is characterised by being non-judgemental of the experience, including any thoughts, emotions and behaviours, and attending to the present moment rather than becoming distracted with other cognitive and affective ideas which exist in either the past or the future (Chiesa et al., 2011).

The theories and practices of mindfulness derived from Buddhist teachings and those within the field of therapeutic psychology have been adopted as the basis and core goal of a number of therapies. Examples include mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Samuelson et al., 2007), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Springer, 2012), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) and DBT (Linehan, 2013, 2015). All of these therapies belong to the so-called third wave of behaviourism, the success of which continues to be corroborated with empirical evidence. Each also holds in common that mindfulness is a skill that one employs for a time, with intent, and that the client can develop mindful awareness using activities and explanations that are specific to the type and goals of the therapeutic intervention.

One of the clearest explanations of how mindfulness can be employed as an intentionally used skill is found in DBT, which was developed by American psychologist Marsha Linehan (2013), as a modified form of cognitive behaviour

therapy (CBT) to treat people with borderline personality disorder and chronically suicidal individuals. In DBT, mindfulness is explicitly taught as one of four core groups of skills which underlie and support all other skills taught in DBT. DBT mindfulness skills 'are psychological and behavioural translations of meditation practices from Eastern spiritual training' (Linehan, 2015: 151), which provide clear explanations and sub-skills which are practically useful and relatively simple to grasp. It is this particular version of mindfulness which I argue could be of particular benefit to phenomenological researchers. Here, I recommend the DBT mindfulness skills as ideal practical tools for crafting phenomenological research and developing researcher reflexivity. Primarily, this is because incorporating these skills aids the researcher to develop an awareness of their natural attitude, provide skills and exercises to learn the art of bracketing their natural attitude and develop objective critical reflection.

DBT mindfulness and its usefulness to the craft of phenomenological research

The practice and theoretical formulation of mindfulness as espoused by DBT aligns strongly with leading authors and definitions of mindfulness. DBT mindfulness embodies the two-component model of other mainstream definitions of mindfulness as proposed by Bishop et al. (2004) and others. Furthermore, the DBT approach to mindfulness includes the self-regulation of attention, which connotes the fundamental phenomenological concept of intentionality. DBT mindfulness also adopts a particular orientation to the consciousness, characterised by curiosity, openness and acceptance which equate to the phenomenological reduction.

In DBT, the skill of mindfulness is divided into two groups: the *what* and *how skills*. The mindfulness *what skills* can only be practised one at a time and cannot be employed simultaneously. *What skills* 'are about what to do' when being mindful (Linehan, 2015: 154). *Observing* involves noticing, paying attention, wordless watching and controlling one's attention. *Describing* involves putting words to the experience, labelling what is observed and experienced. Learning to describe also means learning to not take thoughts and emotions as exact reflections of events. The final what skill, *participating*, involves the skill of participating without self-consciousness, fully entering into the activities and the present moment without separating the self from the ongoing interactions and events. Linehan (2013, 2015) is careful to distinguish between mindfully participating and mindlessly participating, the difference being participating with attention.

In the context of undertaking qualitative, specifically phenomenological research, the DBT *what skills* make for important conceptual companions. DBT *what skills* support the implementation of the fundamental concepts of phenomenology while also providing some much-needed practical support for developing the intentionality of the researcher's consciousness. The DBT *what skill* of participating insists that the researcher engage with the phenomena and the lifeworld of the research participants by being present and active with the research participant. The other two *what skills*, observing and describing, then direct the researcher to the core physical business of what will form the basis of the data, thick and rich description which is a central technique of phenomenological research. However, taken alone, the *what skills* are not enough to lift the natural attitude and reveal the epoché which allow intentionality and reduction to take place.

Each of the three *what skills* in DBT mindfulness are used in conjunction with three *how skills*. Unlike the *what skills*, the *how skills* can be used independently or simultaneously and describe practical considerations of how one observes, describes and participates. Linehan (2015) explains that how one does the *what skills* involves 'taking a non-judgemental stance ("non-judgementally"), focussing on one thing in the moment ("one-mindfully"), and doing what works ("effectively")' (p. 154).

Being *non-judgmental* is described as eliminating interpretations, allowing the observer, describer or participator to take a non-evaluative position where thoughts, emotions, behaviours and experiences are acknowledged without being qualified as good, bad, right or wrong and so forth. Observations, descriptions and participation are therefore distinguished or discriminated between, rather than balancing or prioritising, judging or evaluating. The second *how skill, one-mindfully*, encapsulates the essence of practising mindfulness which in its simplest explanation is 'the quality of awareness that a person brings to activities' (Linehan, 2015: 155). Being *one-mindful* focuses the attention, awareness and the mind to the current moment rather than splitting or dividing attention between activities and thoughts about the past or future. This skill of focused attention is not one that humans inherently possess; rather, it is one that can be developed with practice by concentrating the mind, letting go of distractions and becoming present in the moment. Linehan explains that individuals 'need to learn how to focus their attention on one task or activity at a time, engaging in it with alertness, awareness and wakefulness' (p. 155).

Effectively is the final *how skill* of mindfulness as explained and practised in DBT. It focuses on functioning effectively, or, in simple terms, doing what works using skilful means. In DBT, this skill links with other skills such as being non-judgemental, being willing, and the concept of wise mind where a synergy or balance is found between the rational and emotional mind. To be effective in mindfulness, the original goal of the activity and focus of attention must be kept in mind and focused by using one of the *what skills*. The three *how skills* can be utilised as needed during the time that one chooses to be mindful.

In phenomenological research, it is through the combination of the *what* and *how skills* that the consciousness can be intentionally directed and that the natural attitude can be suspended by non-judgementally and *one-mindfully* observing, then describing in thick description.[5] For the aspiring researcher operating with a phenomenological methodology, the skill of mindfulness is particularly helpful during data generation, data collection and early stages of analysis. It is helpful during any parts of the research which require the suspension of the natural attitude and the adoption of a fully present and non-judgemental attitude, as required when undertaking the reductions or bracketing. In doing these things, one epitomises the practical realisation of intentionality, which is so central to the underpinning philosophy of phenomenology.

Mindfulness skills and the explicit development of bracketing and reflexivity become all the more relevant given that in qualitative research in general, the researcher is the primary tool for data generation and analysis (Brown, 2010; Engelsrud, 2005; Harvey, 2013). Perhaps even more so in phenomenological research than in other methodological approaches, the success of the research rests on the researcher's ability to undergo truly bracket out themselves through the processes of epoché and then eidetic reduction. Mindfulness is given here as a skill and a very practical approach to creating clarity in a process which is undoubtedly difficult to translate from philosophy to practice. Although DBT offers but one model of practising mindfulness, without a doubt it is effective, practically understandable and theoretically sound, while also seamlessly aligning with the fundamental concepts of Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology and phenomenological research practice. However, to echo the thoughts of Vagle (2014) and van Manen (1997, 2002), phenomenology is an ongoing and honed craft, this way of researching is not something one simply does (Coffin, 2014). Moreover, like any craft, phenomenology, reflexivity and mindfulness need to be practised and lived out. Therefore, to include mindfulness as a skill set within the craft of phenomenological and qualitative research, I advocate that the how and what skills must be practised and lived by the researcher.

Another feature of DBT mindfulness is the extensive resources available publicly which can be used to assist researchers wanting to incorporate mindfulness into their research craft and develop their reflexive and critical thinking skills. Linehan (2013, 2015) provides extensive explanations, practical approaches and exercises to develop skills both in the 'DBT Skills Training Manual' and the accompanying suite of teaching notes, handouts and worksheets. Although these resources are used most commonly in therapeutic contexts, they are also tremendously useful for those wanting to practice mindfulness in other contexts such as qualitative and phenomenological research.

Reflections on undertaking phenomenological research utilising DBT mindfulness

To demonstrate a practical application of the ideas explored above, I will share some reflections, thick description and data excerpts illustrating the usefulness of implementing DBT mindfulness during an ongoing research project, which adopts a phenomenological theoretical framework and research methods. Specifically, the examples will demonstrate how the DBT *how* and *what* skills were used to direct my consciousness (intentionality) to explore the lifeworld of the research participants and their experiences of the phenomena of listening and learning. Particularly in the following examples, I will show how mindfulness was used as a skill to suspend my own natural attitude to observe and engage with research participants as objectively as possible.[6]

The phenomenon under study was audience members' experiences of learning to listen within the context of a classical music concert given by a professional Australian symphony orchestra. Ethical approval was granted by the overseeing institution and where data were generated using a concert observation schedule (completed by the researcher), a focus group with audience members and interviews with administration employees of the orchestra. Participants gave consent in both verbal and written forms. Concerts were selected for observation according to criteria specified in the research project, and research participants were recruited according to a procedure approved by both the hosting orchestra and the overseeing ethics council. The concert observation, focus group and interviews were conducted according to protocols developed for the research project based on a phenomenological research approach incorporating elements of DBT mindfulness. The data presented here represent only a fragment from the entire set generated for the larger research project.

Some of the explicit mindfulness prompts in the protocols included 'prior to', 'ready to' and 'after' checklists. These checklists included reviewing the phenomenological research process and mindset, ensuring the researcher was 'set up for success' to research (rested, materials and tools gathered, mindfully focusing by doing a simple brief focusing activity such as a 'body scan' or breathing meditation having arrived at the research site), and reviewing the guiding research questions. In addition to these elements, the concert observation protocol included a mix of closed fact-based sections to complete and more open-ended questions or prompts. The interview protocol included a series of questions and prompts in addition to the 'prior to', 'ready to' and 'after' checklists.

After each concert observation, as a part of the protocol, I wrote a thick description of the researching and concert experience. Thick description is a common tool for phenomenologists, particularly in studies like this which adopt hermeneutic phenomenological methods (Geertz, 1998). Thick

description is useful because it captures a rich explanation of the cultural and social meanings that occur through pure observation and description (Randles, 2012). In this way, the thick description also captures the researcher's experience (lifeworld) of the phenomenon. The researcher, thus, becomes a participant in the research. This is not only a standard feature of qualitative research in that the researcher is the primary research tool, but also inherently phenomenological as my own experience was observed and used as data.

Below is a fragment from a thick description written after a concert observation. It demonstrates my process of mindfully preparing for collecting data, having stepped into the concert hall and mindfully setting aside the natural attitude to begin the process of reduction and epoché. In the writing, notice how the mindfulness was guided by the *how* skills of observing, describing and participating, and how these skills are employed by following the *what* skills. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the research site:

> At this point, despite the excitement, I take a moment to check the observation sheet and review the phenomenological approach. So far, the notes on the sheet are on track and I briefly mindfully set myself in the space by observing and describing the body sensations, the thoughts passing through my mind, the feelings (not that there usually are any) being experienced. I note the excitement of being here with the 'orchestra' and the amazement that I get to research with this orchestra. I take a moment to experience the strain in my neck and shoulders and the jitter in my feet, just as it is. I remind myself to just be in the moment focussed on this task, to not judge the thoughts and sensations that come. In doing this I also notice how I am doing these things – by observing, by describing and by participating. The latter, participating, is one that I remind myself will be important to employ during this concert to get a sense of the listening. Because as I've noticed during the other observations, that though the instinct says to 'write, write, write', it is nearly impossible to experience listening and therefore any pedagogies in play within the context without stopping what else is going on.

The description and observations are made non-judgementally. There are no attempts to judge whether the observations or sensations are 'good' or 'bad', helpful or unhelpful to the research, relevant or irrelevant. The observation and description are kept *one-mindfully* in the present moment as there is no effort to banish away observations because they do not fit within predetermined theories or frameworks, or to latch onto specific ideas because they resonate with previously established experiences. Rather each idea, observation, thought or sensation is acknowledged as it is before moving on. Particularly, I find that if during field research or observations when there is minimal interaction with other people, there is a tendency to want to stay with or repeat over connections or ideas because they are particularly exciting or disturbing. This is a time when I know the natural attitude has slipped back into place. Acknowledging these thoughts and then choosing to consciously move on then allows me to return to the epoché and suspend the natural attitude which would get in the way of experiencing the lifeworld of the participants or work of researching.

An example of the difference between this curious non-judgemental attitude during observation is given below, as well as a non-example demonstrating when the natural attitude has invaded the phenomenological act. This thick description is taken from an observation completed towards the end of data generation and includes a reflection on the use of mindfulness with phenomenological research methods:

> This is probably the most focused observation I've done. There were times where the mind did wander from the moment and experience. Sometimes the thoughts related to the music like 'I wonder how they rehearsed this with the orchestra?', 'what could the musicians be thinking at the moment?', 'do they like/value this kind of playing and performance?', 'how is the presenter keeping all this analysis in his head?' I'm pleased to note now, and that during the performance, these kinds of thoughts were generally wondering or curious type questions and were non-judgemental without placing good or bad/black or white thinking over the thought. Other times the wandering mind went to things that had nothing to do with the music what so ever. Thoughts like 'what is the schedule for tomorrow, am I catching an early bus?', 'I'd really like to watch another episode of Prison Break tonight!'. Other times there was a grey space as to whether the thought was on topic or judgemental such as 'This concert space is perfect', 'Why can't the orchestra do more of these concerts every year, surely every audience member needs an experience like this?!', or 'I like this repertoire, but it's not very common to most people'.
>
> Each time the mind wandered, the response was relatively quick to mindfully tell the mind 'those things are for later, for now be here'. This response to the straying mind stayed mostly the same and didn't lose its non-judgemental tone (it is easy to get frustrated with the mind and say 'stop doing that!').
>
> It takes so much less effort to be non-judgemental than when I first started doing mindfulness. Now it comes very naturally and the 'buts', 'good', 'bad, 'right', 'wrong' which used to trip me up are rare and few in between in both thoughts and writing.

By incorporating mindfulness as a series of skills employed to undertake the epoché in phenomenological research, I achieved a sophisticated level of researcher reflexivity. One was conducive to the other (Davies and Heaphy, 2011). Reflexivity is a core value of high-quality qualitative research which Subedi (2006) defines as the researcher becoming more open to, and accountable for, how they participate in the research and produce knowledge (Berger, 2015; May, 2010; Ruane, 2017). Bloor and Wood (2006) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) both use the word 'mindful' to explain the concept of reflexivity, stating that reflexivity 'encourages researchers to remain mindful that

they themselves are part of the social world they study and should, therefore, consider how their own values and … experiences may influence their perceptions' (p. 23).

Like mindfulness, researcher reflexivity is not an automatic skill. It is a conscious choice which needs practice and awareness to develop (Berger, 2015; Chan et al., 2013; Subedi, 2006). Pillow (2003) even goes so far as to say that reflexivity, like mindfulness, is not a natural attitude and because of this fact, it pushes the researcher towards an unfamiliar experience, to challenge assumptions and operate in a space which is cognitively uncomfortable (Ruane, 2017). Certainly, DBT mindfulness skills find resonance theoretically and practically with developing the awareness needed to enact reflexivity providing a solution and allows more abstract understandings to unfold (Hammond, 2018), which are indeed core elements of qualitative and phenomenological research.

In the context of conducting the interviews with audience members, the same principles apply to suspend the natural attitude and occupy the space of phenomenological epoché. As I listened to my research participants, it was essential to actually listen to what they were saying, rather than wanting to start analysing what was being said or to connect what participants' were describing to the theoretical framework for the study – an example of being one-mindful in the present moment.

At the same time, when working with the method of semi-structured interviews, the grey space between judgemental and non-judgmental thinking became more complex. A dialectic exists between these two positions, the recognition of which is especially true to the essence of DBT. To an extent, the researcher does need to listen to their intuition and reflexively respond to the conversation in order to pose appropriate follow-up questions and shape the interview to gain the best possible data (Berger, 2015; Brown, 2010; Rowley, 2012). Moreover, at the same time, mindfulness can aid the semi-structured interviewer in keeping thoughts and attitudes in check, which also helps the researcher in their embodied experience (Ruane, 2017). The judgement is of a different quality much more akin to the gentle attitude of non-judgemental curiosity advocated in DBT mindfulness.

Consider the following example of researcher cognition during a semi-structured interview constructed using the actual transcript of the interview combined with actual thoughts that came to mind as a researcher. The example is a portion of a transcript from one of the interviews with an education manager of the orchestra along with an example and a non-example demonstrating the differing qualities between judgmental and mindful non-judgmental thinking taking place in the researcher's mind. The judgemental attitude is inherently non-phenomenological, wrapped up in the natural attitude, and does not demonstrate the DBT mindfulness *how skills* of description or observation, or the *what skills* of being effective or one-mindful, and does not have any qualities of researcher reflexivity. The mindful cognitions have a distinctly different quality, demonstrating the dialectic of including the researcher's intuition while also keeping the attitude non-judgemental, curious and inquisitive. In essence, they are far more phenomenological, bracketed and reflexive in nature.

The reflexive thoughts of the researcher are indicated in *italics* and were not spoken in the interview itself. The majority of these thoughts are organic and have been fleshed out for the purposes of illustrating the example.

Interviewer: **What do you think makes an effective listener? Is this something learned?**

Participant: **It's a really good question, and one that we think about a lot at [our orchestra] especially in the education team. We recognise especially with our work in schools that listening is not just a skill in the realm of music but also in life. Listening and interpreting information in a multitude of ways is a really important skill to have… I think it's really important that listening is not just something like taking in sound waves or something that happens to our bodies…**

[Judgemental cognition: *So it should be a good question, these took ages to come up with! It's really good that the participant thinks about listening deeply, other interviews haven't been nearly as on point. Or maybe I was asking the wrong questions in those interviews?*]
[Mindful cognition: *Ok, so the education team thinks a lot about listening as learning. I wonder how the other departments think of listening? It's exciting to hear the participant talk about listening as something that is active, maybe later ask a clarification question if this means listening is participatory too?*]

Participant: **…so with pedagogy we try to put in place ways of making [the listening and the context relevant] to their experience as a person. Which is a really key concept in education of differentiation…**

[Judgmental cognition: *Yes, mention of pedagogy this is going to be important and I like that the word experience was used, that really fits in neatly with my theoretical framework]*
[Mindful cognition: *All right, mention of pedagogy. Relevant to experience, that sounds interesting. Let's see if we can get an example]*

Researcher: **Can you give describe a time when the orchestra has helped the audience make links between their experience and the music?**

Participant: **Sure! A recent example [was when we played] Brahms' second symphony which was written after reportedly two decades of writer's block, because he was so taken back by Beethoven and Beethoven's shadow that he couldn't write anything… [Brahms] took a holiday of two weeks in Austria and just kicked this writer's block right out of the way and produced Symphony number 2, it was really incredible. What we then do when we begin to talk about this with [an audience] is ask 'have you ever experienced writer's block? Have you ever wanted to do something but couldn't get to that endpoint … and so that understanding of context in relation to the piece can help the listener to be effective.**

[Judgmental cognition: *Writer's block don't I know all about that, still have to write that methods chapter… Would the audience really find this helpful though? What if they haven't experienced writer's block before?]*
[Mindful cognition: *Detailed example which illustrates the initial question. Which parts of the original question have I missed so far and where to next?]*

In addition to the constant tracking of the mindfulness of my own thinking, in my responses and follow-up questions it was important to remain effective in avoiding deciding if things were going well. I put away judgemental thoughts which tried to evaluate the moment or if the explanations the research participants were giving me of their learning experiences were relevant or useful. As seen in the example above, and as Linehan (Bishop et al., 2004; Linehan, 2015) explains, usually these unhelpful judgements include words like 'good', 'bad', 'always', 'never' or disqualifying observations using 'but' instead of recognising the dialectic using 'and'.

Being non-judgemental in my wording of follow-up/probing questions and use of non-descriptive encouragers was also vital in minimising any influence I gave as research participants explained their experiences, thoughts and feelings about learning to listen at orchestral concerts. The mechanism for implementing these *what* skills were the *how* skills of observe, describe and participate. As identified in the other example given above, participating mindfully can be difficult when trying to also take notes, ensure that all the questions are asked and manage complex conversational dynamics during group interviews.

Summary

Phenomenology as an approach to social science research, as distinct from the underlying philosophy, is undoubtedly a challenging practice. Moreover, for researchers wishing to employ such a method or even the common practice of reflexivity in qualitative research, there is little pragmatic help in how to tangibly develop these skills or methods to guide reflexive and bracketed research practice. Therefore, as explored above, I assert that qualitative researchers in developing a mindful research practice can develop practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge of suspending and setting aside assumptions, ideas and theories. In particular, I have demonstrated that mindfulness is helpful to the phenomenological researcher in operationalising the complex philosophy which underlies the epoché and eidetic reductions.

There are three key implications for research which have emerged from this discussion on crafting phenomenological research using mindfulness. First, there is an ongoing imperative to examine the pragmatic implications of research theories and to problem-solve these practical issues as a research community, particularly in the case of phenomenological research methods which have grown out of metaphysical philosophic traditions. I have demonstrated here, in both theory and practice, that looking outside strict research methodologies into other traditions can help solve some of these practical problems. Second, I recommend that the practices of DBT mindfulness be further explored for their usefulness to phenomenological and qualitative research methods, particularly during data generation, early stages of data analysis and, more generally, as a means of developing the skills necessary to undertake reflexive and reflective research.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, it is imperative that mindfulness, like phenomenology and reflexivity, become more than just methods in doing research. For the methods explored in this article to be effective, it is not enough to read about mindfulness, write about phenomenology or reflexivity and then turn up to a research site and 'do' research in this manner. Mindfulness, like having the awareness of intentionality over one's own consciousness, is a practised and crafted ability. These are skills that must be lived and breathed both within the research and in the daily life of the researcher, even to the point that these epistemologies and ontologies become a part of our own life philosophies as humans who happen to research.

In sum, I have proposed that mindfulness, as particularly prescribed in a DBT approach, can provide practical tools to help the phenomenological researcher develop skills to undertake the bracketing necessary as a part of phenomenological reductions, and more widely for qualitative researchers learning the skill of reflexivity and critical reflection. I have demonstrated these ideas in this article, having explored both theoretical issues and practical applications to the data generation phase of a research project such as by investigating how audience members learn to listen at orchestral concerts. While mindfulness is not a catch-all for solving the practical problems of researching using phenomenology, these two frameworks have a definite synergy and together

they can make excellent tools for crafting phenomenological research and focus on the present experience.

Acknowledgements

With immense gratitude, the author recognises the influence and help of Julie Campbell, Rita Farley, Dr Furhan Iqbal and Jenni Mazlin-Law. Claire thanks them for the difference mindfulness has made in her life and research. Thanks also go to Dr Clare Hall and Dr Rachel Forgasz for their consultation and ever-encouraging support.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This research was undertaken with financial support from the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. This research was conducted with the approval of the Monash University Human Ethics Research Committee (Project No. CF16/1396-2016000762) and complies with requirements pertaining to the written and verbal consent of participants. The author takes complete responsibility for the data generation, maintenance and accuracy of data analysis.

Notes

1. These terminologies have emerged from the philosophical writings detailing phenomenology, which have given rise to the research methods which have followed in this tradition. Specifically, the term bridling has been espoused by Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2004) as 'invok[ing] the thought of being respectful, or humble' (p. 272) as opposed to bracketing, which asserts an air of aiming for an impossible and total removal of the researcher and their interpretation from the domain of social research. I acknowledge this input and see the way I have applied mindfulness to my research as a means of joining this conversation and the goal of understanding what it means to study phenomena and derive or interpret the hermeneutic meaning of phenomena through the lived lifeworld of others.
2. Phenomenology (from the Greek word 'phaenesthai' meaning that which appears) began as a philosophy of understanding phenomena through human experience and consciousness. It was developed primarily by Edmund Husserl, who drew on works by earlier continental philosophers such as Lambert, Kant, Hegel, and Descartes (see Bernet, Kern and Marbach, 1993), Husserl took particular inspiration from his teacher Brentano, whose writing on intentionality underlie Husserl's early works Ideas and Logical Investigations which developed phenomenology as a kind of descriptive psychology differentiating between the consciousness (noema) and the act of directing one's consciousness (noemata). Philosophers who expanded Husserl's foundations include Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty Vagle (2014).
3. Leading voices include Han-Georg Gadamer (hermeneutic phenomenology), Alfred Schutz (sociological phenomenology), Max Van Manen (phenomenology of practice and pedagogy) and Emmanuel Levinas (ethical phenomenology) (see Cerbone, 2006; Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 2002).
4. I particularly acknowledge the validity of the debate around the term 'bracketing' versus reduction and bridling; however, the scope and focus of this article is aimed at how researchers might best practically deal with these issues rather than challenging semantics.
5. Certainly, these practices are not unique to DBT mindfulness and I acknowledge the potential usefulness of other models of mindfulness for phenomenological research such as those found in MBSR. Rather, DBT mindfulness is a practice I have employed from my own lived experience within the context of this particular research project.
6. As espoused by the literature, mindfulness was not only a practice I developed for this particular research project, but is a part of my daily life. I am particularly grateful to Julie Campbell, Rita Farley, Jenni Maslin-Law and Dr Furhan Iqbal for introducing DBT mindfulness to me and the work they have done with me to develop these particular skills.

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