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Hermeneutic Existential Phenomenology as a psychotherapeutic and philosophical attunement to educate novice researchers

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Abstract: This paper develops a hermeneutic existential phenomenological (HEP) approach to the research education of novice researchers. Drawing from HEP in psychotherapy and philosophy leads to the identification of the importance of lived experience in educating novice researchers. It demonstrates the significance of responding effectively to existential struggles for embodying and inhabiting the way of being of research with competence and confidence. HEP provides a framework for turning the messiness and chaos of the lived experience of research into opportunities for research education and development. Creating the space for turning the emotional “roller coaster” ride of research into educational opportunities requires the skills of a psychotherapist who enables the novice researcher to stay with and learn to listen to their research doubts and anxieties. These skills are also formulated by existential philosophers who write about being resolute in moments of vulnerability and anxiety. A HEP approach to research education is a contribution that psychotherapy and philosophy have to offer research education in psychotherapy and in general. Working educationally with the existential anxiety of research is useful in any research area that acknowledges the importance of being attuned to lived experience in the process of becoming a researcher.

Keywords: Emotions, research, hermeneutic, existential phenomenology

intuition of the whole, but it has not yet emerged. I am also not sure that it will emerge. My mood shifts from an

Welcome to the dizziness of the hermeneutic circle of research

“As I write this paper, I am in the middle of the same hermeneutic experience that I am describing. I have part of my paper in one file and some in others. I have a strong

impatience of trying to get the paper done to the flow of allowing the paper to emerge. The harder I try, the more frustrated I become. Letting go of trying to get it done, allows ideas, connections and examples to emerge and form patterns. As I can see the whole and the parts coming together, I feel excited. My expression of the central themes

of the paper is becoming clearer. The introduction, the body of the paper and the conclusion are being refined in the light of each other. And I keep learning how to be playful in the dizziness of the hermeneutic circle of research.” (Segal, 2023)

I wrote the previous paragraph in moments of being lost and confused when writing this paper. I was in the “angst” of the paper when I became reflexively attuned to the question of “what the hell am I trying to do?” I also experienced moments of wanting to give up writing. I could not see how the parts and the whole connected with each other. I was anxious and excited – in a state of “anxietment.” However, I was also struck by the fact that I was writing about the angst of being lost in the lived experience of research. I was writing about the lived experience that I was already experiencing. This reflexive realisation allowed me the playfulness of working through the angst of being lost. I loved – and still do love – that I was working within the lived experience of the hermeneutic circle of research; I was learning about what I was doing while I was doing it. I was developing my way of understanding of research while I was doing it. And the more I was able to understand it, the more playful I was in embodying it in practice.

I invite you to ponder and play as you leap into the reflexive hermeneutic circles of this paper.

The aim of this paper is to bring out the importance of Hermeneutic Existential Phenomenology (HEP) for the development of novice researchers. The philosophical and psychotherapeutic dimensions of HEP are important for working effectively with the “emotional roller coaster” of novice researchers across the range of academic disciplines. The paper will demonstrate how HEP allows for framing and reframing the existential anxiety of the novice researcher into opportunities for in-habiting and embodying the way of being of a researcher. HEP focuses on the importance of disruptive emotions experienced on the research journey. Rather than seeing disruptive emotions only as concerns for mental health, it sees emotional disruptions as educational opportunities. Responding to emotional disruptions in the lived experience of research becomes educative when we embrace rather than defend against the threats experienced in emotional disruptions. Embracing disruptive emotions from a HEP perspective is educational in that it allows for a reflexive awareness of research from within the lived experience of research. Reframing emotional disruptions of research as educational opportunities allows for developing greater research competence and confidence. In turn, greater competence and confidence in research refines our research

and our way of being a researcher, which, in turn refines a researcher’s confidence and competence. Finally, the paper will suggest ways in which philosophical and psychotherapeutic skills and attunements are significant for research education.

My story of becoming a research coach and therapist

When I began my PhD research, I really thought I knew what I was doing. It did not take long before I realised that I did not know what I was doing. Doubt, self-doubt and anxiety began to settle in. Luckily, I had a supervisor who put the journey into perspective by telling me that I am a novice and as such could not expect to know what I was doing. The thing, she said, is to be able to work with the existential dimensions of not knowing what I was doing. She encouraged me that if I could accept the uncertainty of not knowing, it would become the basis for the emergence of curiosity, wonder and re-searching.

Calling myself a novice provided me with a framework within which to set expectations that were appropriate for being a novice. I did not expect to be an expert and so did not need to feel the pressure to perform straight away. I did not get lost in the “imposter syndrome,” of many novices. Although being challenged by the research, I could see the challenges as opportunities for developing embodied understanding of research. I needed to learn to listen to the voice of being lost.

From 2005 - 2009 I was Director of Higher Degree Research at an Australian University, managing doctoral research candidates. Our program combined both course work and a research-based thesis. The first year of the program was centred on course work. The course work consisted of four units including, research design, development of a literature review, quantitative research methods, and finally qualitative research methods. Each course or unit had specific aims, objectives, means of evaluations and deadlines for handing in of tasks.

While many students performed well in the first year of course-work, in the subsequent research years many found themselves anxious, in self-doubt and confused. Without the structure of what Eikeland (2001), amongst others, calls the “hidden curriculum” of the classroom, many of the students did not know their way about research. The “hidden curriculum” consisted of all the implicit rules, order, routines, organisation and conventions that the teacher brings with them to the classroom. They are not discussed in the classroom

but form the taken for granted conventions that allow classroom engagement to be possible.

This “hidden curriculum” of the classroom did not exist in the thesis years of the research. The experience of being thrown into an unstructured experience of research and the challenge of creating order was never part of the explicit theme of study in the course work year of the program. Preparing students to create their own structure was not discussed. It was only in the second year, when students were left on their own to develop a structure, that they come across the dizziness of the challenges of developing a structure. Describing the anxiety of not having a pre-given structure, one novice research student commented:

The fall of my senior year is when I actually began to write my thesis. Unlike a normal class that has a set meeting time each week and a syllabus to plan out the semester, in an independent study you're responsible for planning your own time and deadlines.

In shock and surprise this novice research student became simultaneously attuned to the taken for granted conventions of planning that structured classroom activity and to the challenge of needing to create her own research order. Her taken for granted conventions of ordering became explicit. She realized that she could no longer rely on these habitual conventions, but she had not yet developed new practices. Part of the challenge of becoming a researcher is developing order without having an embodied sense of order on which to rely. It is creating order through embracing lack of pre-given order, the chaos and uncertainty of the lived experience of research.

Putting this in the form of an existential paradox (Segal, 1995), it was only when novice students experienced the anxiety of being without a structure that the importance of developing a structure became clear. Many students found some short-term relief in proposing a plan for their thesis. Anna, the novice researcher that forms the case study of this paper, found herself planning how she would go about ordering her thesis in advance. However, in the context of the messiness of the lived experience of the thesis, she came to realise that her habitual conventions for ordering did not work. She came to rethink her notion of ordering, developing a more hermeneutic and phenomenological one of allowing order to emerge rather than impose order on experience. This rethinking did not occur overnight but emerged out of the way she responded to the emotional roller coaster ride of research.

The existential paradox of Anna is that it is in the disruption to her taken for granted conventions of order, that her felt sense of ordering becomes explicit and it is in these moments of being made explicit that new possibilities for ordering emerge. Instead of placing order onto the thesis, she allowed the order to emerge out of the thesis, a more hermeneutic and phenomenological and embodied form of ordering.

In enabling novice research students to work through the perplexities of the existential paradox of novice researchers, I adopted a much more therapeutic/coaching approach to the education of the novice researcher. Becoming a researcher was a process of phenomenological emergence and as a coach I could, in a Socratic way, act as a midwife to allow novice researchers way of being to emerge.

A psychotherapeutic view of the role of disruptive emotions of the novice researcher

This paper builds on research by “Therapists as Research Practitioners” (TRP) at Metanoia Institute (UK). Research is more than just a cognitive activity. Just as psychotherapeutic practice involves a “felt sense” for the client, so research is underpinned by a felt sense for the subject matter of research. Just as psychotherapists can draw on their felt sense of the client in therapy, so researchers in the field of psychotherapy can draw on their skills of working with a felt sense of their subject matter. Just as felt sense is considered as a form of knowing in psychotherapy, it can also be used as a form of knowledge in research. For example, in the context of the data-gathering activity of research, Bager-Charleson et al (2018) write of the importance of the “living body,” moods and the felt sense of the researcher in developing their research “know how.” Quoting Finlay they write of the importance of “bodily empathy,” and “attuned inquiry” in knowledge construction. Knowledge through moods, felt sense and attunement is called “embodied inquiry.”

The significance of embodied and attuned understanding seems to emerge out of a sense of emotional disruption in research. Bager-Charleson et al (2018) emphasize moods of feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, disconnected, lost, bewildered from the research subject matter. They also speak of the role of being lost in the research process.

These themes lead them to highlight the importance of mental health and concerns with wellbeing in working through disruptions in research. The lived experience of emotions of shame, fear, self-doubt, anxiety in transitions, emotional disorientation and even panic attacks are central to the lived experience of research.

These disruptive emotions are not just anomalies but are an intrinsic part of the research experience. Novice researchers

tend to think that they alone experience self-doubt and uncertainty. They do not tend to see that many other novice PhD researchers go through periods of self-questioning and anxiety. Research education does not generally provide novice PhD researchers with the understanding that such emotions are an intrinsic part of being a novice researcher. Instead of normalizing these experiences there is a tendency to see such experiences in a negative light, as signs of not coping and thus of something wrong.

These mental health emotive disruptions are not just obstacles to the research process but are opportunities to tune into the research in deeper and richer ways. Quoting one of their research participants Bager-Charleson et al (2018, p. 9) say that disruptions of mood in the researcher “attest to the reality that undertaking research into areas which are deeply meaningful and important to us as people, not just as academics, lays us open to challenge and struggle at very deep levels.”

They go on to quote the same research participant as referring to these disruptive moments as “existential struggles.” These struggles serve as opportunities for a greater attuned awareness to the reflexive role of the researcher in research. Rather than experiencing this existential reflexivity as an obstacle to research, such awareness of self becomes part of research knowledge. Such existential reflexivity allows researchers to switch their research attunement to one of allowing being to be. Quoting the same research subject, Bager-Charleson et al write of a “letting go” and to stay in the space of the unknown without having to resolve any uncertainty: “a far-from-easy letting go of aspect of life which have felt like certainties and an opening up to anxiety and learning to live with it without the need to simply resolve it.” (Bager-Charleson et al 2018, p. 9)

It is interesting to note that these existential struggles are seen not only as opportunities for greater therapeutic understanding of the subject matter of research but as opportunities for “knowing thyself” as a researcher; not only knowledge but the development of a research way of being.

Here we begin to see how working through disruptive moods can move beyond a concern with research knowledge into an attunement to the being and becoming of the researcher.

In the same paper, Bager-Charleson et al (2018) begin to write about the importance of bringing psychotherapeutic processes into developing an embodied research attunement. Just as a client in therapy is called upon to “lean into” the uncertainty of self-exploration so the embodied researcher is called to embrace existential struggles in research construction. Leaning into research existential struggles can be used as a sign or

signal to make sense on the research journey. Bager-Charleson et al (2017, p. 190) say: “Therapists are increasingly encouraged to develop research informed practice; this article suggests that our attention also turns to practice informed research.”

Turning to practice informed research means drawing on the kinds of skills that a psychotherapist develops in therapeutic practice and applying them to situated and embodied research. Just as a therapist can work through their felt sense of a client in a clinical context, so practice informed research is about developing felt sense in the research context. Just as felt sense in a clinical context is developed through emotional disruptions of sense making, so the practice-based researcher works with experiences of bewilderment and confusion in making sense of the research. Just as the therapist skills of working with felt sense are applied in the clinical context, so they can be used in a research context. These include skills of “leaning into the discomfort,” “staying with” the emergence of a felt sense, allowing for the emergence of the felt sense, embracing a sense of lostness as an opportunity, and waiting within a state of “evenly hovering” attention, as Freud called it, for the “aha” moments to emerge.

It should be noted that just because these skills of working with felt sense have developed in clinical practice does not mean that they translate immediately into research. Claire Mitchell, for example, describes how she, as a novice psychotherapist, developed an embodied way of being a therapist by working through the unknown, unfamiliar uncertainties and doubts about what it means to be a therapist. As a novice researcher she found herself with the same unfamiliar and unknown landscape that triggered much uncertainty and self-doubt. Just as she embraced and worked through the uncertainty of the unfamiliar in becoming a clinician, so she needed to embrace the doubts and uncertainties of the novice researcher in developing the same skills in a research context.

As discussed in the above, the turn to highlighting the importance of emotions and felt sense in research has been developed in an epistemic context. This paper highlights the importance of attunement in an ontological context. While the epistemic importance of emotions focuses on the production of knowledge, the ontological importance of developing an attunement is in the context of the being and becoming of a researcher: what does it mean to be a researcher? How do we understand the lived experience of becoming a researcher? How can the skills of a psychotherapist facilitate and hold a novice researcher in the anxiety and uncertainty of having no research know how, no felt sense and having not yet in-habited the research world?

The ontological importance of being and becoming a researcher has not gone unnoticed by researchers highlighting the importance of developing felt sense. For example, Bager-Charleson et al (2020) claim that there is a need to develop accounts of what being a researcher feels like. The title of one of her papers has the word “becoming” in it. They also point to the importance of embracing the uncertainty of the unfamiliar and the unknown in becoming a researcher. The question, however, is not thematized as the experience of “becoming”: what does it mean to “become” a researcher?

The lived experience of the process of becoming a researcher is the theme that underpins this paper.

Hermeneutic Existential Phenomenological Attunement (HEP)

“Methodologically,” the paper is written in line with Heidegger’s concept of hermeneutic existential phenomenological attunement (HEP). As will be seen, for Heidegger HEP is less of a method and more of an attunement. At times the attunement can be embodied in a method. It can even be scientific in the positivist sense of the word (Eger, 1993). It can also be poetic, take a narrative form, the form of a therapeutic attunement and it can also be philosophical expressing itself in, for example, Heidegger’s “destruction” (1985, p. 41) of the history of Western philosophy.

In this section I will first outline a Heideggerian notion of phenomenology, followed by existential dimensions and then hermeneutics.

Phenomenology, as used by Heidegger (1985), is a process of allowing that which is concealed in, but part of a phenomenon to emerge. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that phenomenology is concerned with allowing that “which shows itself from itself” to emerge. The theme of revealing that which is concealed plays a central role in Heidegger’s later work where he writes of “bringing-forth” that “brings [a phenomenon] out of concealment into unconcealment” (1985, p. 293). He writes of poets and artists as exemplars of the phenomenological process. This is exemplified in Michelangelo’s artistic philosophy. He believed that the sculpture of David existed within the marble and his task was simply to remove the excess material to reveal it.

In this case it is the significance of the lived experience of research for becoming a researcher. While much attention, in research education, is paid to the subject matter of research (including research writing skills, developing methods, and interviewing skills), very little attention is paid to the challenges of the lived experience underpinning the subject matter of research. Furthermore, little attention is paid to the effects of embracing the challenges of lived experience on developing effective skills and habits of research practice, including timely completions. Yet, to state the obvious, the lived experience of developing effective habits of research is an integral part of doing research. (For Heidegger it is the very obviousness of a phenomenon that is so hard to see.) How novices live through what I call the “existential challenges of research” effects the way in which they become researchers. And the way in which research novices are affected by the lived experience of research is crucial to embodying and in-habiting research skills which, in turn are crucial to excellence and outcomes.

Heidegger’s view of phenomenology is about allowing a phenomenon to emerge. In reflecting on the process of emergence in her research methodology and way of being, the Nobel prize winning geneticist Barbra McClintock says: “I know [my corn plants] intimately, and I find it a great pleasure to know them. They become bigger as I am able to stay with them and I am able to see them more” (Eger, 1993, p. 27).

Taking the theme of emergence in her research approach one step further she says:

“I found that the more I worked with them the bigger and bigger [the chromosomes] got, and when I was really working with them; I wasn't outside, I was down there. I was part of the system. I was right down there with them, and everything got big. ... It surprised me because I actually

felt as if I were right down there and these were my friends" (Eger, 1993, p. 26).

A crucial aspect of phenomenological emergence, from a Heideggerian perspective, is allowing the phenomenon to emerge. Rather than "trying" or "forcing" the phenomenon to emerge, Barbra McIntock allows the subject matter of research to emerge. She "stays," as she says with the plants. Rather than working on the plants, she dwells with the plants. She is dwelling and being with the plants. She develops a way of being in relationship to the plants in that, as she says, she becomes "part of the system." As she develops a deep-felt sense of being in relation to her subject matter, the latter got "bigger and bigger," as she says.

I hope what stands out clearly is that phenomenology for Heidegger is much more of a research attunement than a method. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, as interpreted by scholars like Dreyfus (1991), Guignon (1983), Polt (1999), and Wrathall (2005) emphasizes that understanding human existence involves an attunement to lived experience and the moods that disclose it. This approach contrasts with a prior commitment to methodological procedures, suggesting that phenomenology is about being attuned to the ways we are always already engaged with our world. In the context of this thesis HEP is an attunement to the lived experience of the way of becoming a researcher.

I also hope that what stands out is that "allowing being to be," in Heidegger's terms means allowing the phenomenon to emerge rather than pouncing on it – just as Barbra McIntock allowed the plants to emerge by dwelling with them.

For Heidegger phenomenology is not only emergence of a research attunement but our ways of being-in-the-world are themselves emergent. For example, our life narratives, identities, and skills as researchers is not simply given. They also are not something that we will into being. They emerge out of the way in which we act and interact in the world. We ourselves are emergent beings. Kierkegaard (1959) expresses this notion of emerge well when he says that life is lived forward and understood backwards – in order to live forward (my addition).

So too, our ways of being-in-the-world as researchers emerge through the way we are immersed in the field of research. As we press forward into the lived experience of research, so we can begin to feel, look back and see a research way of being emerging. Our research skills, habits, identities, and stories emerge as we look back on our leap into the field of research. This paper is phenomenological in two senses: as a way of writing this paper and as elaborating the way in which the way

of being of a researcher emerges out of responding to the existential challenges of the lived experience of research.

For Heidegger a "world" takes the form of a hermeneutic circle, or what is called, in *Being and Time* (1985), a referential whole. Gallagher describes the workings of the hermeneutic circle:

The meaning [and exercising] of the part is only understood within the context of the whole; but the whole is never given unless through an understanding of the parts. Understanding therefore requires a circular movement from parts to whole and from whole to parts.... The hermeneutical circle, therefore, is not a vicious circle, the more movement in this circle, the larger the circle grows, embracing the expanding contexts that throw more and more light upon the parts. (Gallagher, 1992, p. 59)

Historically hermeneutics has been seen as a methodology of textual interpretation (Palmer, 1969). In *Being and Time*, however, hermeneutics takes an ontological turn. It refers to the relationship between being and world as being the parts of which being-in-the-world is the whole. More about the ontological turn of Heidegger's view of hermeneutics will be discussed in the context of research.

In *Being and Time* there is a specific mood in which the novice researcher becomes attuned to the pre-thematic theoretical background. This is the disruptive mood of existential anxiety. In anxiety the novice does not yet have a familiar, embodied and in-habited understanding and knowledge of research. They have no routines and conventions upon which to rely. They have no role identity on which to rely. The strangeness of the unfamiliar and the nothingness of no conventions and routines is what Heidegger calls "existential anxiety." In anxiety the novice has no inhabited or embodied way of making sense of the world of research.

For Heidegger it is precisely when the novice has not yet inhabited and embodied its way of being-in-research that the question of the meaning of sense arises. Or putting it in the form of a paradox, it is in those experiences in which the novice finds itself unable to make sense of the world of research that the question of the meaning of sense and significance arise and become explicit. Again, putting it in a general sense, when the novice has no embodied theory, habits routines and conventions of research that the conventions of research become explicit for questioning.

Framing this in the case of research: when we are absorbed in the flow of research, we do not question the way of being-in-the-world of a researcher. It is only when we cannot make

sense of the way of being-in-the-world of a researcher that the lived experience of the way of being-in-the-world of the researcher announces itself for questioning. A novice has not yet developed the way of being a researcher. Because of this the way of being a researcher is in question. Unlike the expert, the novice cannot just get on with the everyday activities of research. Their lived experience of being a novice means that they are in the existential state of questioning what it means to do research, be and become a researcher. Putting this in a form of a circle, in anxiety the novice researcher comes face to face with the lived experience of being a novice.

It is important to note that existential questioning into which a novice researcher is thrown is not a classroom form of questioning or theorising. It is not a form of questioning abstracted from lived experience. Rather it is in a specific mood of lived experience that such questioning occurs. As has been indicated already, this is the mood of anxiety. In existential anxiety the novice has no embodied sense upon which to rely. Although they may have read many textbooks on research, this is not enough to develop the felt sense of research. And so the novice has no foundation upon which to rely. This is existential anxiety. Existential questioning occurs in moments of “Fear and Trembling” to use a phrase of Kierkegaard. In existential questioning the novice comes to question themselves, their theories and conventions for research in moods of lived experience.

The purpose of existential questioning is not to develop new theories or propositional knowledge. Rather it is to develop new ways of being-in-the-role of researcher. Existential questioning allows the novice to question its past and present conventions and theories in order to project itself into embodying the world of research. Coming face to face with our taken for granted conventions and theories is also the opportunity to let go of some of them or even transform our relationship to them. The shift from being overwhelmed by existential anxiety to embracing new possibilities by letting go of them is, according to Heidegger, called being resolute. Being resolute involves embracing the vulnerability and anxiety of the novice and leaping into the skills, mindset and ways of being a researcher.

The novice’s leap into the existential paradox of experiential learning

The novice researcher is in the grips of what I have come to call “the existential paradox of experiential learning.” On the one hand a novice researcher needs skills of research to engage in the lived experience of research, but they only develop those

skills by participating in research. Reframing this in the words of Lina Hill who says that “[Researchers] had to act as (researchers) before they understood what that role was. Only by acting would they know what their new (role) entailed.” Continuing her point, she says that novice researchers are “trying to learn a role whose meaning and importance they could not grasp [ahead of immersing themselves in the role] (Hill, 2003, p. 45).

This point applies to all skill development: we develop the skills and become artists by immersing ourselves in the world of art, we become plumbers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, psychologists and electricians by immersing ourselves. As we immerse ourselves, we start to develop the felt sense of the skill.

Yet in all these cases we need the skills to initiate the process. Even the skills of riding a bicycle are inhabited through cycling. We need the skills of cycling to cycle but we only inhabit those skills by cycling. As a novice, we have no skill to depend on in the rite of initiation into the practice.

The novice is in the existentially challenging paradox of the unfamiliar and unknown. They cannot rely on past skills or conventions for doing things and they do not yet have the new conventions and habits of practice. To progress the novice researcher needs to resolutely leap into the existentially unknown and unfamiliar. Failure to leap leads to research derailment and a loss of the research way of being. Embracing the leap opens the possibility for inhabiting the way of being of a researcher. As Kierkegaard says: “To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose oneself” (May, 1977, p. 212).

The world of research is disclosed not by thinking about it but by leaping into it. As a novice commits themselves to the research project, so the world of research emerges for them. As a novice commits themselves to research, they in-habit the way of being of a researcher; they become researchers.

In-habiting and embodying the way of being a researcher: from Self Actualization as a Researcher to Becoming a Researcher

One of the early ways in which humanistic and existential psychologists wrote about the importance of becoming a person was in terms of the notion of self-actualization. This theme was developed by, amongst others, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Victor Frankl and Rollo May. However, existential philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Fredrich Nietzsche and Soren Kierkegaard allow for a

questioning of the limitations of self-actualization in appreciating the lived experience of *becoming* and *being* a researcher. Sartre, for example, questions the notion that there is a self to be actualized. He critiques views of self-actualization as a form of essentialism. He also questions the implicit assumption that the self needs the appropriate environmental conditions to be actualized. The humanist view assumes a distinction between the subject and object in which the world is seen as providing the objective conditions for self-actualization.

The theme emerging among existential philosophers is that becoming, and identity development emerges in the context of a relationship to the world. The self becomes itself and is transformed by the way in which it relates to, is engaged in and committed to the world. It is through ways of working through what ... refers to as the existential struggles that becoming and being take place. Just as a self transforms the world so the self is formed and transformed by the way in which it deals with the existential challenges of existence.

This theme is most explicitly developed by Martin Heidegger in his concept of being-in-the-world. For Heidegger the notion of a self is an abstraction from the world. The self is “always and already” situated within and formed by the world. The word “in” in the phrase being-in-the-world refers to a self that inhabits a world. There is no self-prior to in-habiting the world.

Ontologically, as I have said, Heidegger calls this way of being, being-in-the-world. Ontically, I will call this way of being, “being-in-a-role.” The self is always and already within a role. We are, for example, father, mother, child, scholar, doctor, patient or client. Even being a hermit is a way of being-in-a-role. Both the notions of roles and selves are abstractions without each other. The phrase being-in-a-role expresses the inseparability of being and role. Being-in-a-role is an embodied and in-habited way of being. Even being a self or an individual is a way of in-habiting and a way of being-in-the-world.

A researcher is a way of being-in-a-role that emerges out of the existential struggles involved in engaging in the activities of research. Some of these existential struggles have already been mentioned. The underlying existential struggle involved in becoming a researcher is the experience of a novice researcher. A novice is, by definition, someone who does not know their way around a field of practice. They have not developed the know-how of being immersed in an unfamiliar and strange world. A novice is in the existentially unknown. It is through the ways in which the novice researcher resolutely leaps into the existential struggles of the unknown that the way of being-in-a-role of researcher emerges.

Psychotherapy as a form of research and practice is in the best space to hold and enable novice researchers to work through the existential anxiety of the novice researcher. Psychotherapy theory and research is focused on the theme of anxiety that is at the heart of becoming a researcher. Psychotherapy practice consists of the skills for creating the space that allows for the way of being-in-the-role of researcher to emerge through leaping into the anxiety of the unknown.

Existential philosophy and psychology provide a framework within which to focus on the existential anxiety at the heart of becoming a researcher. Existentialism provides the opportunity to move beyond an abstracted subject and disengaged self to an embodied and situated way of being as a researcher.

The next question is: how does the way of being-in-the-role of a researcher emerge?

An outline of a Heideggerian view of hermeneutics as a way of being-in-a-role

Being-in-the-world and lived experience has a hermeneutic structure which, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls a “referential whole.” We develop our way of being-in-a-role as we engage in the “referential whole” of a profession, that is, through the way in which we emerge out of the referential whole of our way of being-in-the-world. A referential whole describes the relationship between the whole and the parts of a phenomenon.

In *Being and Time* one of the examples he gives of a referential whole is that of a workshop. The meaning of the workshop as a whole is given through the relationship between the parts of a workshop and the parts are connected to each other through the whole. For example, a nail is seen as a nail only in relation to a hammer. A hammer is seen as a hammer only in relation to the table that the carpenter is building. The “workshop” is the whole in terms of which the network of parts is situated in relation to each other. And the whole is only made possible by virtue of the parts. So, the parts lead to the whole and the whole allows the parts to be situated in relationship to each other.

It is important to highlight that the “self” does not precede or even oversee the referential whole. Rather the self emerges out of its involvement in the referential whole. For example,

we become carpenters by being immersed in the activities of a workshop of carpentry. As a carpenter we are part of the workshop. We get our identity as carpenter by engaging in the act of working as a carpenter. Our being-in-the-role as a carpenter develops as we engage in the activity of working as a carpenter. The self is not first a subject abstracted from the world. Rather the self is a way of being-in-a-role.

We become researchers, psychologists, psychotherapists, or plumbers only through our way of being in the referential whole of each of these activities. Furthermore, each of these professions or practices takes the form of being-in-a-role.

Heidegger's clearest expression of the hermeneutic process of in-habiting a role is given in his understanding of art. Art involves three terms: artwork, artist and art. Each of these are necessary conditions for each other, but none are reducible to each other. It is only through drawing or painting on the canvas that the artist becomes an artist. The artist is not an artist in advance or prior to engaging in drawing or painting. Similarly, the artwork comes into being through this painting or drawing. "Art" defines the relationship between artist and artwork but is not reducible to either of the terms. It is neither separate from the two terms nor is it identical with either one or both terms. Together they form a hermeneutic whole, in which the parts (artist and artwork) give rise to the whole (art) and the whole situates the parts in relationship to each other. "Not only is the main step from work to art a circle like the step from art to work, but every separate step that we attempt circles this circle (Heidegger, 1977, p. 3). Reinforcing his point Heidegger (1977, p. 17) says: "As necessarily as the artist is the origin of the work in a different way than the work is the origin of the artist, so it is equally certain that, in a still different way, art is the origin of both artist and work."

An example of the hermeneutic circle is developed by Alex Alemande (1977), a contemporary Spanish artist, in his self-portrait:



There are many examples of paintings within paintings. However, what is unusual about this painting is that it is not only a painter painting himself but that, as he is painting himself, he is simultaneously being painted by his painting. The hand extending from the painting within the painting, demonstrates how he is being painted by his painting while painting it. His identity, habits of practice and way of being an artist are formed from within the relationship to his work. He is becoming an artist by painting. This extended hand that is painting itself is usually hidden in the everyday activity of painting. Thus, when painting, we do not see that our identity or way of being a painter is being formed by the painting. Yet as we are painting, we are developing the way of being of an artist. Art comes into being only through this hermeneutic boomerang between the painter and the paint work.

And, as Heidegger (1977) says, this circle keeps circling itself, that is, as the artist paints so his skills of painting are refined and as his skills of painting are refined, his ability to paint is refined and the circle keeps circling itself. And just as the world of painting emerges through an involvement in painting, so the world of research is disclosed through being-in the lived experience of research. By leaping into the lived experience of research, the researcher develops the way of being-in-the-role of researcher.

The hermeneutic circle of research

Describing the hermeneutic experience of becoming a researcher one of my PhD students compared it to learning to drive:

You sort of learn over time and you realise that it's kind of like driving a car. When you are driving for the first time, you are worried about the right acceleration, and the gear shift, and the signs on the road, and the horn, and the instructor, you know, it's too confusing! But when you have driven the car for a few years, you realise that it's automatic and you're also learning to text (on the) phone while driving (A). *(Author's note: not that this practice would be recommended!)*

The skill of learning to become a "driver" is itself hermeneutic. It involves embracing the uncertainty of working with many parts at the same time. The driver does not inhabit the being-in-the-role of driving in a sequential and linear way. As indicated in the above example; to be on the road, a driver needs to co-ordinate several actions simultaneously. Together these separate activities form the whole called "driving."

The parts of a car are parts through being in relation to each other: the clutch is a clutch in relation to the gears. The gears are as such in relation to the accelerator. The accelerator is in relation to the breaks. Each of the parts is as such in relation to the steering wheel. The whole of which each of the latter are parts is the activity of "driving." "Driving" brings all the parts together and, in turn, the parts are essential for the whole. The activity of driving transforms a person into a "driver."

Paraphrasing this in terms of research: Just as the driver emerges out of the activity of driving, so the researcher emerges out of the lived experience of research. The relationship between the parts and whole of a thesis are much more like a hermeneutic puzzle in which we tend to go backwards and forwards, joining new parts together, catching sight of the whole which allows us to catch a better sight of the relationship between parts.

Becoming a researcher involves the same kind of dizziness as becoming a driver or an artist. The novice needs to make sense of the chaotic experience of the relationship between parts. The novice researcher does not have an embodied understanding of the hermeneutic relation between whole and parts. If anything, they are socialised into expecting to follow a linear order of parts. All they experience is the dizziness of uncertainty; of not yet having the felt sense of situating the parts in relation to each other.

An Exemplar: Anna's experience of in-habiting the hermeneutic circle of research

The process of the emergence of this next section was a form of unintentional collaborative inquiry. Because of my background in hermeneutic existential phenomenology (HEP), Anna invited me to be her academic advisor for her PhD. (I have been given permission by Anna to write about and quote from emails that she has sent to me.) While she was learning *about* the philosophy of existential hermeneutic phenomenology, she, quite by accident, found, as I shall shortly show, that she was living through her research in an existential hermeneutic and phenomenological way.

Just as she saw the existential disruptions experienced by her participants as opportunities to facilitate their reflexive awareness of themselves as therapists, so she was beginning to see her own existential disruptions on the research journey as opportunities to become attuned to herself as an emerging novice researcher. Her existential and emotional disruptions threw her into "deep" existential questioning and challenged her to let go of old assumptions in constructing her new research way of being. She came to see that the experiences of anxiety and self-doubt when used appropriately allowed her to inhabit and embody the way of being.

In line with phenomenology, she did not try to control or impose a pre-defined structure on the messiness of research. Rather, in the manner of a phenomenologist she allowed her thesis to emerge by embracing the chaos and anxiety of being a novice. As she resolutely embraced uncertainty, she began to see that order and structure in research emerged in a hermeneutic way.

Her thesis was hermeneutic in that it was not written in a linear way. Rather, she found herself going backwards and forwards between whole and parts. She also found that her way of being and identity as a researcher emerged in a hermeneutic way. As she engaged in the activities of research so her way of being a researcher developed.

As we shall see, Anna drew on her skills and attunement as an experienced psychotherapist in turning the anxiety of being a novice into the opportunity to develop her way of being a researcher.

Anna began her PhD journey at an Australian University where her expectations were set by a senior academic during an induction address to new PhD candidates. The message that Anna heard was that success in research emerged out of having a pre-planned well-ordered process that is imposed on her research. Paraphrasing this faculty member, Anna said that

Her strategy was simply to get up each morning and work from 4 am to 7 am, her only undisturbed time. She enthusiastically spoke about how she dedicated herself to this routine for six days a week and finished her PhD in the three-year time allocation.

Anna was excited by this advice as she believed that it fitted with her way of doing things. Anna remembered thinking: "I'm a person with strength and dedication." However, it was not too long before she came to see that the way in which this faculty member had described the strategy of ordering her research, came into direct conflict with Anna's experience of research. Anna came to see that things were quite messy and not well ordered, saying:

But then the reality of the messiness of the PhD journey set in. Some days I spent much longer than three hours ... Other days I felt paralysed to do anything at all, lost in the confusion of which article to read, what to do with what I read, how to hold it all together.

Anna's initial response to the discrepancy between her experience and the faculty member's espoused view of research led her to an experience of being existentially lost: "I felt like I got nowhere." Without a sense of how to go about research she continued to rely on the espoused version of research given to her at the induction address. Initially Anna believed that she was the problem. Seeing herself through the frame provided threw her into self-doubt and anxiety. She began to question her ability to do a thesis.

When I "couldn't do it" the way it had been described, I started to question myself - did I have it in me to produce a thesis? Was I dedicated enough? If I couldn't do three hours of work six days a week, what did that say about me and how determined and motivated I was?

It is important to note that, at this stage, the framework given by the faculty member was not thrown into question by Anna. As stated above, it was her ability to cope within the framework that Anna doubted:

The anxiety I felt in the first few years of the project was intense and exhausting; driven by the need to "get it right",

to be seen as "hard-working", to follow the rules – the suggested pathway I heard at that first induction address.

Anna went on to say that she coped with her self-doubt in a self-sabotaging way: by procrastinating:

I wanted to quit so many times. These were all ways of shutting down, closing off, feeling defensive, protecting myself. But, while I have come to accept them as a part of the PhD journey, they have not resulted in much fruit.

However, as she continued her journey, Anna developed a felt sense that something was wrong in the fit between her and the university. She says: "Something about the experience felt like I was having to do it someone else's way and that didn't feel right to me."

In the last paragraph, there is a shift in Anna's doubt. Instead of going into self-doubt, she doubts that the university is appropriate to the kind of research that she wanted to do. The shift from self-doubt to doubt highlights a shift from examining herself as the problem to understanding that the doubt was directed at the ways of doing research at that university. She began a search for another university. She then found a second university which resonated with her topic and her way of doing research.

However, she had still not in-habited and embodied this new way of doing research. She was still living in the confusion and anxiety of a novice not really knowing what they are doing. Anna was lucky because she was a psychotherapist. Over time, Anna used her skills as a psychotherapist, to see that working through her anxiety opens new insights and habits of research: "What is my self-doubt is telling me in the context of this research project? I have just been sitting quietly with my eyes closed inviting the self-doubt to be present."

The more she listened to the felt sense of self-doubt, the more her taken-for-granted expectations of herself as a research scholar emerge. She began to see how she had fallen into the set of assumptions espoused by the faculty member of the previous university. As has already been indicated, she came to develop a hermeneutic phenomenological response to the chaos of research. Instead of imposing order on the research, she was able to stay with her anxiety in a way that allowed order to emerge out of research. Through the experience of being resolute in the face of the unknown her research voice begins to emerge: "I am learning to go with it and that is helping me navigate the moments when the self-doubting self appears."

With time, Anna became aware that much of the anxiety was not about her but about being a novice: 'I have learned how to navigate the challenges my own way. ... It's a constant journey, this moving back and forth between disruption felt as a threat to me and holding disruption with openness and curiosity.' Continuing this point she says: "I am learning to go with it, and that is helping me navigate the moments when the self-doubting self appears."

The more she understood her anxiety, the more she was able to work in the messiness of the lived experience of the hermeneutic circle of research: This was described by Anna in looking at her research work reflexively:

Eventually I found, through my research findings, a philosophical anchor point. But after that discovery I had to go back to **everything** that I had thought and done before that moment and consider it again - in light of my new perspective. But this didn't just happen one time in some linear fashion – it was a constant sense of learning something new, looking back at things, learning else something new, and looking back at things again.

The way her thesis develops hermeneutically can be seen in the above quote. Not only is she going forward and backward, but her earlier chapters are reframed in terms of the philosophical perspective that she gains only much later in the thesis which, in turn reframes how she moves forward. Refining the hermeneutic point she says:

Then, as I started writing, I went back and forth AGAIN through everything I had done - the question I had formed, the methods I had used, the findings that emerged; constantly thinking about how the findings and the philosophy were helping me make sense of what was appearing. It feels like a spiral in some ways – it's getting smaller and more refined as the journey goes along – but it's not going in just one direction. It's moving forwards, then backwards, then forwards again - all leading to something thicker and deeper.

But not only is the research project constructed in the form of a hermeneutic circle, the way of being a researcher is constructed by participating in the hermeneutic circle of research. Doing her research transformed her into a researcher. The more she was transformed by doing research, the more she in-habited and embodied the being-in-a-role of researcher.

Reframing my role as a HEP research coach/psychotherapist/educator

Anna's insight into her own lived experience of doing her thesis from an HEP perspective, opened a new role for me in relation to her work. Not only did we discuss the formal philosophies of HEP as the philosophical framework of her thesis, but I also became a research coach-therapist-guide who facilitated her in developing her competence and confidence by working through the emotional/existential challenges of her research. In a circular movement, we moved backward and forward between lived experience and the conceptual framework of HEP.

As a research-coach-therapist my attunement shifted from assisting Anna in the development of concepts to an attunement to developing perspective on and working through the research-anxiety and messiness in which she found herself. My attunement in this role was underpinned by my experience in working with the HEP framework in working with the emergent researcher. The HEP framework of research begins where the novice researcher is thrown into emotional disruption.

My role as a coach is to enable the novice researcher to frame the experience of emotional disruption as an educational opportunity, an opportunity to develop her way of being as a researcher. Because a novice goes through the existentially unknown and unfamiliar, it is appropriate to feel uncertain, anxious, and dizzy. It is the attitude that a research novice has to the chaos and uncertainty that is central to embodying the way of being of a researcher: can the novice turn the anxiety of the unfamiliar into an educational opportunity?

The idea of a hermeneutic circle allows novice researchers to work effectively in the dizziness of the research experience as going forward, backward and all over the place. The perspective shift here is to be able to see that the hermeneutic dizziness is not an anomaly but an integral part of a research attitude. Without the safety place created by a coach many novice researchers do derail, developing greater self-doubt, mental health issues and even leaving the program.

There are many emotional disruptions on the journey towards embodying and in-habiting the world of the researcher: loneliness, self-doubt, undermining of self-worth, feeling like an imposter and, of course the joy and excitement of new discoveries and seeing order being established. A HEP research coach sees these as opportunities for embodied learning in the context of lived experience.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced the HEP perspective for working with the emotional disruptions of the lived experience of the novice researcher. It has highlighted an understanding of the importance of becoming attentive to lived experience in research education for enabling competence and confidence in the novice researcher. It has demonstrated that the lived experience of being a novice means embracing the dizziness of the hermeneutic circle.

Starting in 2005, I have developed HEP as an approach to research education from within the anxieties of being thrown into research. This is a theme, however, for another paper.

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