



# Heuristic Inquiry: Differentiated From Descriptive Phenomenology and Aligned With Transpersonal Research Methods

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Heuristic inquiry has been classified by many qualitative researchers, as a phenomenological approach, whereas transpersonal psychologists consider it a transpersonal research method. However, Moustakas, the creator of heuristic inquiry, distinguished heuristic research from descriptive phenomenology, and labeled it personal, instead of transpersonal. The differences between heuristic research and descriptive phenomenology are highlighted in this article for methodological clarity, and evidence from Moustakas's writings is presented to support the argument that heuristic inquiry could be considered either a personal or a transpersonal research method. Distinguishing phenomenological characteristics such as a grounding in philosophy and the application of the psychological-phenomenological reduction are missing from the heuristic inquiry design. In addition, heuristic inquiry is a person-centered approach, whereas the phenomenological method is a phenomenon-centered approach. Multiple essential similarities with transpersonal research methods, such as transpersonal descriptors, incorporating the researcher's personal experience, and a transformational impact justify the transpersonal classification. In addition, the article presents some challenges encountered in heuristic applications, such as discomfort with personal disclosure, privileging the researcher's personal experience, and unique ethical issues such as handling the confidentiality of the researcher as participant.

**Keywords:** heuristic inquiry, qualitative research, descriptive phenomenology, transpersonal research methods, transpersonal psychology

Heuristic inquiry developed by Clark Moustakas is “a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The approach can be used in “any research endeavor where the inquiry is on the cutting edge of new territory being explored” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 58), and has been described as “the richest and most satisfying description of an important human experience” (Braud, 1998, p. 47). Notably, Clark

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This article is based on the presentation *Heuristics as a Transpersonal Research Method* at the Transpersonal Research Colloquium, held in conjunction with the British Psychological Society Transpersonal Psychology Section Conference, in Northamptonshire, United Kingdom, in 2016.

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Moustakas was one of the founders of the humanistic psychology movement in the United States.

Heuristic inquiry is a qualitative research method, in which “the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). The experiences examined are often profound and transformative, such as Moustakas’ first heuristic study on existential loneliness after a crisis (Moustakas, 1961/2016), self-healing (Ozertugrul, 2017; Sela-Smith, 2002), the symbolic growth experience (Frick, 1990), forgiving the unforgivable (Mihalache, 2012), spiritual bypassing (Hamdan, 2014), and identity reconstruction through acculturation (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010), to name just a few. In contemplating a heuristic research topic, Moustakas advised to pose the following question “What stands out as one or two critical incidents in your life that created the puzzlement, curiosity, and passion to know?” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 53).

### Heuristic Research Design

The heuristic inquiry starts with the main researcher attempting to understand an intense and often complex personal experience, a phenomenon that is not well understood. The essence of the design is the engagement of the researcher’s self in a process of discovery, the literal meaning of heuristic inquiry. “The emphasis on the investigator’s internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). The experience is powerful but contains a mystery, and “the mystery summons me” Moustakas wrote (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13). Even though the heuristic topic is based on personal experience, the knowledge acquired experientially is incomplete, and results in doubt and questioning (Frick, 1990), rather than certainty. The questioning calls for a systematic investigation of the experience within the researcher’s self, and by engaging others who have lived through the same experience. In this subjective journey, the researcher and coresearchers employ successive stages of deeper understanding that result in a full descriptive account of the experience studied. With this purpose in mind, Moustakas (1990) delineated six specific heuristic research phases:

- (a) *Initial engagement* with the main question of the study related to the researcher’s self-searching process.
- (b) *Immersion* into the intensity and fullness of the experience studied. The topic becomes the focus of one’s existence. The researcher engages fully the question, and the “universe” responds by engaging the researcher: “People, places, meetings, readings, nature, all, offer possibilities for understanding the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). During this phase, the perception of the phenomenon changes from looking at it, to looking from within it.
- (c) *Incubation* is a state of temporary retreat from the intensity of the study. The data is left to incubate on an unconscious or subconscious level, offering new perspectives. Periods of immersion are combined with periods of incubation, in order to allow the data to sink deeper and ferment into new understandings and meanings.
- (d) *Illumination*, occurs naturally and spontaneously, comprises of new understandings, revelations, and disclosure of hidden meanings. Intuition, the process of understanding wholes, and tacit knowledge characterize this phase. In my own heuristic research on becoming forgiving, my perception of the experience

changed during illumination from being an act or a decision to being a developmental multilayered process (Mihalache, 2012). It felt as if I was zooming in and out through a camera's lens, at times focusing in on a specific meaning, at other times opening up to panoramic insights.

- (e) *Explication* is the process of explaining the insights and trying to clarify the subjective knowledge acquired. The reorganization attained at the level of tacit knowledge in the previous phases surfaces now to normal consciousness, facilitating the integration and explication of the experience.
- (f) The accumulated data is allowed to be distilled by meditation and solitude into a *creative synthesis* to enhance the communication of the nature and meaning of the experience researched. Moustakas (1990) indicated that the creative synthesis is "a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences" (p. 13).

The heuristic design employs a plurality of voices in order to cover as many facets of the experience researched as possible—the voice of the researcher, those of participants named "co-researchers" in heuristic inquiry, and accounts found in literature, art, and wisdom traditions. However, the heuristic researcher starts the data collection with herself or himself, going through the heuristic phases in a process of self-searching typically through extensive journaling. Alternative forms of data that enhance the expression of the experience, such as past diary entries or any forms of creative expression, such as poetry, drawings, or recordings are also gathered. "Self-dialogue is the critical beginning . . . one's own self-discoveries, awarenesses and understandings are the initial steps of the process" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). Sela-Smith (2002) warned that each and every heuristic phase should be engaged in fully for the heuristic process to be successful. The personal data collection is followed by collecting data from participants in a similar manner. Coresearchers could be asked to journal, or to provide narratives of experience and alternative forms of data prior to a conversational interview. "The stories and understandings of the other participants come to deepen and extend the understanding" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 17). In interviews, Moustakas (1990) advised a conversational dialogue, "in dialogue one is encouraged to permit ideas, thoughts, feelings, and images to unfold and be expressed naturally" (p. 39).

According to the heuristic method, results are presented in the form of individual depictions, a composite depiction, exemplary portraits, and a creative synthesis. The main researcher constitutes each data set, comprising of journals, interview transcripts, and alternative data, into an individual depiction of the participant living the experience investigated. Each individual depiction contains verbatim material from the participant's narrative. From the raw data and individual depictions, two or three depictions that are most representative of the group are selected. These are amplified with biographical and contextual data and presented as exemplary portraits "in such way that both the phenomenon and the individual persons emerge in a vital and unified way" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). All depictions and portraits are then thematically analyzed to extract common themes and patterns. "The challenge is to examine all the collected data in creative combinations and recombinations, sifting and sorting, moving rhythmically in and out of appearance, looking, listening carefully for the meanings within meanings" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 52). The common themes and patterns are assembled into a composite depiction of the experience. All results are then integrated into a creative synthesis. "The synthesis goes beyond distillation of themes and patterns. It is not a summary or recapitulation. In synthesis, the searcher is challenged to generate a new reality, a new

monolithic significance that embodies the essence of the heuristic truth” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 52).

Validity or credibility in heuristic research is established by repeatedly questioning the meaning of results, “does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). Member checking is accomplished by asking the coresearchers to verify the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the composite depiction.

## Examples of Heuristic Studies

The authoritative source for heuristic applications remains Moustakas’ book on heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), more specifically Chapters 4 and 5. The reader will find examples of individual depictions, exemplary portraits, composite depictions, and creative syntheses. I offer below some examples from my own heuristic research, and a couple of heuristic dissertation studies I have supervised.

In my own heuristic research, I have explored the experience of becoming forgiving of the unforgivable, labeled in the study *transformative forgiveness* (Mihalache, 2012). The sample consisted of 13 coresearchers from various ethnic and spiritual backgrounds, who were able to forgive seemingly unforgivable offenses. Four participants forgave the murderer of their son or daughter, among them being the father of a 9/11 flight attendant. Other participants experienced forgiveness in the context of other traumatic transgressions such as the Holocaust, childhood abuse, and domestic abuse.

Becoming forgiving of the unforgivable is an intense and complex experience and one that is not well understood. We think we know what forgiveness is, but, when we try to define it and study it in depth, we discover that it does not yield easily to explication. There is sustained disagreement related to the nature of forgiveness in the general population (Mullet, Girard, & Bakhshi, 2004) and among researchers. The agreement among researchers centers more on what forgiveness is not, rather than on what it is. Forgiveness is not pardoning, excusing, or condoning either the hurtful action or the offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015).

In quantitative research, forgiveness is studied frequently in hypothetical situations. However, the person that considers forgiveness when faced with the hypothetical hurtful situation of spending a night alone because her partner chose to get drunk with friends (Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007) is experiencing something completely different from the individual who forgave the murderer of his child, as some of the participants in my study have experienced. Hypothetical situations invite criticism for lacking ecological validity, yet, for both situations, the denouement in literature is forgiveness. A significant amount of evidence from quantitative studies is also indirect, measuring forgiveness by the reduction in unforgiveness—the reduction in avoidance and revenge behaviors—rather than measuring forgiveness itself. Although decreasing unforgiveness is necessary, forgiveness is more than the reduction of anger, just as health is more than the alleviation of illness. These are just some of the aspects of forgiveness research that reveal the complexity of this experience, and the need for more qualitative research in this area.

In my heuristic study, data was collected and analyzed according to the heuristic procedure described by Moustakas (1990), and summarized above. Narratives, interviews, and secondary data such as journals, poetry, and other creative works were collected from all coresearchers. For the main researcher, journaling was the main venue for continuing

to make sense of the experience, and journal entries from the past were combined with entries from present in a personal individual depiction.

The heuristic methodology elicited a large amount of data that produced very rich and meaningful depictions. Personally, it was transforming and inspiring. Becoming forgiving of the unforgivable was revealed as a process of profound healing transformation, not only an emotional transformation from negative to positive, but a whole pacification of being (Mihalache, 2012). A unique experiential aspect of transformative forgiveness was a surprising sense of closure. After years of hurt and resentment, all participants expressed this sense of closure as the heart and spirit surprising the mind. The transcendence of the victim identity was attained in this realization of the redemptive value of trauma. The felt magnitude of the experience was matched only by the magnitude of the burden lifted. Another unique experiential aspect was reversing the expectation of change from the perpetrator to oneself. Instead of expecting apologies, or amends, or expecting a change in the perpetrator, the victim's intention to change herself and heal, was a major, initial facilitator of becoming forgiving following trauma (Mihalache, 2012).

Other heuristic studies that I had the privilege to supervise exhibited the same characteristics of continued self-integration in all coresearchers, and very rich and meaningful depictions. Hamdan (2014) investigated in a heuristic study the experience of spiritual bypassing among Muslim Americans in the U.S. Spiritual bypassing is a complex psychological process, defined as a person's utilization of spiritual practices and beliefs to avoid unresolved psychological issues. In addition to selecting an intriguing and difficult topic to research, Hamdan (2014) has also selected a population typically closed off to discussing spiritual matters. Being a Muslim American herself and having personally experienced spiritual bypass, the author was able to gain special access to this population and this sensitive topic. The heuristic inquiry was therefore the best methodological fit for this study. Hamdan (2014) was able to collect valuable in-depth data from 10 coresearchers (five women and five men) including herself. Reflecting a paradoxical complex nature, spiritual bypassing was painful but constructive as well, a constructive defense mechanism that demonstrates the necessity of psychological growth in complementing spiritual growth. The reader is referred to the full dissertation for details.

Hellow (2016) explored the lived experience of mothers conceiving through in vitro fertilization and raising triplets, in a heuristic study. Eight women, including the researcher, have provided detailed narratives that highlighted the unique and life altering psychological progression of adaptation and integration into triplet motherhood. The process of adaptation proved to be, against all preconceptions, a difficult traumatic process characterized in the first period by loss of self, inner conflict, marriage, and financial problems. Fortunately, motherhood also comes with developing fortitude and resilience, and all women in the study have described the importance of acceptance and transformative integration. Due to the increasing use of in vitro fertilization techniques, triplet births are much more common now in our society, and this important and unique study informs future mothers of what to expect and how to overcome difficulties.

### **Sela-Smith's Critique of the Heuristic Method**

Sela-Smith (2002) conceptualized the two aspects of the heuristic method—engaging oneself in heuristic self-search and engaging coresearchers—as “two processes instead of one” and “opposing halves” (p. 75). This opposition creates a methodological ambivalence in her opinion, “a dissociated process” (p. 76), and “a massive jolting contradiction” (p. 85). The inclusion of participants is a “distraction from the internal process” and thus

“feeling is disconnected from the research and self-transformation does not occur. The tacit dimension is not entered, and the internal structures remain intact” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 71). Sela-Smith (2002) conjectures that when the researcher experiences resistance to self-searching, because of unfinished business or pain, the researcher slips into a phenomenological inquiry associated in her opinion with a more comfortable position of researching others, rather than oneself. In her critique, Sela-Smith (2002) even judged Moustakas’ heuristic research on loneliness as invalid. He did not explore his true loneliness because of resistance to the “dreadful experience” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 76) and “he failed in his own self-search process” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 84). This judgment seems unnecessarily harsh and unjustified.

Sela-Smith (2002) advocates for the singularity and superiority of focusing on the researcher’s self-search, as the true heuristic inquiry and “correct method” (p. 81), and she eliminated the involvement of participants in research. “There can be only one subject for self-study, and that is ‘I’” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 78). She labeled this methodological truncation the heuristic self-search inquiry (HSSI). Sela-Smith (2002) and Ozertugrul (2017) are two heuristic researchers who have employed HSSI to extraordinary self-healing effects: Sela-Smith (2002) from depression, and Ozertugrul (2017) from obsessive–compulsive disorder. Whereas Moustakas integrated therapeutic techniques and principles in heuristic inquiry, but retained a basic research design, HSSI appears to be essentially self-therapy, characterized by complete surrender to the I-who-feels and a natural unfolding of the heuristic phases as therapy. Moustakas acknowledged this possibility but did not consider it superior:

Although in theory it is possible to conduct heuristic research with only one participant, a study will achieve richer, deeper, more profound, and more varied meanings, when it includes depictions of the experience of others—perhaps as many as 10–15 coresearchers, often met for extensive, long interviews. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47)

In my own heuristic research, I did not experience a “dissociated process” when moving into engaging coresearchers. Of course, the self-searching period was powerful and transformative, to the point that I had labeled the experience itself *transformative forgiveness*. However, although the process generated answers it also generated many questions, such as do other people experience a sense of closure in this type of forgiveness? So, I was actually eager to move into another level of discovery with individuals who shared the same profound transformative knowing. This move from self-search to search-with-others also felt organic to the inquiry process. I welcomed the learning from coresearchers’ diversified contexts and experiential variations, not as validation of personal knowledge, but as an expansion of it. I experienced a movement from subjective to intersubjective meaning, and I continued to experience the I-who-feels with participants, especially deep empathy and resonance. Moustakas cited insights from Rogerian person-centered therapy, characterized by empathy and unconditional positive regard, to describe this process: “In those moments I am able to sense, with a good deal of clarity, the way his experience seems to him, really viewing it from within him, and yet without losing my own personhood in which each of us is changed” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 107).

To summarize, Sela-Smith’s main critique is that in the second part of research which involves participants, there is no self-search, thus no self-transformation, and consequently this is not heuristic inquiry, but what appears to be “both hermeneutic and phenomenological” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 75). This phenomenological second part of research “focuses on the phenomena of the objective, observed experience, not the self

who feels” according to Sela-Smith (2002, p. 75), and is basically “an external process . . . to fit the requirements of objective positive science” (p. 76). This interpretation does not seem to take into account phenomenological assumptions or the differences between the heuristic and the phenomenological method, which will be discussed in the next section.

### Differences Between Heuristic Inquiry and the Descriptive Phenomenological Method

Heuristic inquiry is essentially considered a phenomenological method by many qualitative researchers. Some popular qualitative research method textbooks classify it as a phenomenological method as well (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2001, p. 107), the main reason being that it investigates a lived experience. However, Moustakas clearly and repeatedly pointed out the differences between the heuristic design and the empirical or descriptive phenomenological method (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990, 1994, 2015). Specifically, four years after the publication of *Heuristic Research: Design, methodology and applications* (1990), he wrote a book on transcendental phenomenology (1994), and the two methodologies exhibit significant differences. Giorgi (2011) has also argued convincingly that simply using terms such as “lived experience” or “investigation of meanings” is not sufficient to establish a specific research approach as phenomenology. These terms are generic and they “lack phenomenological exclusivity” (Giorgi, 2011, p. 205).

Methodological conflations are not unique or even rare in qualitative research because boundaries or differences between qualitative approaches are not always clear, and procedures often overlap (Sandelowski, 2010). The problem is compounded within the phenomenological spectrum, by the confusion and long-standing debates about what really constitutes a phenomenological approach and how to apply it (Finlay, 2009, 2012; LeVasseur, 2003; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). For example, Norlyk and Harder (2010), conducted an analysis of 88 peer-reviewed nursing phenomenological studies in order to extract the essential characteristics of a phenomenological study. They were unable to find common essential characteristics and were forced to conclude that “variations, apparent inconsistencies, and omissions made it unclear what makes a phenomenological study phenomenological.” (p. 420)

Not all qualitative methods textbooks classify heuristic inquiry as a phenomenological approach. Creswell (2013) correctly distinguished the heuristic approach from descriptive phenomenology. This seems to be the correct approach congruent with Moustakas’ intentions and with the call to all qualitative researchers to strive for methodological integrity (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). An accurate description of heuristic inquiry should consider the major differences with the descriptive phenomenological method, and six important ways in which the two approaches differ are the following:

1. Bracketing, epoche, or phenomenological reduction are not required in heuristic research.
2. In the descriptive phenomenological method bracketing results in a distancing from the phenomenon being studied, whereas heuristic inquiry, on the contrary, involves connecting with the phenomenon and coresearchers.

3. Personal experience of the phenomenon investigated is not required in descriptive phenomenology, but is required in heuristic inquiry.
4. The phenomenological method is grounded in philosophy. Heuristic inquiry is grounded in humanistic psychology and nondirective counseling approaches.
5. In descriptive phenomenology, self-reflection is used by the researcher as a preparatory phase before bracketing, whereas the heuristic researcher employs self-reflection throughout the study.
6. "Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43).

I will next explicate each statement citing primarily supportive sources from Moustakas (1990, 1994, 2015) and Giorgi, the creator of the empirical or descriptive phenomenological psychological method (Giorgi, 1994, 2008a, 2011, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2017). Moustakas (1994) referred specifically to the differences between heuristic research and "the empirical phenomenological research of the Duquesne studies" (p. 18).

1. Bracketing, epoche, or phenomenological reduction are not required in heuristic research. None of these terms are mentioned in the heuristic materials written by Moustakas (1990, 2015). He did include epoche as a required condition in his transcendental phenomenology model (Moustakas, 1994), but not in the heuristic one. In phenomenological research, bracketing, epoche, or phenomenological reduction refer to the researcher suspending his prior assumptions, prejudices, understanding (whether theoretical or experiential) in order to examine the studied phenomenon in an unbiased manner, in the life world of participants. According to Giorgi (2008a, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2017) the descriptive phenomenological method encompasses three fundamental steps: (a) phenomenological reduction, (b) description, and (c) a search for essences. Giorgi clearly stated "without the phenomenological reduction one cannot claim that a method is phenomenological because the reduction is the entrée to the phenomenological domain" (Giorgi, 2011, p. 201).
2. Bracketing in phenomenology imposes a distancing from the phenomenon being studied, while "heuristic inquiry emphasizes connectedness and relationship" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). The connecting relationship is with the phenomenon being studied through personal experience, and with the participants, in contrast to the detached phenomenological attitude. Heuristic inquiry continually engages the researcher in self-search and self-discovery with relation to the phenomenon, consciously shaping its understanding.

Bracketing and the achievement of the detached attitude are at the center of the phenomenological debate. LeVasseur (2003) explained Husserl's notion of bracketing as aiming to cultivate a very detached attitude "something similar to Buddhist enlightenment . . . an arrival at the 'transcendental ego,' the consciousness necessary for the apprehension of pure phenomenal experience devoid of any assumptions about personal history or location in space or time" (p. 413). However, Linda Finlay (2012) the creator of the relational phenomenological approach, specifically denies that scientific detachment is the aim in the phenomenological attitude. She advises instead an attitude of "non-interference and wonder" in order to cultivate intersubjectivity (Finlay, 2012, p. 175). Nonetheless,

compare this detached or noninterference phenomenological attitude with Moustakas' heuristic attitude of connecting with the phenomenon:

When I consider an issue, a problem, or a question, I enter into it fully. I focus on it with unwavering attention and interest. I search introspectively, meditatively, and reflectively into its nature and meaning . . . If I am investigating the meaning of delight, then delight hovers nearby and follows me around. It takes me fully into its confidence, and I take it into mine. Delight becomes a lingering presence. For a while, there is only delight. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 309)

Moustakas maintained that authentic bracketing was very difficult in practice, and most existential phenomenologists after Husserl disputed his conceptualization of bracketing (LeVasseur, 2003). Moustakas chose to utilize the personal experience of the researcher, rather than eliminate it or attempt to suspend it. The experiential knowing of that intense personal experience might indeed facilitate illumination, but it could also result in challenges, which, will be discussed later in this article.

3. Personal experience of the phenomenon is not required in the phenomenological method, whereas in heuristic inquiry, "self-experience is the single most important guideline in pursuing heuristic research" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 46). Furthermore, "unlike phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have had the experience (e.g. giving birth through artificial insemination), the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense, and full way" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). At the heart of the heuristic approach is the researcher's personal experience and his or her inner search for meaning and understanding. Thus, the researcher uniquely serves as a participant in the study, along with the other participants in the study, which is not allowed in phenomenological approaches. With regard to this aspect, Giorgi (1994) asserted that heuristic inquiry cannot be considered a phenomenological approach precisely because the aim in heuristic inquiry seems to be the continued personal transformation of the researcher, rather than the description of a phenomenon. The researcher's personal experience with the phenomenon is considered a source of bias and influence in descriptive phenomenology, and therefore a primary target of bracketing. In the phenomenological psychological reduction attitude, the researcher will bracket all knowledge that is not part of the phenomenon as given, such as theoretical knowledge "as well as established beliefs that have come from the researcher's own past experience" (Giorgi, 2008b, p. 41).

Some hermeneutic and relational phenomenology researchers who dispute the validity of this type of bracketing, tend to see a source of meaning in the researcher's personal experience, and choose to work with it in a reflexive manner (Finlay, 2002, 2009). "One particularly divisive issue for researchers is how much attention they should pay to bringing their own experience to the foreground and reflexively exploring their own embodied subjectivity" (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Moustakas was the researcher who clearly separated these debatable aspects and created two different approaches: heuristic inquiry and his own transcendental phenomenological method.

Etherington (2004), who teaches and supervises qualitative research at the University of Bristol, noticed that her counseling students started reporting personal transformations in the process of training and conducting reflexive methodologies. She became interested in the differences between students who reported transformation and those who did not.

Her conclusion was that there were “students using reflexive methodologies who reported profound changes rather than students using methodologies in which they bracketed off themselves and their own experiences” (Etherington, 2004, p. 49). In my own heuristic research, the personal experience provided a knowing that functioned as much needed guideposts when confronted with mountains of data, and as a valuable base for empathic understanding when I was listening to coresearchers (Mihalache, 2012).

4. An important requirement for a study to be considered phenomenological is a grounding in a philosophical source (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Giorgi, 2008b), whether Husserl, or other philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, or Merleau-Ponty that frame the hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenological approaches. Heuristic inquiry does not have a grounding in philosophy. Moustakas (1994) did provide a Husserlian foundation for his transcendental phenomenological method, but not for heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic inquiry is grounded in humanistic psychology theories and nondirective counseling approaches. Therapeutic processes, such as adopting a self-analytical frame of reference, focusing, intuition, and indwelling, are incorporated into the heuristic methodology. In fact, a short section on heuristic therapy is placed at the end of the book on heuristic research, and Moustakas had repeatedly drawn comparisons between heuristic inquiry and Rogerian person-centered therapy:

These interconnections and interrelationships between person-centered therapy and heuristic research enable a fuller understanding of the discovery process. In both approaches, there is an opening out of internal perceptions, feelings, and meanings, a process of self-development leading to clearer understandings and projections into new experience. Both approaches recognize the significance of the person's frame of reference, internal experience, and the value of indwelling, honesty, authenticity, human presence, and mutuality as catalysts for self-discovery and self-renewal. Both approaches emphasize that their primary concern is the person's unfolding sense of truth, explication of experience to deeper levels of meaning, and expansion of consciousness. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 104)

Heuristic inquiry is also rooted in the theory of Polanyi (1966/2009) regarding tacit knowledge, as the ground for discovery of all knowledge. Because tacit knowledge is not accessible to surface consciousness, the heuristic method was conceptualized as a way of accessing this deeper knowledge, discovering new levels of meaning, and thus providing a reorganization of being or self-transformation (Moustakas, 1990).

5. In descriptive phenomenology, self-reflection is used by the researcher as a preparatory phase before bracketing, aiming to consciously identify any prejudices, assumptions, or preunderstandings that might bias the study, attempting to set these aside as a prerequisite of phenomenological reduction. In heuristic inquiry, self-reflection is constant throughout the study.

In phenomenological psychological research, self-reflection when used, is typically only a preparatory step to gathering data from research subjects. . . . The researcher will often jot down these reflections for reference during data analysis . . . they are important for locating the presuppositions and biases the researcher holds. (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46)

The phenomenological reduction attitude is cultivated throughout a phenomenological study, not only in the incipient phase, in order to continuously monitor suspension of bias and prior knowledge. However, reflexivity or self-reflection is necessary to generate the

personal material that needs to be bracketed, and this occurs only at the beginning of a phenomenological study (Finlay, 2002). The heuristic researcher, on the other hand, practices self-reflection throughout the study.

6. The most important difference emphasized by Moustakas was that “phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). Phenomenological research aims to describe the essential structures of a phenomenon. In heuristic inquiry, the data are presented in the form of individual portraits of the main researcher and participants. The portraits contain in-depth experiential data but they highlight the individual in experience or experiencing. In a portrait of a woman laughing, one sees a woman laughing, not only laughing or joy. In phenomenology, “individual co-researchers disappear in the process of interpretation and structural analysis, in heuristic inquiry the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and especially in the individual portraits they continue to be portrayed as whole persons” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). Responding to the critique that the individual disappears in the descriptive phenomenological approach, Giorgi replied that the critique is not valid because “it confuses the goal of the research with its method. . . . The phenomenon is what stands out, and to have a specific individual’s experience submerge is part of the design” (Giorgi, 2008b, p. 7).

The differences between heuristic inquiry and the descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2008a, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2017) are clearly more pronounced than the differences between heuristic inquiry and hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology. In an article in 1994, Giorgi noted many similarities, not differences, between his descriptive phenomenological approach and heuristic inquiry, but these were not explicit in Moustakas’ writings. As a reminder, the steps of Giorgi’s method are phenomenological reduction, description, and searching for essences. For example, Moustakas used the words “seeing freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12) and this was interpreted by Giorgi as establishing the phenomenological reduction attitude. Similarly, Moustakas used the word “essences” and Giorgi interpreted this as meaning a phenomenological search for essences. The heuristic incubation phase, which involves distancing oneself from the analytical process to allow incubation of new understanding and fresh ideas, was also interpreted by Giorgi (1994) as phenomenological reduction. Taken in isolation, it might be the case. However, in heuristic inquiry, incubation is preceded by immersion, which is the opposite reaction, for it is immersing oneself in all aspects of the phenomenon and connecting with it, rather than detaching from it. Moustakas did not describe incubation as a form of phenomenological reduction, but Giorgi did. In doing so, Giorgi seemed to establish heuristic inquiry as a form of descriptive phenomenology at the time, in 1994, and this might have contributed to other qualitative researchers classifying heuristic inquiry as a phenomenological research method. However, Giorgi (1994) already started expressing ambivalence toward the end of that same article. He started questioning the very purpose of heuristic inquiry as being concerned with the individual rather than the phenomenon, and also questioning the aim of the heuristic researcher for self-growth as being more therapeutic than research oriented:

When Moustakas (1990) uses terms like “indwelling,” “focusing,” “self-dialogue,” and so on, one is not sure whether the goal is the person or the phenomenon. . . . But is the purpose of the research to develop “personal growth, insight, and change”? Is that the phenomenon being

researched, or is that a side effect of some types of research? To what goal, specifically, is the research directed? Or, what is its intentional object? Some research may have as a consequence “personal growth,” but surely that is not the goal of all research. Thus, the consequences of the process of research and the goal of the research would have to be distinguished. (Giorgi, 1994, p. 217)

Later in his phenomenological writings, Giorgi started to clearly distinguish the phenomenological approach from other qualitative methodologies, and to establish distinctive characteristics that heuristic inquiry does not have. Some of these characteristics are an explicit grounding in philosophy and the presence of the psychological-phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2011; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2017).

In conclusion, considering the arguments listed above, it certainly appears that heuristic inquiry cannot be classified as a descriptive phenomenological approach. Even though the differences with the interpretive or hermeneutic spectrum of phenomenological approaches are not as prominent, there are still differences that stand out, such as lacking a philosophical foundation and application. Scott Churchill, one of the foremost phenomenologists in the country, is also advising all qualitative researchers to carefully consider the label and application of phenomenological approaches:

There do exist in the literature examples of research that self-identify as “phenomenological” simply on the basis of the fact that “first person” descriptions are collected as data—without any reference to the principles of *reflective analysis* (including the *epoché* and *eidetic intuition*) that can be found in the texts of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, or others from the phenomenological tradition. All that I can say here is that this unfortunately *levels down* the meaning of the term “phenomenology” to a point that is counterproductive for the purposes of research pedagogy and mentoring, because “phenomenology” is not a term that can simply mean whatever one wishes it to mean. The term has an extensive history of usage not only in philosophy, but in a number of the human sciences; and one should be very careful to consult these sources before adorning one’s otherwise “qualitative” study with the title “phenomenological,” out of respect for this tradition. (Churchill, 2018, p. 14)

### Similarities Between Heuristic Inquiry and Transpersonal Research Methods

In addition to being classified a phenomenological method by qualitative researchers, the heuristic approach has also been welcomed as a form of transpersonal inquiry by transpersonal psychologists (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Calabrese & Calcina, 2017; Hiles, 2001, 2014; Sela-Smith, 2002). However, Moustakas did not label his research method as *transpersonal*. The word “transpersonal” does not appear in the *Heuristic Research Design* book (Moustakas, 1990). In fact Moustakas (1994) described the heuristic inquiry as “intuitive and *personal*” (p. 13, italics added), evolving as an expression and exploration of individuality, of selfhood. So, how can we claim it is a transpersonal method, if it is not labeled as such? What makes a research method, a transpersonal one?

Transpersonal research approaches employ a pluralistic epistemology and ontology, incorporating multiple ways of knowing and being in the conduct of research itself (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud, 2010; Braud & Anderson, 1998). The transpersonal, meaning extension of identity beyond self or personality, is actively sought, not only in what the research is about, but in how it is conducted, with the purpose of being faithful to the expansive nature of topics. Transpersonal experiences include psychic and mystical experiences, and point to a broader spectrum of consciousness, beyond ordinary states of

consciousness. Alternative ways of knowing and being, such as intuitive, compassionate, and embodied modalities are employed in data collection, analysis, and presentation. “The essential quality of transpersonal research and scholarship is the inquirers’ encounter with the Sacred” (Anderson, 2015, p. 164). Transpersonal research, similar to heuristic research, emphasizes connectedness and transformation, and thus differs from conventional research in psychology of religion, in which spirituality is often quantified as a construct, and the researcher adopts the classical detached attitude (Anderson, 2018). For a complete description of transpersonal research methods, the reader is referred to two main textbooks: *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Braud & Anderson, 1998) and *Transforming Self and Others Through Research* (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

In contrast to my previous argument distinguishing heuristic inquiry from phenomenology, I will argue in the following pages that heuristic inquiry can be considered a transpersonal research approach. There are four main points of convergence: (a) Moustakas used transpersonal descriptors in his writings to describe his methodology; (b) main researcher’s personal experience is essential in both research methods; (c) in addition to information, the research inquiry invites transformation in both methods; and (d) transpersonal processes are part of both approaches. The following sections cover these methodological similarities in detail.

### Transpersonal Descriptors of Heuristic Inquiry

- “Heuristic inquiry requires that one . . . recognizes the place and unity of intellect, emotion, and spirit” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16).
- “The heuristic process requires . . . openness to metaphysical forms of knowing” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 105).
- “In heuristic investigations, I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11).
- “The heuristic search is akin to the enlightenment of Satori” (Moustakas, 1995, p. 25).
- “Experiences in meditation and self-searching, intuitive and mystical reachings, and hours of silent midnight walking paved the way to a formulation of my understanding of loneliness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 93).

### Main Researcher’s Personal Experience Is Essential in Both Research Methods

There is a deep understanding, almost a conviction, in both heuristic inquiry and transpersonal methods, that the researcher’s personal experience enhances rather than hinders the comprehension and exploration of a phenomenon, and ultimately enhances the quality and richness of results. Transpersonal research approaches also recognize and utilize the high epistemological and ontological value of personal experiences to enrich the depth and quality of research (Anderson, 2015; Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998). In transpersonal research, as in heuristic inquiry, these experiences are often the turning points in one’s life, profoundly meaningful and transformative experiences. “In short, we are dealing here with Big Events. Their study cries out for and deserves research methods that are as powerful and encompassing as the experiences themselves” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 20). Overall, transpersonal researchers aim for methodological integrity through maximizing fidelity to the phenomenon studied and

utility of the research methods, in accordance with the guidelines for designing qualitative research established by the Society for Qualitative Inquiry (Levitt et al., 2017).

The researcher's intense personal experience is at the center of heuristic inquiry as well. "One must begin with oneself. One's own self-discoveries, awarenesses, and understandings are the initial steps of the process" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). The research question guiding the project, "is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13), but as previously stated the experience or phenomenon is not well understood. Moustakas gave an example of the mystery of death and dying. The felt mystery creates the need to continue to explore the experience within oneself and in participation with coresearchers.

### The Research Inquiry Invites Transformation in Both Methods

The following sets of parallel quotes from Moustakas's (1990) heuristic textbook and transpersonal research methods materials illustrate the similarities between heuristic inquiry and transpersonal research methods:

- *Heuristic inquiry*: "Not only is knowledge extended, but the self of the researcher is illuminated" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11).
- *Transpersonal research methods*: "Pursuing these transpersonal methods potentially becomes a self-realizing act" (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. x) and, "the key to far-reaching understanding of transpersonal and spiritual topics is the researcher's willingness to engage research as an art and act of transformation" (Anderson, 2018, p. 4).
- *Heuristic inquiry*: "In the process I'm not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).
- *Transpersonal research methods*: "This interpretive and interactive dynamic of intuitive inquiry tends to transform both the researcher's understanding of the topic studied and his personal life—sometimes profoundly so" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 18).
- *Heuristic inquiry*: "The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9).
- *Transpersonal research methods*: Transpersonal research results not only in the transformation of the main researcher, but a likely transformation of the participants, and the readers as well—as the title claim of a well-known book in the field suggests: *Transformation Of Self and Others Through Research* (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

It is possible to deliberately increase the likelihood of transformative changes in all research personnel by choosing inquiry approaches *and emphasizing research skills* that involve the researcher to a much greater degree than usually is the case and that *allow the researcher to actualize aspects of herself and himself* that are typically ignored and remain untapped during the course of a research project" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. xv, italics added).

*Heuristic inquiry*: In heuristic inquiry too, participants need to share an intense interest in discovering the nature and meaning of the experience studied, and thus

participate in transformative effects as well. Moustakas (1990) further designed the presentation of the data, especially the creative synthesis to “be told in such way that in itself enables self-transformation” in readers (p. 13). Sela-Smith (2002) confirmed that “when a story is formed with the embedded wholes of the transformation in it, the story itself contains the power to transform anyone who dares to surrender to the listening” (p. 64).

Heuristic researchers and advisors frequently indicate the personal benefits and transformative impact of conducting heuristic inquiry. Some participants involved in a heuristic inquiry in United Kingdom, have reported that the personal development achieved during the study was greater than development achieved in therapy (Etherington, 2004). Hofmann and Barker (2017) have noted a considerable therapeutic impact on personal illness management and how they perceive illness, in a study in which the main researcher and participants suffered from diabetes. Ozertugrul (2017) was another researcher who reported extraordinary self-healing effects from obsessive-compulsive disorder by employing the heuristic self-search inquiry (HSSI) developed by Sela-Smith (2002). And Ings (2011) was also able to validate positive transformations of students in another unique heuristic application in graphic design research in New Zealand: “Becoming an expansively more competent practitioner requires disciplined practice and eventually self-creation that calls into existence a new and better self” (p. 238).

### Transpersonal Research Processes Are Part of Both Approaches

Intrapsychic (self-searching), interpersonal (coresearchers data collection) and also transpersonal processes are all employed in both heuristic inquiry and transpersonal research methods. Both heuristic and transpersonal researchers make use of processes, such as intuition, focusing, indwelling, creative expression, and tacit knowing in the course of research (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Moustakas, 1990). Other similarities between the two approaches focus on blurring boundaries between self and topic, self and data, and researcher/participant roles.

**Intuition.** In heuristic inquiry, intuition is exercised not only individually by the main researcher, but also together with coresearchers in a format labeled “intuitive connecting” by Moustakas (1990, p. 114). Intuition is occurring preverbally as a whole in the depths of one’s being, in what has been labeled the *tacit dimension*. The tacit dimension is where “experience, feeling and meaning join together to form both a picture of the world and a way to navigate that world” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 60). In order to gain access to this tacit dimension of felt meaning, processes such as maintaining an internal frame of reference, indwelling, self-dialogue, inner focusing, and meditation are engaged. There is sometimes a response forming within in the form of an image or a memory, an intuition that reminds one of a similar personal experience. And often this intuition carries that common deeper meaning. “It is either received by the other person as a gestalt or cast aside” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 114). Moustakas also wrote about intuition as a skill to be developed, a practice to be perfected in order to be effective, not as an instant illumination “pursuing intuitive clues and hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within this tacit dimension” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). The best-known transpersonal research method is the intuitive inquiry created by Rosemarie Anderson (Anderson, 1998; Anderson, 2011; Wertz et al., 2011). As the name suggests, the approach systematically develops and utilizes intuition and compassion in the process of research. Intuitive inquiry is therefore, authentically creative, liberating, and simultaneously transformative.

**Subject and object of inquiry (self and topic) become one.** While researching loneliness, Moustakas wrote: “For many, many months I opened myself to the loneliness which surrounded me in my everyday living, to the lonely experiences of my colleagues, friends, and neighbors, to books and articles” (Moustakas, 1961/2016, loc 73). Similarly, in transpersonal inquiry “one aims to confront the whole of what one is researching with the whole of one’s being” (Braud, 2006, p. 142).

**Boundaries between self and data become blurred.** A common property of transpersonal research methods is “the personal transformation of the researcher as data” (Anderson, 2015, p. 164). Similarly, heuristic inquiry is of course autobiographical, in which the researcher’s personal experience becomes data, and is continually shaping the work. Ings (2011), a doctoral supervisor of heuristic inquiry, poignantly described this aspect in the research of one of his students: “Any critique he offered on his work could not be divorced from a critique of himself” (p. 234).

**Boundaries between researcher and participants become blurred.** The main researcher in heuristic inquiry engages as participant and participants become coresearchers, all sharing an intense experience and interest in understanding and making sense of that experience. Heuristic and transpersonal researchers alike often identify strongly with coresearchers’ experiences (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). Dialogue with self and dialogue with others become a mirror and a lens.

Blurring all these boundaries makes the holistic aspect of the experience more visible. However, it also results in some risks and challenges in heuristic inquiry, which will be discussed next.

## Risks and Challenges in Heuristic Applications

A heuristic researcher characterized heuristic inquiry as “an extremely demanding process . . . that should not be attempted lightly” (Hiles, 2001, p. 2). Because heuristic inquiry uniquely involves the researcher as participant, and the researcher’s personal experience becomes data to be systematically investigated, some challenges might result that should be considered in practice: (a) discomfort with personal disclosure and self-exposure; (b) privileging personal experience and the need to practice reflexivity; and (c) unique ethical issues such as handling the confidentiality of the researcher as participant.

### Discomfort With Personal Disclosure and Self-Exposure

In a critical review of 28 research projects employing heuristic inquiry, Sela-Smith (2002) has found only three that successfully employed the method correctly. For her, the critical factors missing were: (a) the report of a personal, subjective experience; (b) evidence of surrender to the process of discovery instead of careful planning of phases; and (c) explication of the phenomenon as revealed from within oneself, rather than coming mainly from coresearchers. Apparently, “many researchers studied external situations rather than internal experience” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 71). The focus on and the depth of self-exploration in heuristic inquiry could be healing and transformative but also challenging. The reason for omitting the personal experience report and self-explication might be due to the inherent discomfort with personal disclosure and self-exposure, signaled by many heuristic researchers (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Etherington, 2004; Ings, 2011). Heuristic researchers are often candid about the difficulty of engaging in this research: “Choosing heuristic inquiry was a difficult decision. While my passion for researching people in exile was rapidly growing, I still had to face my biggest fear of looking at myself

and what I had become over the years” (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010, p. 1571). Therefore, the topic of research should be considered very carefully, both in light of heuristic inquiry advantages and challenges, and in terms of emotional requirements in addition to intellectual requirements (Ings, 2011).

### Privileging Personal Experience and the Need for Reflexivity

Although the researcher’s experiential knowledge is utilized toward benefiting the research instead of being bracketed in heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), one should be aware of the danger of privileging one’s own data. The personal experience could become a minimizing lens focused on self to the detriment of others. Moustakas (1990) advised reflexivity and journaling to become aware of a rigid adherence to preconceived notions that might influence the results in reductive ways. Heuristic researchers should practice reflexivity and mindfully examine personal and methodological assumptions, expectations, and biases, and also the relationship researcher-participant. All these factors could create influencing tendencies toward anticipated and biased outcomes. Reflexivity has been defined as “engaging in explicit, self-aware meta-analysis throughout the research process” (Finlay, 2002, p. 536), or as “reflecting on the mirror’s mirroring and, especially, on the person who holds the mirror” (Gemignani, 2017, p. xx). I have also found that self-interviewing or answering the interview questions is always helpful in highlighting possible blind spots with regard to researcher’s biases.

Due to the sustained effort at self-exploration, both heuristic inquiry and transpersonal research methods have been known to elicit a narcissistic preoccupation with self (Anderson, 2015; Etherington, 2004). This unconscious form of narcissism can result in privileging personal data. When this happens, the researcher’s personal portrait may be considerably longer than the other individual depictions and loaded with detail and emphasis. Because the other depictions are shorter and more superficial, the personal narrative may dominate and thus diminish the scope and diversity of results. There may be less of a shared meaning and more of an ego meaning. In an analogy with therapy, the researcher behaves more like the client, rather than the therapist. In contrast, Moustakas repeatedly, in all quotations and analogies, compares the researcher with the therapist, as it should be.

In a heuristic application on personal change in research, two participants who were also psychotherapists noticed how they were drawn too much into self-analysis during the study and had to intentionally refocus outside, to balance and ground themselves (Etherington, 2004). The main researcher concluded with the advice and warning that “heurism invites us to filter our participants’ experiences through our own, and not to superimpose our own experiences unto theirs” (Etherington, 2004, p. 62). Another researcher advised:

Clearly, we need to strike a balance, striving for enhanced self-awareness but eschewing navel gazing. . . . If the researcher is sincere in maintaining a primary focus on the participants or texts involved, returning to the self only as part of increasing awareness and insight, the problem of regress is bypassed. (Finlay, 2002, pp. 541–542)

### Unique Ethical Issues

The unique heuristic design can also raise some ethical concerns, such as compromising the confidentiality of one participant who is the main researcher, and considering his or her safety as well as that of participants. Institutional Review Boards are not accustomed to considering the safety of the main researcher when approving a study. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the study’s advisor or the heuristic researcher to

inform the IRB of any possible events that might interfere with the ethical conduct of research, just as it would happen with participants. One such event might be for the main researcher to experience something during the course of research that would greatly interfere with the self-analytical process, such as a traumatic event. The discomfort with self-disclosure and breaching the confidentiality of the main researcher by simply authoring the study, can be avoided by using a pseudonym or code associated with the personal data, and blending the personal narrative with the others, instead of identifying it as the author's data, or omitting it.

## Growth of Heuristic Research

Heuristic research was accompanied by an enthusiastic freedom in the 1980s and 1990s when it was created, a freedom from the restraints of quantitative methods (Frick, 1990). The enthusiasm has faded somewhat over time, but heuristic inquiry remains popular in counseling and humanistic sciences research, and there is evidence of growing into other fields, such as nursing as well. In an introduction to heuristic inquiry in the nursing literature, Kenny (2012) concluded that "Nursing practice and research are ideally placed to engage with questions that emerge heuristically from our experience" (p. 6).

The last edition of the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* (Schneider, Pierson, & Bugental, 2015) includes a chapter on heuristic research as a representative humanistic methodology (Moustakas, 2015), and McLeod (2011) a leading qualitative researcher, characterized the heuristic approach as "particularly influential in the field of counseling and psychotherapy" (p. 205). However, while the heuristic method is applied in "a substantial number of counseling and psychotherapy Masters and doctoral studies" (McLeod, 2011, p. 207), few of these heuristic studies are published in professional journals. McLeod suspects that one of the reasons might be difficulty with self-disclosure. Heuristic studies generate personal transformation in addition to very insightful and rich findings, and I want to encourage every heuristic researcher completing a doctoral dissertation to explore publishing opportunities.

Following the heuristic model, other researchers advocate for the use of the researcher's own personal experience in phenomenology (Johnston, Wallis, Oprescu, & Gray, 2017) and more widely in qualitative feminist research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013), by having the researcher become a participant. Barnes (2001) also created a heuristic phenomenology model, a combination of the two Moustakas' methodologies: heuristic inquiry and transcendental phenomenology.

While researching the heuristic literature for this article, I was pleasantly surprised to find another interesting expansion of heuristic inquiry applied in a postgraduate graphic design program at the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand (Ings, 2011). The research is remarkable in its scope and findings, not only because it extends the scope of heuristic research beyond psychology, but because it carries a similar quality of findings—that of personal and professional transformation of the heuristic researcher. The author concluded that "heuristic inquiry is demanding, but its potential to progress highly gifted graphic designers beyond the formulas that have brought them to levels of competence is considerable" (Ings, 2011, p. 240).

## Summary

The current article presented a methodological analysis of the differences between the heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990, 2015) and descriptive phenomenology, and the

similarities between heuristic inquiry and transpersonal research methods. Although Moustakas, the developer of heuristic inquiry did not label his approach either phenomenological or transpersonal, it is often classified as such in the research literature. In contrast, I have argued that heuristic inquiry cannot be considered a phenomenological approach based on texts written by Moustakas, and phenomenological sources primarily by Giorgi (1994, 2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2017). A subsequent analysis and comparison with transpersonal methodological sources supported the assumption that even though Moustakas did not label his approach as *transpersonal*, transpersonal descriptors and procedures reveal significant similarities that lend credence to the argument that heuristic inquiry can be considered personal and/or transpersonal.

The heuristic research design is effective and transformative, to the point that one heuristic researcher declared “as an approach to self-inquiry, heuristic inquiry is possibly without rival” (Hiles, 2014, p. 795). The whole laborious process of going through the heuristic phases, just like the laborious process of working with the unconscious, or the process of personal/transpersonal development seems to create a transparency of being for insight into deeper levels of meaning and understanding. However, some of the conditions that enhance the quality and depth of results might also create some challenges. Researchers and advisors are not always aware of challenges, and therefore some of these have been discussed in this article as well.

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Received April 11, 2018

Accepted September 27, 2018 ■