Transformative Phenomenology: Collaboration Among Strangers Based on Writing Phenomenological Protocols

Paper Presented at the 2019 Annual Meetings of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (SPHS), Pittsburgh, October 31- November 2, 2019.

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Abstract

This paper reports on preliminary findings of a collaborative phenomenological research project involving 78 students from Fielding Graduate University, University of Lodz, Poland and University of the Virgin Islands. The students all wrote a series of eight protocols and posted them in on-line platforms and shared them with each other within university groups. The protocols were about phenomena of their interest, using both Husserlian and Schützian phenomenology. The students at Fielding also participated and shared their protocols on four Zoom calls. The UVI students shared on Zoom weekly, and the Lodz students shared in direct face-to-face classrooms. In addition, students were invited to chat and collaborate as they wished with students from other universities on an online platform. The students also commented on the experience of sharing their work with strangers cross culturally. In addition, the students discussed the ten qualities of phenomenologists discovered by Rehorick and Bentz (2017) in relation to their experiences. The transformative nature of phenomenology and its reverberations in practices were pervasive outcomes.

Introduction

> I attempt to lead, not to instruct, and only to point out, to describe, what I see. I make no other claim than that of speaking according to my own best knowledge and conscience, first and foremost before myself but in the same manner also before others, as someone who has lived through the fate of a philosophical existence in all its seriousness. – Edmund Husserl in The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 18.

The preliminary results of a multi-national and multi-institutional participatory action research project on the phenomenon of being a "stranger" while building relationships across cultures are described.[1] The project is focused on understanding and developing effective approaches to consciousness raising and community building founded on the principles of *Transformative Phenomenology* —a somatic-hermeneutic-phenomenology put into action in the lifeworld that was developed during 20 years of "teaching" doctoral students at Fielding by Professors David Rehorick and Valerie Malhotra Bentz (Marlatt, Rehorick, & Bentz, 2020). Rehorick and Bentz call this evolving era the "Silver Age of Phenomenology at Fielding" (Bentz et al., 2019). The
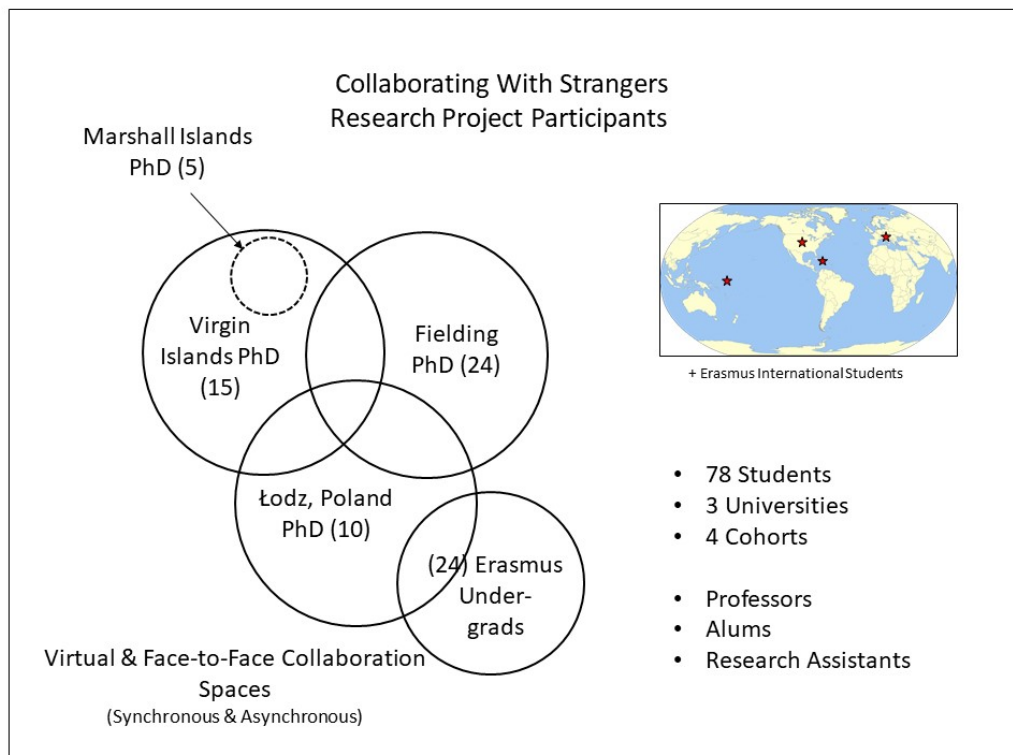

Practice of Transformative Phenomenology is founded on the essence-based phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, the embodied phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the ontologic-existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, and the reflective interpretative hermeneutic methods of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

The project was designed to replicate research which highlighted ten phenomenological "competencies" that graduates of Fielding obtained through the study and practice of phenomenologically based contemplative social research (Bentz & Giorgino, 2016; Rehorick & Bentz, 2017). Research participants included doctoral students and alumni from Fielding Graduate University, the University of the Virgin Islands (including participants from the Marshall Islands), and the University of Lodz, including visiting undergraduate students from the Erasmus Institute (Figure 1). Participants experienced phenomenological writing and the foundations of somatics, phenomenology and communicative leadership in raising consciousness and building a community-of-practice (Wenger, 1998). The project was initiated in January 2019. During eight weeks of learning and applying *Transformative Phenomenology* (Rehorick and Bentz, 2008) students developed phenomenological protocols and commentary on their collaborations that were used as information for the research.

Our participatory action research project focused on influencing the cross-school learning system based upon principles of participation, empowerment, and change. As participatory action researchers, we acted in facilitative roles in the process of inquiry aimed at consciousness-raising. The research more specifically involved the recording and collection of information on consciousness raising and community building founded on the methodologies and methods of phenomenological inquiry—including Husserlian eidetic and Schützian social phenomenology.

In this paper, we also provide preliminary comments about the effectiveness of the

process of community building through *Transformative Phenomenology*. Our goal is to contribute to immediate solutions involved in community building and to contribute to the knowledge, theory, and practice of consciousness raising, transformative phenomenological inquiry, and *leregogic*[2] "teaching" practice. We are also interested in processes supporting the development of the self-learning capacity of our evolving community-of-practice through its democratization, humanization, and actualization. Our research ultimately seeks solutions for the urgent challenge of building consciousness in the lifeworld for change in perilous times for human beings, and non-human beings—all life forms and the planet. We are interested in developing and expanding and sustaining a community-of-practice founded on the principles of *Transformative Phenomenology* for personal, professional, organizational, and societal change— with a focus on social and ecological justice.

Collaborating With Strangers
Research Project Participants

Marshall Islands PhD (5)

Virgin Islands PhD (15)

Fielding PhD (24)

Łodz, Poland PhD (10)

(24) Erasmus Under-grads

Virtual & Face-to-Face Collaboration Spaces
(Synchronous & Asynchronous)

+ Erasmus International Students

- 78 Students
- 3 Universities
- 4 Cohorts

- Professors
- Alums
- Research Assistants

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[2] David Rehorick invented the neologism "leregogy" to denote a form of teaching where student and teacher co-learn as equals. (Rehorick & Rehorick, 2016)

Figure 1: Research Project Participants

Transformative Phenomenology and the Global Crises of Lifeworlds

The concept of lifeworld as posited by Husserl and developed by Schutz reveals key aspects of human social life. What happens when organized forces of human control tear lifeworlds apart? Gebser warned that without a transformation of consciousness humans would destroy their world. Habermas pointed out that humans were destroying lifeworlds with little awareness of the consequences due to the predominance of rational/legal thinking, thus creating "Deathworlds." Deathworlds are human worlds focused on destroying meaning, coherence, we-relationships, and intersubjectivity for humans and other life forms. Once destroyed these worlds become "dead zones" killing or expelling all life (Sassen, 2014). Within the current epoch, complex arrangements of legal, financial, technological, corporate and governmental structures have created powerful dynamics that create great wealth for some and expulsions for millions and the persistence of Deathworlds. As the survival of life forms on earth is in question, humans must overcome the economic and technological forces leading to Deathworlds. *Transformative Phenomenology* has become a community-of-practice that is an antidote to Deathworld-making. *Transformative phenomenology* includes hermeneutics, somatics and leregogic practices. Phenomenologists trained in this way exhibit ten qualities of being. The call to maintain and restore lifeworlds is the call to oneness and peace. In the era of growing Deathworlds, we, phenomenologists, are urged to respond and contribute to this call. See (Bentz, Rehorick, Marlatt, Nishi, & Estrada, 2018)

The late Husserl, in the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, posited the lifeworld as the fundamental ground for all human action (Husserl, 1954/1970). Schutz had begun exploring this concept before he was aware of Husserl's work on

lifeworlds, which Schütz felt Husserl had left unfinished. The lifeworld to Schütz was independent of all concepts in the social sciences, including "system" and "culture." Schütz delineated the elements of "lifeworlds," which mostly are taken for granted as humans pursue their tasks. Ironically, humans in pursuit of tasks have developed organizations that have led to the destruction of lifeworlds along with the myriad of other creatures, both plants, and animals. Following in Schütz' footsteps but extending lifeworld to include the other life forms, Bentz and Shapiro define lifeworld as:

> The lived experiences of human beings and other living creatures as formed into more or less coherent grounds for their existence. This consists of the whole system of interactions with others and objects in an environment that is fused with meaning and language and that sustains the life of all creatures from birth through death. It is the fundamental ground of all experience for human beings. (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.172).

With the increased colonization of the lifeworld, there is doubt as to who is making the choice or whether a person can be free. How can persons get in touch with truth? Habermas points out that power distorts communication, which in turn fosters false communications. (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003) Truthful communication must be *understandable* (speakers share norms and ways of speaking and writing so that they can accurately interpret meanings); *true* (assertions are cogent and recognizably affirmed in the actual world), *truthful* (speakers are sincere and able to examine their own ideological and experiential distortions); and have a sense of *rightness* (speakers follow valid moral norms). See (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). It is a premise of our research that these conditions may only be realized when we develop and implement a means to create consciousness change. Such change becomes reality though processes like *Transformative Phenomenology* which allow for such communication to be developed, and which act as antidotes to Deathworlds.

David Rehorick and Valerie Bentz reviewed over 75 doctoral dissertations that they supervised over a twenty years of teaching at Fielding Graduate University that were phenomenologically based, informed, or inspired (Rehorick & Bentz, 2017). They identified ten qualities of phenomenological scholar-practitioners (Figure 2). Transformative phenomenologists seek to transcend the reality of everyday lived experience in service of generating common understanding. The transformative phenomenologist-in-action exhibits phenomenological qualities and "leregogic" attitudes (Rehorick & Rehorick, 2016) that promote reflection and enhanced consciousness. Some of these qualities and attitudes are listed below after Rehorick and Bentz, 2017:

- Experiencing phenomenology as a way of being.

- Embracing embodied ways of knowing.

- Approaching life and practice with the "sparkle" of wonder and authenticity.

- Being open and mindful of learning from and within relationship.

- Seeking mutual enhanced understanding and understanding that lifeworlds are constructed through patterns of communication.

- Looking beyond the taken for granted, with a practical focus on recognizing the natural attitude in the reality of everyday life.

- Seeking the "whatness" of experience.

- Embracing doubt and chaos and tolerating incoherence when encountering new situations.

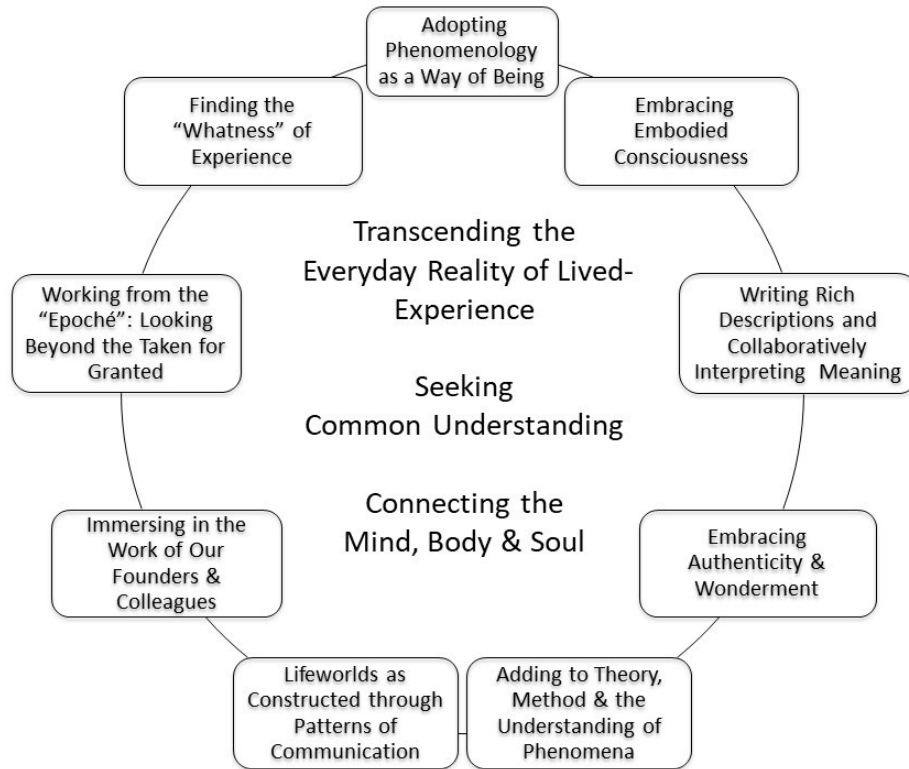- Staying open to immediate experience.

Adopting Phenomenology as a Way of Being

Finding the "Whatness" of Experience

Embracing Embodied Consciousness

Transcending the Everyday Reality of Lived-Experience

Working from the "Epoché": Looking Beyond the Taken for Granted

Writing Rich Descriptions and Collaboratively Interpreting Meaning

Seeking Common Understanding

Connecting the Mind, Body & Soul

Immersing in the Work of Our Founders & Colleagues

Embracing Authenticity & Wonderment

Lifeworlds as Constructed through Patterns of Communication

Adding to Theory, Method & the Understanding of Phenomena

Figure 2: Ten Qualities of Transformative Phenomenologists

Research Design

The overall focus of the research was on understanding the phenomenon of being a "stranger" while building collaboration across cultures. The project was designed to replicate previous research, which highlighted ten "competencies" that graduates of Fielding obtained through the study and practice of phenomenologically based contemplative social research (Bentz & Giorgino, 2016; Rehorick & Bentz, 2017). Graduates of Fielding who have studied and applied phenomenology exhibit "ten competencies" (qualities) which have transformed their lives and enriched their practice (Rehorick & Bentz, 2017). Contemplative research methods (Bentz & Giorgino, 2016), such as Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) also generated and taught at Fielding, have been found to lead to personal transformation and success in creating more inclusive social worlds (Pearce, 2007). The research design included "teaching" students

the process of writing rich descriptions of a poignant experience following principles of Husserlian essential phenomenology and Schützian social phenomenology. More specifically the research focus was on:

- Evaluating the process of *Transformative Phenomenology* and contemplative research across cultures through "writing phenomenology."

- Understanding the phenomenon of being a "stranger" while building collaboration across cultures.

- Replicating and extending research revealing the ten qualities of transformative phenomenologists as a foundation for consciousness raising.

- Seeking to better understand how *Transformative Phenomenology* can lead to consciousness raising and positive change in the lifeworld.

- Supporting the emergence of a Fielding based *Transformative Phenomenology* community-of-practice supporting social and ecological justice.

Valerie Bentz, and Kryzsztof Konecki, Professor of Sociology at University of Lodz developed the research project concept. Valerie Bentz is the principal researcher evaluating the outcomes of this project along with Fielding alumni and student assistants. Professor Bentz led the virtual "teaching" of doctoral students at Fielding and face-to-face teaching at Lodz. Professor Bart Buechner led the virtual University of Virgin Islands "writing phenomenology" program. James Marlatt is the research project coordinator. Graduate research assistants included Carol Estrada from Fielding (USA), Łucja Lange and Natalia Martini, University of Lodz (Poland), and Eion Maison from the University of the Virgin Islands. The research participants included 78 doctoral students in sociology and visiting students from the Erasmus Institute. Łucja Lange assisted with the teaching of this undergraduate cohort.

The research and practice project produced an array of information that will be used in producing a comprehensive report on the role of *Transformative Phenomenology* in consciousness raising (Figure 3). The process is fourfold and included a focus on embodied awareness (somatics), lived experience (essence-based and social phenomenology), reflection (hermeneutics & communication), and acting-in-the-world (praxis). In a phenomenologically based research project, the participants are looking deeply into their own experiences. The information that was collected included a sequence of eight protocols written by each student on a poignant phenomenon of interest. Additional information was collected from undergraduate students from the Erasmus Institute. Each student was also invited to write about their experience of being a "stranger" as they learned about phenomenological techniques. The students were also presented with the opportunity to prepare written self-evaluations of their engagement with the ten competencies of phenomenologists. Notes kept by the researchers, including those by the research assistants also provided sources of research information. Students were provided the opportunity to share their experiences of writing phenomenological protocols and on being a stranger through on-line space, such as Moodle, Blackboard or BaseCamp (Figure 4). They were also provided opportunities of collaborating with the students across the three cohorts through Zoom videoconference calls.
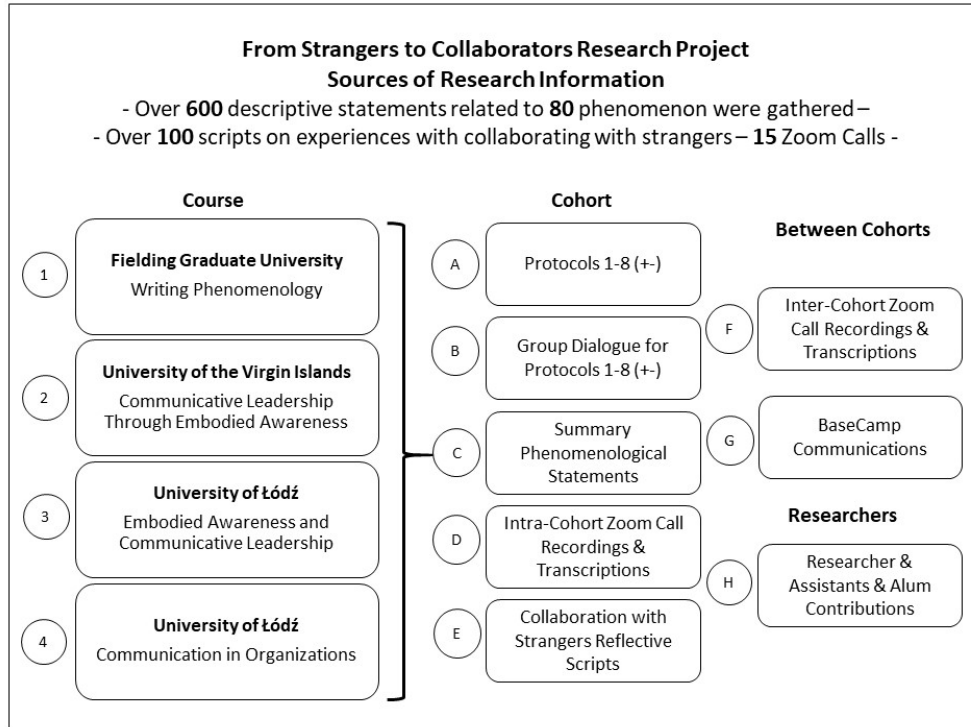
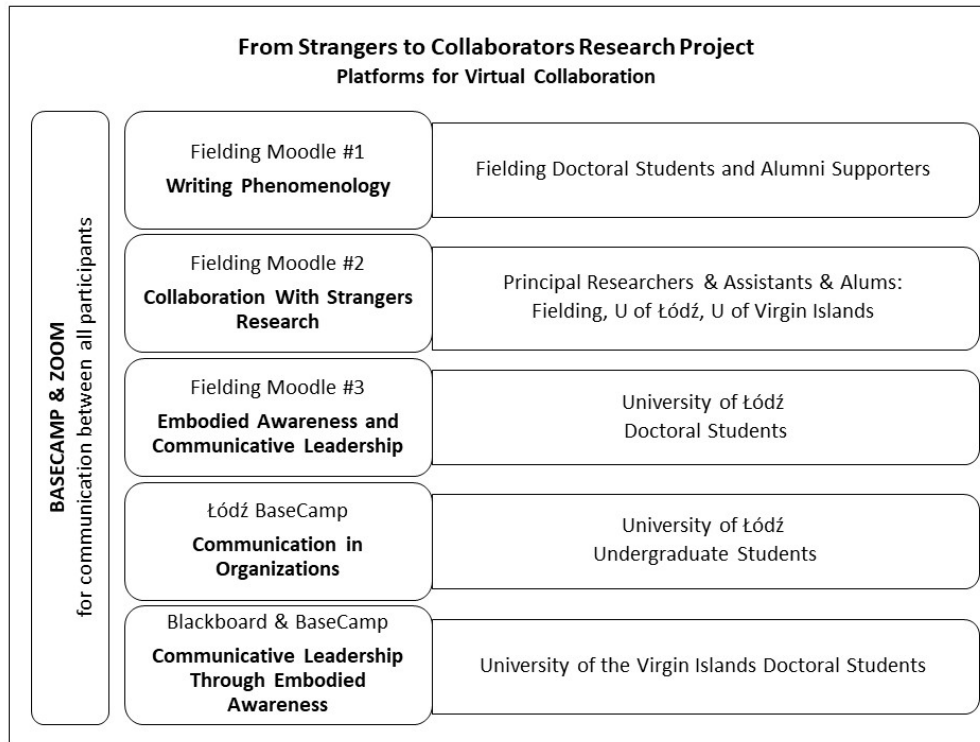*Figure 3:* Sources of Research Information

Figure 4: Platforms for Virtual Collaboration

As the overall project was about collaboration among strangers, students shared their protocols, statements, and feedback on-line with others in small groups. These protocols were guided by established techniques developed by Bentz and Rehorick developed over many years of "teaching" phenomenology at Fielding Graduate University founded on Husserlian and Schützian principles. Students identified a poignant phenomenon of interest and wrote a series of phenomenological protocols that revealed the essence of the experience, the lifeworld basis of the experience, and the motivation behind the experience. Motivational perspectives were considered through the lens of Kenneth Burke's Dramatist Pentad (Burke, 1969). See Figure 5 and Table 1.
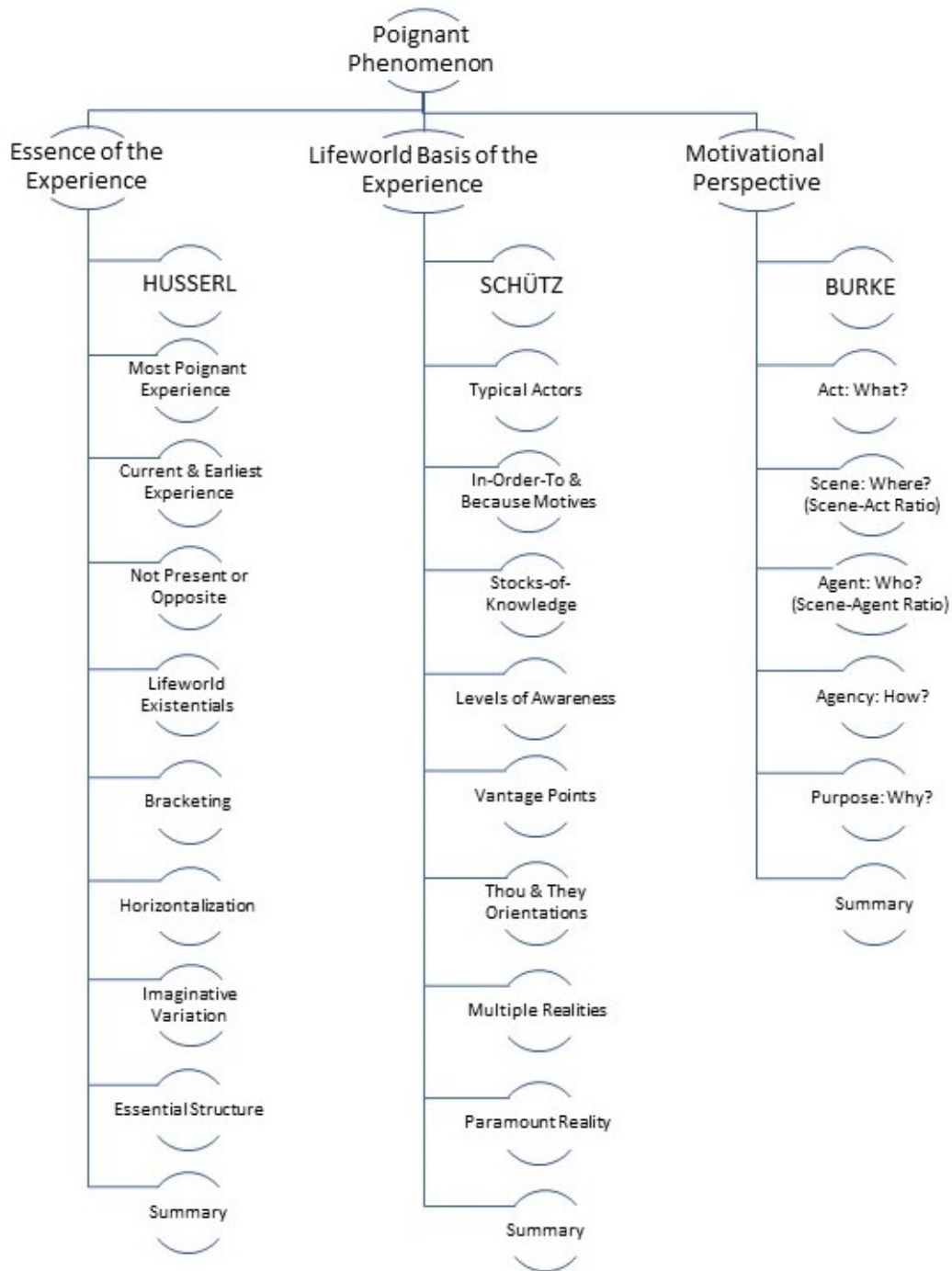
Figure 5: Techniques for the Exploration of Poignant Phenomenon through Writing Phenomenology

Table 1

Path to consciousness-raising? Sequence of phenomenological protocol topics (rich descriptions of lived experience) followed by students participating in the "Writing Phenomenology" program.

Protocol	Focus
1	Write a phenomenological protocol (lived-experience description) of your most poignant memory of the experience of a phenomenon of interest.
2	Referring to lifeworld existentials (spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality), describe your earliest memory of the phenomenon you wrote about in the first session (van Manen, 1997).
3	Write about an experience of either the opposite of the one you are focusing on or one where the phenomenon was not present. Consider and use several of the phenomenological writing techniques of bracketing and horizontalization. Look at the words you are using to describe your phenomenon and their sources and what they mean (etymology). Is there an embodied (somatic) connection?
4	Based on your protocols and others you may have found in literature, popular media, etc., write a short essential structure of the experience. What must be present in an experience for it to be the one in question? Also, what must not be present to be the experience in question? Refer to the protocols you recently wrote and distill the essence of the experience of your phenomenon. As you work with this, you may continue to use phenomenological techniques, such as imaginative variations and horizontalization, and bracketing.
5	Describe aspects of a lifeworld in which your chosen experience or phenomenon occurs. Use Schütz's concepts of typifications, relevances, levels of awareness, "because" and "in-order-to" motivations; biographical determinants, we-relationships, and others.
6	Continue amplifying your description of the structures of the lifeworld in which the phenomenon occurs or explore another typical lifeworld. Use concepts like stocks of knowledge, multiple realities, paramount reality, precessors, contemporaries, and successors.
7	Write a short essay considering second-order constructs in the lifeworld from the perspective of your phenomenon: Schützian "puppets," logical forces, moral code, and ways that patterns and archetypes can act to create both "Lifeworlds" and "Deathworlds". This essay gives you the opportunity to explore ways that the awareness of such constructs, including the formation of shared moral code, may help to explain – and perhaps change – unwanted patterns. Think about Schützian "puppets" and other related concepts from our readings to consider how your phenomenon may be part of - and to some extent shaped or controlled by a larger system, or a pattern of behavior driven by outside contextual forces.
8	Describe the lifeworld in which your phenomenon occurs using the five parts of Burke's dramatist pentad: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Investigate whether there is a primary or guiding aspect of the pentad. The dramatistic pentad is an instrument used as a set of relational or functional principles that could help us understand what he calls the 'cycle cluster of terms' people use to attribute motive.

Students used the technique of "bracketing" or setting aside an aspect of the experience to describe how the remaining aspects appear. They also used the technique of "imaginative variations" to explore how the experiences could have been changed. They then distilled the essential elements of the experience. Following this, they described aspects of the "lifeworld" in which their phenomenon exists (Rehorick & Bentz, 2017; Wagner, 1983). This involved clarifying different standpoints and perspectives of each participant, and the various ways they typify themselves and each other. They made explicit what they see as relevant and how this may shift and change. They also used hermeneutic approaches for analyzing their own writings and their on-going relationships as they develop.

Another component of the project was consideration of contemplative research methods. As pointed out in Bentz and Giorgino (2016), researchers across the social and human sciences have begun to use mindfulness techniques as means of preparing themselves for openness to differences leading to deeper insights in their interpretations. Mindfulness is deeply connected with somatic knowing. In addition, students learned techniques from communications theory, especially Communicative Management of Meaning (CMM) as developed by Barnett Pearce (2007). CMM offers techniques so that participants in group discussions may create positive relationship outcomes despite divisions in values, politics, and cultures. Throughout, *leregogic* principles of collaborative learning were used (teachers and learners as equals learning together). Professors, students, and alumni all learned together with fresh eyes, an important experience that all humans face (Rehorick & Bentz, 2017; Rehorick & Rehorick, 2016).

Preliminary Research Findings

Elements of the participatory action research project are illustrated in Figure 6. This included the writing of approximately 600 phenomenological protocols relating to 80 phenomena, over eight

weeks, by 78 students across three universities and four cohorts (See Figures 1 and 3). In addition, over 100 scripts describing experiences of collaborating with strangers and engaging with the qualities of transformative phenomenologists were created. Video conference call transcripts provided additional information. The study also includes the on-going collaborative study of information yielding preliminary findings reported in this paper. In addition, about twenty participants in the research project are engaged in phenomenologically inspired collaborative writing projects on a wide range of topics including commentary on the impact of phenomenology on raising consciousness. The participants form part of an evolving *Transformative Phenomenology* community-of-practice.

Next we present preliminary research findings including participant comments on: evaluating the process of *Transformative Phenomenology* through "writing phenomenology;" being a "stranger" while building collaboration across cultures; the ten qualities of transformative phenomenologists as a foundation for consciousness raising; how *Transformative Phenomenology* leads to consciousness raising and change in the lifeworld.
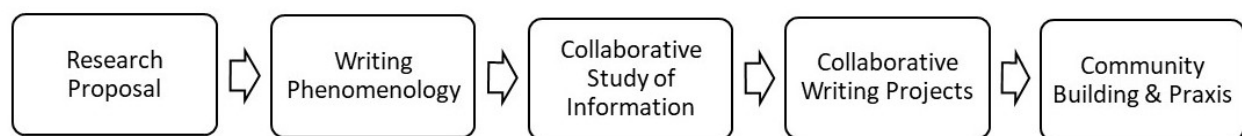

Figure 6: Research Project Evolution

Evaluating the process of *Transformative Phenomenology* through "writing phenomenology"
Doctoral students engaging with phenomenology writing for the first time encounter the push-pull, and attraction-repulsion, experiences of coming to an unfamiliar domain of inquiry and the methodologies and methods associated with Husserlian essential phenomenology and Schutzian

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lifeworld phenomenology. The students were guided through the process of writing protocols with the support of Professor Valerie Bentz and alums and doctoral student assistants familiar with the principles of *Transformative Phenomenology,* and the ten qualities of transformative phenomenologists. Students were engaged through a "lerogogic" teaching lens. Feedback was provided through virtual platforms and real-time videoconferencing. Students shared their protocols and other students provided feedback and support to each other. Virtual asynchronous feedback was particularly evident from the Fielding cohort and considered a significant factor in supporting learning and collaboration. UVI students preferred real-time collaboration through videoconference as a mode of feedback and collaboration. On-line feedback with fellow UVI students was rare and attributed, in part to limited capability of the on-line platform. Lodz doctoral students exchanged feedback face-to-face, and to a lesser degree through the on-line platform. Cultural differences, challenges of communication between time zones, asynchronous and face-to face teaching modalities, availability of reading material, and virtual communication platform technologies appear to be factors that have impacted the delivery of the writing phenomenology program in positive and negative ways. These factors are worthy of exploration and consideration from an action-research perspective for future practice of "writing phenomenology."

A key element in our process of "writing phenomenology" is the opportunity for students to select a unique, personal, and poignant phenomenon for phenomenological exploration through writing rich description of lived experience. The freedom of choice appears to be instrumental in promoting a deep exploration, leading to consciousness raising. The range of phenomenon selected by the student was vast and the students' protocols provided many insights. Examples of poignant phenomenon are presented below.

Table 2

Examples of poignant phenomenon selected by students for protocol writing

Anxiety	Pressure	Women Taking Health Risks
Trash	Being a Parent	Lack of Control
Otherness	Aboutness of Pain	Power
Hatha-Yoga	Self-Discovery	Waiting
Spirituality	Fear	Disaster Experience
Walking with Homeless	Strangers and Collaborators	Being a Mom of Soldier
Epilepsy	Waiting	Body Self-Image
Self-Determination	Destiny	Knot in My Stomach
Emotional Regulation	Unraveling	Domestic Violence
Immigration	Teaching Reading	Friendship

As part of evaluating the process of *Transformative Phenomenology* through "writing phenomenology," students were asked to reflect on the impact of phenomenological writing through short paragraphs, that they posted on the virtual collaboration platforms. The objective was to understand the potential for raising consciousness. Selected responses from students are listed below that appear to support the claim of the transformative nature of "writing phenomenology."

- It was the greatest lesson … how I operate in a situation, uncertainty, how I interpret events.

- This class has been truly an eye-opening experience for me …

- This has been a vastly different experience than every single class I have ever had … rarely does a class ask me to stretch what I know, as in the world I know, the laws of that world, and how that world houses our reality. This growth has been taken to the next level by sharing this transcendence with others.

- Not only am I understanding these new concepts, so are you all, and the beauty of it, for me, is in the vulnerability, the awakening, the humility, that I am able to share, and that is shared with me.

- It is a highly effective method in amplifying the impact of these concepts. However, the true genius is in how these monumental surges in growth are not felt singly, the energy carries throughout the group in various ways, increasing the overall power of what is being learned.

- So, we are not only learning how to understand our world on another level, we are actively engaging in these concepts with one another in many ways. Absolutely beautiful.

- (the) feedback … has made me question the assumptions I so deeply engrained.

- Participating in this project has been a life-changing experience that I hope will continue, as I volunteer my services to see to its success.

- This class has propelled me into another level of awareness, and I am very grateful for that.

- I feel I am at the stage of embracing authenticity and wonderment as I work to move through the Ten Qualities of a Phenomenologist.

On being a "stranger" while building collaboration across cultures

Can *Transformative Phenomenology* act as an antidote for raising consciousness in an imperiled world? Our multi-national and multi-institutional collaborative phenomenological action-research project seeks to understand how collaboration for change in the world can be catalyzed through phenomenology. The project brought together 78 student "strangers," professors, alums, research assistants from across the globe. In detail, this included participants from the USA, Virgin Islands, Marshal Islands, Mongolia, China, South America, Poland, Europe, Canada, and elsewhere. The project design provided opportunities for communication and collaboration through face-to-face, videoconference, and asynchronous virtual platform modes within and between four cohorts. Our earliest observations were that there were differences in the preferred modes of collaborative communication as described on the previous section. Fielding students were active collaborators. UVI students appeared to prefer videoconferencing and follow-up collaboration off-line. Some of the Lodz doctoral students were initially resistant to collaboration. Some avoided collaboration. While some attributed this tendency to historical

socio-cultural factors, others did not. The program created openings for communication and collaboration for the Lodz students. Further investigation of our information will follow-up on these observations.

Students were asked to reflect on the impact of on being a "stranger" while engaging in collaboration through the "writing phenomenology" program. Selected responses from students are listed below that describe the impact of the program. Vulnerability, openness, and awareness are some emerging themes that may point to the essence of collaboration among strangers.

- I will approach people who come to us as immigrants or for any other reason quite differently.

- Everyone in this project has influenced me positively, whether directly or indirectly as I have discovered much about my phenomenon and myself.

- Collaborating with strangers deepens self-reflection and provides an unfamiliar but very constructive insight that is extremely beneficial when exploring phenomena

- As we continue to share our phenomenological writing and give each other feedback, layers of "stranger-ness" continue to peel away.

- The act of being conscious of collaboration … provides a way to make meaning of the "what" we are doing and gives insight into the "how." In this respect, we are consciously collaborating; which I believe is powerful.

- … collaborating with strangers transformed and inspired new levels of awareness of my phenomenon and phenomenology in general.

- Collaborating with strangers so far has brought the possibility to live myself lighter with the child curiosity to explore new landscapes and witness new hearts expressing themselves, in their fully lived emotion and potential at the same time.

- Collaborating with strangers has improved as I worked to get to know classmates on a deeper level through their work.

- Collaborating with strangers were also moments of deep intimacy when the only thing I could do was to live the deep empathy for what I read while feeling and embracing the other, knowing that I had either touched an unknown expression of the other's humanness or I deeply touched myself through the eyes, hands, movements, and heart of the other.

- Collaborating with others is to embrace the possibility to reach new horizons and to build things that I could never build alone.

- Overall, collaborating with strangers has been useful in that when you collaborate outside of the usual network you are blessed with diverse feedback.

- I feel like I have grown a lot so far in this class, but I am still struggling with posting what I have written because I choose to write about a phenomenon that has become much more personal than I originally intended. As I have read the other postings, I admire the openness in which others have been able to write about their phenomena. I do not find it easy to share personal truths with virtual strangers, but as the class has progressed, I am beginning to view my colleagues less and less like strangers. I am still struggling with opening myself up to the judgment of others.

- Collaborating with strangers - that is a strange group of words for me. I don't think of you all as "strangers", we are all in the same field just trying to make it. We have a common bond already. I have been in school long enough and in "psychology, human development, whatever you want to call it - field" and they are pretty much similar.

- Collaborating with stranger has never been my strong suit. I am a private person about my thoughts and feelings. I share them only with people I trust to be open minded, supportive, and honest. This class challenges me in more than one way, the idea of writing about myself and an experience is also something I am not very good at or comfortable with. I can write about data, theory, results, etc. but myself is much harder. Reading through the discussions has helped me start to understand the self-reflection that I will need to become comfortable with in this class. The way some of my fellow students can write with such detail of their emotions is very foreign and incredible to me. This class is pushing me out of my box.

- What I find most interesting is what experiences my colleagues choose to share. Everyone seems to have distinct poignant experiences, so much so that the experiences seem to drive both their scholarly work and careers … sharing my experiences with strangers did not come across as tough, but rather redundant … writing phenomenology turned the broken record off … in sharing my lived experiences … I discovered that I have so much more to discover and talk about, than what I planned. Sharing these experiences with others has been a platform for discovery…

- Being vulnerable is something that I have always struggled with, and this course is making me address a weakness. The fear of being judged, misunderstood, and/or rejected always runs through my mind. Thoughts of coming across the wrong way and having to defend myself because I jumped to conclusions, haunts me … reading the experiences of others, allows me to feel like I know them through their experiences. Starting this course, I was very unsure of how this would work out but

seeing, hearing, and exploring their words have helped also to encourage me and forced me to think beyond myself.

- As I approach collaborating with strangers, there is both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is the potential to make new connections that enrich my life. Perhaps this person will teach me something about myself, or the world, that I don't know. Maybe I can add value to their life. There is also the hope that we will move past the point of remaining strangers and become acquaintances or even friends. The threat is the fact that this person is unknown to me. I don't have a sense for who they are or where they come from. What if we don't click? What if painful words are spoken or written? I've had enough unpleasant experiences with strangers to know some of the possibilities … I know that connection requires vulnerability … perhaps it is because we are all on the same path, pursuing graduate degrees as adults, so we already have a common bond and mission that makes it easier to trust them. I also think that the nature of phenomenological writing causes us to open up in a way that we don't typically do with strangers, thus expediting the vulnerability and connection process.

- The initial experience of collaborating with strangers is riddled with anxiety and excitement. You are given the option of revealing your true self or presenting a façade to maintain your privacy. At some point, in phenomenological studies, you have to decide whether you want a genuine experience of learning and growing through sharing or if you want to make a minimal contribution in order to move forward. For some, it is easy to share their truths, but for others, it might be more difficult. I find it much easier to share truths with strangers rather than those who are closest to me. I think this is because there is no vested relationship with a stranger in which I am fearful of being judged. However, I will admit, I do not bare my soul, but will allow for information sharing at the appropriate time.

- Alternate perspectives are another benefit of collaborating with strangers, as most of my colleagues are from different parts of the country, as well as lead lives much different from my own. Diversity among strangers can be so rich and valuable in the learning environment, but I think even more so when it applies to research studies of phenomena or any topic for that matter.

The ten qualities of transformative phenomenologists as a foundation for consciousness raising

David Rehorick and Valerie Bentz identified the ten qualities of transformative phenomenologists through the evaluation of over 75 doctoral dissertations that they supervised over twenty years of teaching at Fielding Graduate University. See Figure 2. Evidence of the transformative impact of phenomenology is reflected in descriptions and case studies offered by Fielding scholar-practitioners that demonstrate and document personal, organizational and social

transformations founded on *Transformative Phenomenology* (Bentz et al., 2019; D. Rehorick &

Bentz, 2017; Rehorick & Bentz, 2008). One objective of the research project is to affirm the ten

qualities of transformative phenomenologists. Many of the student participants embraced one or

more of the qualities through their introduction to phenomenology. Through writing rich

descriptions and collaboratively interpreting meaning, students sought to discover the

"whatness" of experience and to look beyond the taken for granted and embraced approaches to

understanding the lifeworld. A smaller number of students more fully embraced *Transformative*

Phenomenology and experienced profound shifts in their way of being as suggested in the

following student commentary.

> Where do I begin with your question about phenomenology having an impact on my life? I don't even recognize myself anymore compared to the person I was in January (before taking Writing Phenomenology). Just the other day, I was recounting to a friend the events that have taken place in my life over the past few months, noting the internal transformation that also impacted my lifeworld. Of course, life is dynamic and non-linear, so I'm not able to discern one specific *thing* that caused all of the changes in my life. However, without a doubt, phenomenology contributed to the transformation of my consciousness, and the shift in consciousness spilled into my external environment ... Bracketing alone changed how I interacted with people. When I learned to suspend assumptions, biases, and judgments (bracket), I became *present* when I engaged in conversations with people. From that *presence,* I discovered authenticity in myself, which resulted in deeper, more meaningful relationships with people. Similarly, learning about vantage points and relevances and utilizing those techniques (more like bringing them into my consciousness) in my everyday life contributed to deeper and more meaningful relationships with people. This summary probably explains why I chose to highlight bracketing, vantage points, motives and intentions in my essay—because they were the most meaningful and transformative to me.

Building a community-of-practice through collaborative writing projects

The participants in the research project were offered the opportunity to collaborate with other

participants between and across school affiliations. The objective was to deepen collaborations

among strangers through collaborative writing and to further understand the transformative

potential of phenomenology in raising consciousness and building a phenomenological

community-of-practice. Scholars Ken Gale and Johnathan Wyatt describe the "vibrancy of …

relationality (when) working at … *wonder* (our emphasis) as a necessary part of engaging in collaborative writing as a method of inquiry." They rely on the philosophy offered by Isabelle Stenger and Gilles Deleuze and describe their existential interest in collaborative writing and describe its transformative potential.

> "This is where our interest lies, where the fire is sparked and where we work at wonder, not just to think, ponder, or to ask questions but to be taken aback and to share the sense of always becoming able to be surprised …we take up this exhortation for and of "wonder," this creative space of becoming, by writing again into our collaboration—collaboration as a dynamic process—to see how we each, and we all, might become what we were not before. (Gale & Wyatt, 2017, p.356).

The chapters co-authored by doctoral students and colleagues on topics which they collaborated on will form the basis of a publication volume. The topics include personal challenges, such as grief and death, power and pressure, to social and ecological issues such as waste, loss of human, animal and cultural habitat, building trust in virtual relationships, military family challenges, helping cultures in crisis around the world homelessness, communication of powerful leaders, and others (Table 3). In addition, the collaborative writing project will gather reflections from the participants regarding ways in which the writing and collaborative processes led to changes in their lives and work.

We found throughout our early assessment of our research information, a dialectic between "lifeworlds" and "deathworlds" (Bentz et. al., 2019). Deathworlds are places on planet earth which can no longer sustain life. These are increasing rapidly. One of the preliminary findings of our study is that we experience remnants of deathworlds within our lifeworlds, (for example traumatic echoes of war, genocide, oppression). Current practices and policies directly or indirectly are creating deathworlds and undermining lifeworlds through processes like climate change and species extinction. The collaborative writing highlights the ways in which personal transformation in collaboration may lead to social and environmental justice practice which means decreasing Deathworld making.

Table 3

List of collaborative writing projects

Phenomenologically Inspired Collaborative Writing Project Topics

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Transformative Phenomenology and the Global Crises of Lifeworlds describes the evolution of transformative phenomenology and the development of the project across three universities and diverse cultures in the face of increasing deathworlds on the planet.

Precognition and Intuitive Knowing describes how phenomenology changed the understanding of a participant's precognitive predictive awareness of death and birth through writing phenomenological protocols and how she moved from a dark gothic understanding through a sense of solitude to one of wholeness.

Grief and Unraveling in the Lifeworld of We-Relationships weaves together the experiences of grief and personal unraveling through sharing their phenomenological writing.

The Experience of Power and Pressure in Body Building, Personal Training, and Yoga illuminates the dynamics between the feeling of pressure, personal power, and the experience of middle-aged women who pressure themselves to the point of danger to obtain a younger body image.

In *Navigating Between Deathworlds and Lifeworlds in Military Families* two strangers discover through phenomenological writing that they share a common lifeworld of "military families" while remaining strangers to "military culture."

Teaching in the Deathworlds of Indigenous U.S. describes an educator's journey through Transformative Phenomenology to assist indigenous communities in restoring their lands and culture from deathworlds to lifeworlds.

The Lifeworld of First Responders to Emergencies analyzes the way first responders to trauma experience a unique sense of being on high alert and an effective way for providers of care may effectively treat their trauma.

Inspiration Experiences During Times of Personal Challenge elucidates the way inspiration and spiritual support is experienced at times of challenge based on a phenomenological study of the author and five project participants.

Transformative Coaching Through Somatics and Phenomenology describes the power of transformative phenomenology and somatics in coaching practices.

Combatting Loss of Lifeworlds through Phenomenology reveals how writing phenomenological protocols increased the ability to enhance connectedness in the modern world.

At Home Together through a "Cosmopolitan" Lens: Somatic and Communicative Linkages among "Strangers" provides insights into practice with persons living in the "permanent liminality" of conditions of failing lifeworlds.

Building Trust in Virtual Relationships: The Lived Experience describes phenomenological concepts to understand developing virtual relationships.

The Deathworld Politics of Wi Jinping and Donald Trump employs hermeneutic phenomenology is used to interpret two major world leader's world views.

Twalinghaina: Collaborative Inquiry in Mizoram India explains how phenomenological awareness of self was necessary for her to successfully collaborate with the government and villagers in Mizoram, India, in a famine prevention project.

The Community of Practice of Transformative Phenomenology pulls together the processes of improving lifeworlds and transforming deathworlds via transformative phenomenology.

Conclusion

This paper presents preliminary results of a collaborative phenomenological research project involving 78 students from Fielding Graduate University, University of Lodz, Poland and the University of the Virgin Islands. Encountering phenomenology for the first time through protocol writing and the collaborative interpretation of meaning can lead to consciousness raising as participants question taken for granted assumptions in the lifeworld. The transformative nature of phenomenology and its reverberations in the lifeworlds of participants were pervasive outcomes of the research project. The study of the information gathered will continue.

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