

DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL METHOD: AN EXAMPLE OF  
A METHODOLOGY SECTION FROM DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

### DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL METHOD: AN EXAMPLE OF A METHODOLOGY SECTION FROM DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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This paper is the methodology section of my doctoral dissertation that outlines the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method of research as it has been taught to me by Amedeo P. Giorgi. Giorgi (2009) based his method on Husserl's descriptive phenomenological philosophy as an alternative epistemology for human science research. This method section references Giorgi's work and the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and others. Each step of Giorgi's (2009) modified Husserlian method is described and explained in the context of doing psychological research on the lived-experience of the participants in my dissertation research. The steps are: (1) assume the phenomenological attitude, (2) read entire written account for a sense of the whole, (3) delineate meaning units, (4) transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of their lived-meanings, and (5) synthesize a general psychological structure of the experience base on the constituents of the experience. It is the first-person psychological perspective that is sought so that an empathetic position can be adopted by the end-user of the research.

## **Methodology**

### **Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method**

Historically, psychology has worked diligently to constitute itself as one of the natural sciences (studies concerned with the physical world) through the adoption of their values and procedures. In doing so, much of psychological inquiry has involved the use of controlled environments or controlled aspects of environments and some form of quantified abstraction and measurement procedures (Giorgi, 1985). Beginning with the application of experimental procedures psychological inquiries became about studying behavior in the form of preplanned events confined within contrived environments (laboratories) requiring the (1) isolation of phenomena, (2) the systematic manipulation of variables, and (3) repeatability of the process (Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989). The isolation of psychological phenomena from their natural contexts into the “sterile laboratory” contexts of experimental methods presupposes that the phenomena exists independent of the context in which it is found in everyday life. The first of these procedures assumes that the more the researcher isolates the phenomena from natural situational “contaminants,” the more neutral the context becomes which renders the phenomena into a condition of greater abstraction or purity (Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989). In a natural science such as chemistry, it makes complete sense to isolate atoms and compounds from one another in order to manipulate and test controlled reactions between them. While there are scientific goals in doing so, sometimes there are also inherent aspects of safety that require such controls over the substances used in chemical experiments. But it is the plucking out of the psychological phenomenon (along with the person in whom it is inherently found) from its

natural habitat and forcing it into the contrived context that imposes the greatest threats of “contaminating” it prior to its analysis and subsequent understanding.

It was not necessarily a greater understanding per se, that experimental psychology was interested in finding. Rather, it was the “prediction and control of behavior” that emerged as the theoretical goal of psychological research (Watson, 1913, p. 58). Behaviorism and its use of the natural sciences methodological model increased in popularity and prestige, due largely to the fact, that it could “*do something* – and, more importantly, do something according to the expectations of the time concerning science” [*emphasis original*] (Giorgi, 1970, p. 46). Watson’s (1913) behaviorist’s manifesto marks a shift in psychology from a study of mental phenomena to discovering mental laws by drawing inferences based upon the observable interaction of an “animal” and the “stimuli” of its environment. This approach deliberately sets aside any and all mediating mental phenomena between the presupposed causal sequence of stimulus and response. Therefore, two distinct limitations for psychology appear due to the behaviorists’ attitude and use of experimental research designs. First, all mediating mental phenomena are deliberately left out of the “equation” and second, the mental phenomena are threatened with “contamination” by the alterations of the environment from the one in which they would normally be found. Finally, having wrested the psychological phenomena from its “real-world” context and the deliberate ignoring of its qualities and faculties, the “scientific study of behavior” is left as a hollow shell version of psychology (i.e., a tough exterior without much substance therein.)

The beginning and rise of the “cognitive revolution” moved psychology back to the perspective of including mental mediation between the stimulus-response of behaviorism. It was the development of the computer processing metaphor that became the dominant explanation for

the psychological phenomena mediating between the person and situation. But the computer processing metaphor has been taken too far by many and literalized to the point that the human mind is often regarded both atomistically and mechanically (Aanstoos, 1987; Giorgi, 2001). It was through this paradigm that the presuppositions of mental elementalism were kept as the foundations for formulating the information-processing explanations of psychological phenomena (Aanstoos, 1987). Whether meant literally or not, such theoretical concepts as templates, schemas, scripts, and stereotypes were described as the “programming” of the mind based on perceived environmental features acquired as *data entry* that is *encoded* into memory through life experiences. The information-processing computer model evolved to become synonymous for “cognition” within the mainstream of psychology (Aanstoos, 1987).

Phenomenological psychology however, recognizes that a person is an historical being and experiences are part of his or her constitution as such (Giorgi, 1970). The divisions between thinking, feeling, imagining, and their physiological correlates are distinguishable but essentially indivisible. The cognitive perspectives readmitted the *mental processes* back into psychology but left their nature within the realm of being products of the physical world. Consequently, the dominant cognitive view of the mind is that it is a product of the brain and still considered within the natural sciences framework (Giorgi, 2009).

A phenomenological perspective of the mind acknowledges consciousness as the most fundamental life-quality that coexists with the body and thus, a person is regarded as an embodied consciousness (Husserl, 1977; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Husserl (1977) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) point out that people know one another’s consciousness through their physical bodies. This means that we know our own consciousness by reflection but cannot know the consciousness of the other except through the body. On the other hand, a body without

consciousness is a corpse (Husserl, 1977). Therefore, consciousness cannot be ignored or discarded as Watson (1913) asserted, and it would be going too far to assert that it is merely a product of the nervous system. For Husserl (1977), consciousness synthesizes experience through its intentional acts toward objects that are both sensorial and purely mental in origin. In other words, objects that are governed by time, space, and causality are called “real” and those that are imagined, remembered, anticipated, hallucinated, etc., are called “irreal” because they do not physically exist (Husserl, 1977; Zahavi, 2003). Because the natural sciences were intended to study only the “real” world, Husserl’s (2008/1931) project for phenomenology was to develop a method in the form of an eidetic science (science of possibilities) for psychology which would necessarily include “irreal” objects in its analyses. In a sense, phenomenology would be a “science of possibilities” for human studies in a similar way that geometry is for physics. For there are geometrical concepts that are accepted as theoretically sound, (such as the two-dimensional plane) but that are physically non-existent in our three-dimensional world. So for psychology, phenomenology would be the investigation of consciousness through the examination of its actions upon objects that it takes without positing the origins of the objects.

The concept that consciousness takes objects for itself is called intentionality. Husserl (2008/1931) explained that consciousness is naturally directed-to objects, which is to say, consciousness is always conscious of something beyond itself. Zahavi (2003) explains it in the following way:

One does not merely love, fear, see, or judge, one loves a beloved, fears something fearful, sees an object, and judges a state of affairs. Regardless of whether we are talking of a perception, thought, judgment, fantasy, doubt, expectation, or recollection, all of these diverse forms of consciousness are characterized by intending objects and cannot be analyzed properly without a look at their objective correlate, that is, the perceived, doubted, expected object. (p. 14).

I believe that one can see from the above explanation of intentionality, why a phenomenological psychological method is well suited for the proposed study of police officers' use of deadly force. In the above description of intentional acts of consciousness, one can see that both "real" and "irreal" objects of consciousness must be considered to understand the whole experience in its natural context, and as it was lived by the participant.

The natural context of a social interaction of any kind has been shown by social psychology to be an important influence on people's behavior and understanding of their experiences. Experimental-like research done in "the field" is when the researchers contrive a situation in the real world, but do so without allowing the persons being studied to know about the research until afterwards (Babbie, 2010). By design, this type of research involves deceiving the people being studied with the idea that their "reactions" and "behaviors" will be more authentic and natural than if they had known. While the distinct advantage to such field research is that the researcher can observe the persons "in the act," it does so without their prior consent. The Descriptive Phenomenological Method provides the lived-context of the participant and does so focusing on his or her perspective without the use of deception (Giorgi, 2009). Further, the method allows the researcher to keep the "voice" of the participants in the research without abstracting their viewpoint out through analysis. Rather, it is the subjective-psychological perspective of the participant that captures my interest as the researcher (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). As such, it is not only the "reactions" and "behaviors" that are included in the data, but also the thoughts, impressions, feelings, interpretations, and understandings of the participants' experiences that I will be analyzing.

The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method is a five-step system of research that holds Husserlian Phenomenology as its philosophical foundation. Because Husserl

was a philosopher, Giorgi (2009) needed to modify Husserl's method to be useful for psychology. In doing so, Giorgi's (1985; 2009) five-step method provides the systematic rigor of "science" while not being reductionistic in its treating of the persons studied. Further, the method is discovery-oriented rather than verification-oriented. Therefore, I do not propose a hypothesis to be supported by the evidence, but rather intend to describe the structure of the psychological phenomenon so that it can be understood in a deeper, holistic and more comprehensive way than other methods can provide. In the proposed study, it is the first person "meaning(s)" of the experiences that are of interest to me rather than mere objective interpretations of behaviors. More detail about how this is achieved will follow in the "data analysis" section of this proposal.

### **Participants**

The participants for this research are from an exclusive population of people. Police officers that have used deadly-force in the performance of their duties are relatively few in number within the greater law enforcement officer population. As a former law enforcement officer, I had personal access to the law enforcement community through my vocational ties that other psychological researchers do not necessarily have. Therefore, I contacted local law enforcement acquaintances seeking their assistance in recruiting officers that have used deadly force in the line of duty. It is important to make the distinction here, that it is the experience of using deadly force that was of interest, regardless of whether or not the force's outcome was fatal for the suspect. Police officers are trained to "stop" the violent behavior of the suspect and not "kill" him or her (Klinger, 2004; Murray, 2006). Additionally, most deadly force applications involve the use of firearms. However, there are acts of deadly force that involve the deliberate use of a police automobile as a weapon (Alpert & Fridell, 1992). However for this study, I used officer-involved shootings as the kind of the deadly force experience in which the suspect died.



What I believe is essential to this study is that any use of deadly-force was a deliberate act on the part of the participant.

### **Data Collection**

The raw data for this study is the “naïve description” of the deadly force experiences from and in the words of the participants. For Husserl, (2008/1937), “natural cognition begins with experience and remains *within* experience” (p.5). So the naïve description is the first-person account of the experience as it was lived and understood by the participant in his or her everyday common sense mode of understanding. Since no other person can co-experience the subjective-psychological perspective of any lived-experience with the participant, the best and only “record” of such an experience exists (admittedly, only in part) within the memory of him or her who experienced it from the subjective position. Therefore, I captured an audio recording of separate in-person interviews with each of the participants about his or her experience. To initiate the telling of their experiences, the initial question for the participants was very simply presented like, “In as much detail as possible, tell me what it was like for you to use deadly force on a suspect as a police officer?” This general question is open-ended and intended to offer the participant a wide range in which he or she can verbally describe the experience. As the participant related the experience to me, I made mental note of verbal transitions in which I sensed more could be said about something or that the participant incidentally veered away from which naturally occurs when people are speaking. When the participant reaches a point that he or she has said all that can be said spontaneously, I asked one or more follow-up questions like, “You spoke about *such and such*, can you tell me more about that?” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The follow-up questions are not purposefully “leading” in the sense of trying to “pull out” of the participant particular information of a kind. Rather, it is an interviewing technique intended to

“re-open the door” to an aspect of the account that was presented but not fully and expressly described by the participant. As the researcher, I wanted to acquire a verbal “re-living of the experience” expressed by the participant, to the greatest possible degree.

Getting an account of the experience based upon the memory and report of the participant carries with it a certain degree of dubiousness about its accuracy. Data acquired through self-report methods (questionnaires and interviews) are always subject to memory decay, alterations or participant response errors (Giorgi, 2009). There are no perfect descriptions, but adequate descriptions are obtainable and they are pregnant with psychological meanings to be analyzed (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Further, the interviewing strategy is not intended to “spur” or “jog” the participants to remember some “obscured details,” but rather help them to simply relate as fully as possible “what it was like” for them during their experiences. I trust that the data provided by these interviews was sufficient to acquire the most salient and personally important aspects of the experience, because they have been kept in memory. It was through the phenomenological psychological analysis that both the explicated and implied meanings of the experiences will be accessible to be elucidated (Giorgi, 1985). More explanation will follow about the analysis below.

The naïve descriptions provided by the participants were recorded for later transcription. A digital voice recorder was used to capture the interview contents and I transcribed the interviews into text for further analysis. It was the transcribed text that was used as the raw data for analysis. As part of the data collection process, all identifying information that would have revealed the participants’ and other people’s identities, places or things that could make such identities easily known was replaced with pseudonyms or other fictitious representations as are appropriate to maintain the privacy of those interested parties. Such informational replacements

took place during my transcription process so that only the participants and I will know their identities and other private details.

### **Data Analysis**

The Descriptive Phenomenological method in Psychology uses a five-step method of data analysis based on some principles of phenomenological philosophy (Amedeo Giorgi, *personal communication*). In each step, I will explain the procedure and its corresponding philosophical concept that supports its purpose and character. Therefore, the data analysis is done once the interview has been transcribed and the text has become the “empirical evidence” to be analyzed for its psychological implications.

The first step of the phenomenological psychological method is for the researcher to assume the phenomenological attitude. The phenomenological attitude is different than the natural attitude or everyday way of understanding the world. In the phenomenological attitude, the researcher “brackets” his or her everyday knowledge to take a fresh look at the data. In other words, the researcher puts aside his or her presuppositions, theoretical, cultural, experiential, or otherwise. The concept of “bracketing” comes from Husserl’s (2008/1931) epoché in which the researcher allows him or herself to be present to the data without positing its validity or existence. Simply being present means that the researcher allows him or herself to “see” the data as it appears in itself and in its own context without doubt or belief. In this way, the researcher can remain true to the phenomenological slogan “back to the things themselves” (Husserl, 2001/1901). Additionally, the researcher does not posit the real existence of any object or state-of-affairs that is given to consciousness. Rather, because it is given to consciousness, the researcher takes the object (or state-of-affairs) as it presents itself rather judging its veracity from the objective perspective (Husserl, 2008/1931). In this, each object and intentional act on that

object by consciousness is included in the analysis because it was there for the participant's consciousness. So the bracketing and withholding of existential positing allows the researcher to see and thus describe what was present for consciousness from the participant's first person perspective. I assumed the phenomenological attitude and then proceeded to the next step.

The second step in the data analysis requires that I read the entire "naïve description" to get a sense of the whole experience (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The "naïve description" provided by the participant was taken in the natural attitude in the way that he or she would experience things in the mode of everyday living from the commonsense perspective. This is done without a critical reflection on the experience. However, the I remained in the phenomenological attitude that "puts out of action" all commonsense presuppositions in order to conduct a critical reflection about the participant's experience in order to describe how it was phenomenally experienced (Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 2008/1931). It is in the phenomenological attitude that I was *present* to the data as it is given.

The third step in the data analysis is the demarcation of "meaning units" within the narrative so that the data can be dealt with in manageable portions (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). As the researcher, I went through the narrative text in a subsequent reading(s) with the purpose of determining where places of meaning shift within it. The stream of experience in consciousness has "landmarks" in a way that is analogous to how we see the windings, rapids, and falls in a water stream. Another analogy used by James (1996/1912) is that a bird's flight is marked by where it perches more than the actual distances in which it flies. So as I read the text through after getting a sense of the whole, the subsequent reading is done with the idea of marking where meaning-shifts occur which are like the "landmarks" or changes in the flow in some way (Giorgi, 1985).

To distinguish the meaning units, I marked the meaning unit demarcations with a *forward slash (/)* at the cleavage between two meaning units, but each meaning unit will be identifiable by its numerical labeling at its beginning point. The numerical identification will be expressed in superscript. Therefore, the meaning unit will begin with a superscript font numerical identifier and end with a forward slash. According to Giorgi (2009), how or where the meaning units are delineated is not absolute. Different researchers may delineate the meaning units in different places in the same data. However the same or different the meaning units may be among researchers, it is the results that are important to the overall quality of the analysis (Giorgi, 2009).

Additionally, distinguishing meaning unit can be a self-correcting process in which the researcher discovers that meaning units are too long or too short in their delineation. It is acceptable to combine or divide meaning units as one's familiarity with the data provides clarity about better places for their distinctions. Overall, the researcher does not have to commit to the initial delineations and battle through them as an inviolable rule (Giorgi, 2009).

The fourth step I took was transforming the meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expressions of each of them. The researcher takes the phenomenon at the psychological level to practice science rather than the transcendental level which is to practice philosophy (Giorgi, 2009). The psychological level is an individuated, worldly and personal level rather than a transcendental (universal, unconditional, and independent of experience) (Giorgi, 2009). It is in this third step that the first change is made to the data in the analytical process. The meaning units are re-expressed in the third-person while remaining faithful to the meanings expressed by the participant. The change to the third-person language does not change the meaning content, but assists the researcher in remaining in the phenomenological attitude by

not being empathetically drawn to the participant's natural attitude (Giorgi, 2009). Taking each meaning unit in its third person form, the research transforms it into a statement that expresses its essential psychological meanings. Using a mode of psychological sensitivity means that the researcher intends to locate and elucidate the psychological meanings contained in the data. Transformations from the third-person versions of the meaning units into descriptive psychological transformed expressions are performed to bring the psychology to the forefront. The transformations require the researcher to use Husserl's (2008/1931) intellectual procedure known as *imaginative variation* to determine the essence of the phenomenal structure of the experience (Giorgi, 2009).

Imaginative variation is performed by the researcher by changing qualities of the object being analyzed so as to determine which qualities are essential and which are accidental (present but not required) (Giorgi, 1985, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Husserl, 2008/1931; Zahavi, 2003). By taking each third-person meaning unit individually, the researcher dwells with it and considers what is being psychologically expressed through it. A psychologically focused re-expression is transformed in a descriptive manner and placed next to it.

The transformations are psychological formulations of the essential meanings of each meaning unit. Because the researcher is still in the phenomenological attitude, each transformation describes what the meaning unit expresses psychologically without any interpretation or positing about its "truth." It is only describing how it was experienced and understood by the participant from his or her point of view without explanation of "why" it was experienced in the way it was. The phenomenological attitude of the researcher in the psychological analysis of the data is what makes the results both phenomenological and psychological. The general structure of the lived-experience is synthesized from the participants'

transformations when taken generally together in a comparative view by the researcher (Giorgi, 2009).

The general structure of the experience is a descriptive paragraph which lays out the lived-experience of the researched topic from a psychological approach. The fifth step in the analysis is the synthesis of the general psychological structure from the psychological *constituents* of the experience. Constituents differ from the concept of *elements* because they are context dependent (Giorgi, 1985). Constituents therefore cannot be independent of each other, but are necessarily part of the whole structure. The purpose of this procedure is grounded in the phenomenological concept of *parts and wholes*. Sokolowski (2008) points out that concept of parts and wholes is not original in phenomenology but was actually developed by Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, the concept expresses the idea that the “whole” of some things or states-of-affairs are irreducible to its parts. In other words, the value of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Parts are regarded in phenomenology to fall into two distinctions: *pieces and moments*. Pieces are parts that can subsist separately and detached from the whole to which they belong. There is an identifiable independence about pieces apart from the whole that moments do not have. Moments on the other hand, are dependent upon their whole and have their essential identities as being a part of the whole (Sokolowski, 2008). Each constituent must therefore, hang together interdependently with the others forming a general (whole) psychological structure. Consequently, there may be psychological aspects of one or more of the individually situated experiences that one could find to be a “piece” which is more like an element. Pieces or elements can subsist on their own and therefore would not be constituent (moments) of the general structure (Giorgi, 1985; Sokolowski, 2008). Being identified as a “piece” or accidental quality of

the experience does not render the aspect useless, but simply not an essential part of the general structure.

The constituents are determined by viewing the transformations of all of the participants for convergent meanings. Still using the imaginative variation, the researcher can see the shared meanings of the participants pertaining to their general psychological consistencies. The researcher applies a descriptive word or phrase to the constituents based on their psychological givenness. This is not a process of thematizing or merely creating nominal categories (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The constituent “title” must be descriptive of its psychological meaning. These constituents are put together in a descriptive paragraph which is the general descriptive psychological structure, that is, the structure is the outcome (results) of the analysis. All other “pieces,” whether psychological or not, are set aside for the later and broader discussion with the extant literature in dialog with one another.

It is important to note that the phenomenological concepts of parts and wholes are kept intact throughout the study. From the interview, the naïve description is obtained from the participant with as much continuity as possible. The follow up questions are only used to mine deeper into aspects that are already given by the participant. The naïve description is read through in its entirety while the researcher is in the phenomenological attitude. Meaning units are delineated but the whole data remains intact. The meaning units are transformed using imaginative variation within the phenomenological attitude and psychological perspective to elucidate their essential psychological meanings. The essential meanings (constituents) are examined for their interdependence as part of the psychological structure (whole) and described as such. The determination of an essential moment versus an accidental (nonessential) piece of the experience, which differentiates the constituent from an element, requires the use of the



imaginative variation still in operation. It is through the imaginative variation that the eidetic nature of the data can be brought forth (Giorgi, 2009).

The phenomenological concept of *presences* and *absences* is an important one to use during one's use of the imaginative variation. This is how the explicit data can reveal the existence of the implicit meanings without them being concretely expressed in the data by the participants (Giorgi, 2009; Sokolowski, 2008). During the transformations, the researcher can not only "see" the explicit data and meanings, but also uncover the implicit meanings through the imaginative variation and having the "sense of the whole" still in mind from the initial step of the analysis. When synthesizing the general structure, the researcher can also find that as the structure emerges, some constituents are given implicitly in a similar way. In this way, the descriptive phenomenological approach is more comprehensive than mere empirical approaches in the natural attitude (Giorgi, 2009). This is justified through understanding that what is "present" often implies or indicates an "absent" quality. Because we "see" things in profiles, meaning we cannot view an object circumferentially all at once, we only view them through the aspect that is facing us. But this does not mean that we disregard the fact that there exists an aspect on the other side which is hidden from our view (Sokolowski, 2008). For example, when I see someone face to face, I also understand the person to necessarily have a back that corresponds to his or her front. But I draw this logical inference from a totality of the other's presence.

Husserl (2008/1931) points out that our experience is self-correcting. This concept is important here because when one is considering the whole data, he or she can see the structure and determine if there may be an essential aspect that is "absent" in one participant's data that is present in the data of the other participants. Further, the interdependent nature of the

“constituents” when assembled together through imaginative variation, reveals the “absence” of the constituent among the “present” other constituents. So there are two levels of “wholes” that are considered in the analysis and synthesis resulting in the general structure. First, in the individual level the explicit data may reveal an implicit quality that was not verbalized by the participant, but is an “absent” essential quality that we can logically infer existed in the experience. Second, that “absent” essential quality can also be supported by its explicit presence in the data of the other participants that had the same kind of experience. Therefore, these logical inferences are supported by evidence and not merely hunches or wishful thinking on the part of the researcher. Upon review by others, the veracity of the logical inference drawn through the analysis can be critiqued, accepted or refuted (Giorgi, 1985).

It is important to note here that the expressions from the participants can be one or multiple examples of instances when the constituents were experienced. The grid configuration allows the researcher to place a note in a cell of an instance when a constituent is implicitly in the data rather than providing an explicit example. Further, it also can help the researcher to determine if there emerges a structure among the participants that is different than the others. This is important because it not only demonstrates that we may classify a kind of experience in a way that is experienced differently and might be classifiably different. Further, the differences in the structures that emerge might provide insight about how and why the psychological experiences were different phenomenologically when we would regularly consider them the “same” in the natural attitude.

The emergence of one general structure of the experience was sought, but not necessarily the goal of the proposed study. Because the descriptive phenomenological approach is a method

in the mode of discovery rather than validation, the discovery that different general structures of police deadly force experiences would not be a failure of the method or the study (Giorgi, 1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is the overall goal of the proposed study to find a deeper and richer understanding of what it is like to use deadly force as a police officer. One of the benefits to the participating officers and perhaps the law enforcement community at large is a richer understanding of the personal meanings of the officers that they may not be fully aware of or had come to understand. Giorgi (2009) points out that when someone says something there is always more meaning in what was said than even the speaker is aware of, in the natural attitude. The natural attitude causes a lot of psychological aspects of experience to be taken for granted. It is my hope that the proposed study will bring out some clarity and new insights regarding the psychology of police deadly force incidents.

The law enforcement community might find some valuable insights for training, policy, or even ways to better support officers that go through such experiences. Where Klinger (2004) obtained and organized a lot of valuable information about police shootings in his deadly force research, the phenomenological approach can take us deeper from the natural attitude to the phenomenal level of the officers' perspectives

I believe that it was important to maintain the participants' voices in the research as much as possible. One of the ethical advantages to the descriptive phenomenological approach is that no deception is required to get the data in its real world context. Of course, some may criticize my approach by saying that observing behavior as it is naturally acted is more legitimate than self-reported accounts of the incidents. But police deadly force encounters are not events that we can predict well enough to conduct observational research. Further, to do so would be solely an

objective viewpoint which is what the natural sciences position would value most. However, it was the subjective psychological perspective that descriptive phenomenological approach pursues (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Further, other self-report methods would suffer the same criticism but have demonstrated over time that they are legitimate ways to gather important data that are not necessarily less valid or reliable than observational or experimental methods. Moreover, Giorgi (2009) points out that falsified memories (through various distortions) can be more interesting for psychology because they reveal more about the psychological life of the individual due to their subjective origins. So for the proposed study, I am most concerned with how the officer psychologically experienced a deadly force encounter rather than creating an abstracted version of the incident filtered through already existing psychological theories and nomenclature. In sum, there is no deception, context changes, or meaning-twisting imposed on the officers' experiences or recounting of them. Phenomenological psychological analysis is a mode of discovering the psychological meanings as they were lived and how they inform our understanding of such experiences on a deeper level. The officers and law enforcement in general may be provided some new insights about police deadly force that have not yet been discovered or precisely because a phenomenological perspective was adopted.

The participants in the proposed study had the control over the information and the way it is given. Of course, I sought the most full and honest descriptions from the participants that they can provide. I had no reason for initial skepticism about getting anything else but the truth from these volunteers. But I also recognize the possibility of willful omissions or distortions in the accounts provided by the participants. I will take no measures to manipulate or control the participants into providing information they do not freely want to give. Clearly, informed

consent agreements secured clear understanding about the relationship between the participants and me as the researcher.

The benefits that I sought from conducting the study are academic, professional, and personal. Primarily, the study was intended to be a part of the requirements to be met in completing my doctoral degree in psychology. Professionally, I have served as a police officer in my emergency services career and currently work in higher education in the public safety disciplines. The completion of a doctoral degree is required for my advancement in my current position as well as adds to my credibility as a college instructor.

Finally, because I have been a certified peace officer for 22 years, I feel a personal desire to know more about deadly force experiences and how an officer might be better understood. As Klinger (2004) points out, many police officers have experiences of “close calls” in which a perceived or real lethal encounter are lived-through but for various reasons the officer selects not to use deadly force. As a police officer, I have had such situations in my law enforcement career which provided a little insight into what it might be like to use deadly force. But because of my own “holding fire,” I have a personal curiosity about the experiences of those that pulled the trigger. I believe the descriptive phenomenological psychological method will provide a greater understanding about the topic due to its purpose and design (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

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