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Persistent Psychological Meaning of Early Emotional Memories*

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Abstract

The effect of early emotional memories have been one of the most researched topics in modern scientific psychology. On the other hand, rigorous qualitative studies have been relatively rare, investigating the lived consequences of early emotional memories. The purpose of this paper is to report on some human scientific research results on the phenomenon, the lived persistent psychological meaning of early emotional memories. The study utilized Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method. A general psychological structure was discovered indicating constituents such as, the vividness of early emotional memories; emotional needs and coping strategies; everyday and life choices; as well as personal values attached to the meaning of an object that was present during the early emotional situation (a value experienced as contributing to the initial formation of an emotional life). The results might have implications for human service professionals in that they can contribute to a human scientific foundation in terms of understanding the persistent psychological meaning of early emotional memories as well as opening up for new venues of research on phenomena related to human memory, personality, and life-span developmental psychology.

Keywords

emotional memory, phenomenology, qualitative research

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Throughout the history of modern psychology, researchers and clinicians alike have shown an vast interest in the psychopathological effects of early emotional memories (e.g., Freud, 1899/1989; Terr, 1994); and/or the empirical facts remembered vis-à-vis an emotional situation (e.g., Cahill & McGaugh, 1995, 1998; Ceitlin, Santos, Parisotto, Zanatta & Chaves, 1995; Liwang & Stein, 1995; Pezdek & Banks, 1996). Attempts have also been made trying to locate the anatomy and the physiology associated with emotional memories (e.g., Adolphs, Cahill, Schul & Babinsky, 1997; Davis, Campeau, Kim & Falls, 1995; Farb, Aoki, Milner, Kaneko & LeDoux, 1992; LeDoux, 1993; Weiskrantz, 1956). In fact, the psychological literature is so extensive on phenomena such as memory, emotion, as well as emotional and traumatic memories, it would take an extensive work in itself to make an in-depth study of a mere fraction of one of these subject matters. Most attempts that have been made in terms of understanding and/or explaining such phenomena have been through philosophical reflection, clinical case studies, or experimental research. Hence there is also a need to conduct more systematic and rigorous human scientific research seeking the discovery of the psychological meaning of phenomena related to early emotional memories.

The purpose of the following paper is twofold: 1) to present some recent descriptive phenomenological psychological findings on the lived persistent meaning of early emotional memories and 2) to engage in a critical dialogue with some of the literature of the past that presented itself as being relevant to the research findings.

Method

The study was guided by the main research question: What is the lived persistent psychological meaning of an early emotional memory? In order to seek the psychological meaning, a qualitative human scientific method seemed appropriate (due to the fact that such a method is originally designed in a way so that the researcher will arrive at human meanings). Giorgi's (1985, 1997) descriptive phenomenological psychological method was chosen in order to discover the psychological meanings constituting the essential psychological structure of the phenomenon.

In compliance with the data gathering strategies of the descriptive phenomenological psychological method (Giorgi, 1985, 1997), three partici-

pants were asked to describe a situation in which they remembered an early emotional event and they were then asked to describe what kind of impact this early memory had had on their lives. Hence the phenomenon: The lived persistent meaning emerging from an early emotional memory. Consistent with qualitative methods seeking the discovery of the meaning of a phenomenon, only participants who had experienced the phenomenon were allowed to be part of the study. An interview ranged from 1–2 hours each in length and provided sufficient depth on a human level, indicating that a discovery of a general psychological structure of the phenomenon was plausible.

The researcher used the phenomenological reduction through all steps of the data analysis, which is a prerequisite to claim that one has made an attempt to approach the data descriptively. The data were analysed using the four steps of the descriptive phenomenological psychological method as developed by Giorgi (1985, 1997). These are: 1) First, each transcript of raw data was read over a few times in order to get a sense of the whole experience and situation 2) Second, the raw data was then divided into smaller so-called meaning units (which is first and foremost a practical step in order for the researcher to handle huge amount of data into workable smaller units) 3) Third, the psychological meaning of each unit was described with a focus on the research phenomenon 4) Fourth, a general psychological structure was discovered.¹

Results

The results will be organized into the following four main sections: 1) Summaries of portions of the raw data 2) General psychological structure 3) Constituents and their empirical variations 4) Relationship among the constituents.

Summaries of the Raw Data

Some of the raw data is presented in order to provide some clarity to the relationship between the raw data and the results. Due to the fact that

¹) For a more thorough account of the descriptive phenomenological psychological method, see Giorgi (1985, 1997).

the raw data were 1–2 hours each in length, only portions of it will be cited. A summary of Participant 1 (P1) and Participant 2 (P2) results follow, mainly because, from a pedagogical perspective, these provide a good example of variations within each of the constituents. Such a summary may also provide the reader with a better feel for the richness of the data and will hopefully contribute to a qualitative presence to portions of the data. These summaries will also have an organization consistent with the research questions.

Summary: Participant 1 (P1)

Memory 1: P1 describes a situation 8 years ago when she visits her great grandmother's house. She states that she really likes her great grandmother. She remembers not wanting to go because it was dismal outside and she anticipates the house having a displeasing odor. Her uncle lives with the great grandmother. He sleeps in the great grandmother's living room and she describes him as having had a rough life, having been a war veteran. When she walked up the stairs and in through the door, she is present, to her, a displeasing smell that she describes as mold and old, as well as a displeasing perception of a army green carpet. Furthermore she describes the great grandmother's house as dark and dismal, similar to a small cave. She stated that it was "like some kind of just a void of any life and not comfortable at all." She describes herself just sitting there trying to have a nice visit.

Memory 2: In this situation, P1 remembers an early childhood situation in which her father had been in a bicycle accident and suffered injuries to his head. The accident took place when out on a bicycle ride on a sunny day with her younger brother and her father and his girlfriend. The love between the father and his girlfriend was not "out in the open," although P1 claims that she intuitively knew about it. After the accident, they all went to the father's girlfriend's house so that she could care for the father's injury. P1 describes the experience walking into the house as similar to walking into the great grandmother's house, in that the steps leading up to the house were similar. She describes the situation as strange and that she was having an alienated type of the experience, in which she did not feel as if she was real. The father's girlfriend's house felt unfamiliar and thus strange. While the father's girlfriend was tending to the father's injury, P1 and her younger brother just sat there waiting. She describes this experience as being similar to the experience she had at her great grandmother's house, just sitting there and not knowing what to do with herself. She also experienced the father's girlfriend's house as similar to that of a cold, dark bunker with a displeasing smell and colors. P1 felt

scared, shocked, abandoned, unsure, alone and her younger brother was behaving recklessly, making her very uncomfortable. P1 had to constantly try to control the younger brother. She also felt sad because another person than her immediate family was tending to her father. In addition, she felt frustrated because she was not being tended to. She wanted to leave, did not feel at home, or loved, or welcomed, and experienced the whole thing as “icky.” After a while, the father’s girlfriend acknowledged the children and gave them both something to do. The stay at the house was experienced by P1 as “being a very long one” and also “being anti-fun.” P1 claims that the worst part of the experience was not to have a choice to be in this uncomfortable place and situation. She experienced the same “not having a choice” situation at her great grandmother’s house due to that her place was far away and she could not leave right away when she really wanted to. P1 also states that she would leave situations in which she experienced the situation as uncomfortable and also as an adult moved to another city in order to not have to visit certain relatives and thus encounter these types of situations.

Lived consequence: P1 then describes how this childhood memory has had an effect on her life. It has affected her in that she has a very limited tolerance for staying in a place she does not want to be. She describes this very limited tolerance to a childish type of fight or flight instinct that she has to respond to. In certain places she experience this empty, alone, frightening, and uncomfortable feelings, and she does not tolerate this but leaves the place. She gives an example of being on a date about two months ago and gone to a place in which she felt uncomfortable. She states that she was not frightened by the person she was on a date with but by the situation. At some point during the dinner she said, “You know what, I have to go” and that she just left the dinner. She describes her behavior as primitive and similar to that of an immature child who just can’t take it any more. P1 describes other situations in which she experiences the lived consequences of the early emotional memory. For example, she describes being at the library, a place that she thinks is the only place in which she can study without being disrupted by temptations present at home (e.g., television, etc.). Although she must study in order to meet a deadline for an assignment, she leaves the library because she is uncomfortable; that is, she experiences the library as cold and sterile as well as being tired and hungry. She also describes the similarity in her reaction to being cold and hungry. She also states that cold weather is intolerable and that both being hungry and cold triggers her reaction. For her, being hungry or cold is the same thing. She states that it is the whole point in her life. She theorizes that she might fall into the category of being a hedonist. She states that she “...literally just have to get up and anything is possible and get out.”

She spontaneously states that the first time she experiences having had this experience was at her father's girlfriend's house. She also recognizes that other people perceive her as rude because of her behavior. She looks at it as both a habit and a personality trait. She also recognizes that her father has a similar behavior. She also states that she does not know how to and does not want to go further in depth with her description of being alone and frightened, but might do so sometime in the future. P1 goes on to state that there are numerous daily occasions in which the lived consequence of her early memory is being repeated. For example, she states that just being in the university classroom is a horrible experience and that she experiences the classroom as sterile and lifeless. Even though she finds her professor's lectures exciting, she is bored while in the classroom. She finds it hard to leave for the lectures because she is uncomfortable in the classroom and all she wants to do while there is just to leave. She also states that she always gets tired in the afternoon and that this becomes a problem in relation to her just wanting to leave the lecture or not to show up for it in the first place. She states that the afternoon class is an obstacle to her because she is tired and that she finds this particular professor to be monotone. She experiences this situation as empty and that there is nothing in there for her to grasp at or anything. She states that this situation really pains her and that it is horrible.

Summary: Participant 2 (P2)

Memory 1: P2 describes a situation in which he remembers an early emotional situation. He is out walking and suddenly aware of the flight pattern and an aircraft flying overhead that he experienced as absolutely beautiful. He is aware of a similar comforting feeling of warmth and peace, and how he was affected as a child. The situation stops him and it is experienced as a break of his momentum of his walk. The peacefulness brings him back to the age around five years old.

Memory 2: P2 starts to describe the childhood memory in which he and his mother are on the way to the airport to greet his father who is on his way home from a business trip. He starts to describe the whole airport and what it looked like in details and his state of intense anticipation waiting for the aircraft to land. He experienced the situation as magical and himself almost as if he was animated. He also remembers himself being hyper, which he states is the opposite of what happens to him nowadays. Today, when he is present to an aircraft, he experiences a sense of serenity and calm. The similarity, emotionally, with the initial situation and today is that he experiences joy and "wonder overload." He goes on to further describe his early childhood experience in great detail while at the airport, how the suspense would build up and

how he still today can get butterflies in his stomach and experience great excitement and wonder by just being near an airport. He experiences the childhood situation as nurturing in a sense that this world was introduced to him and has since then always been a part of him. P2 remembers having had the intense experience of ecstasy when the aircraft landed. He remembers all the smells and how he yelled with delight; an experience in which everything in his whole being was present. He states, "I mean, it could have been the second coming of Christ and I couldn't be more excited." He goes on to describe in detail the process involved when the aircraft landed and, in addition, refers to the exterior of the aircraft as "skin." He remembers that his energy level was so intense and that he was so excited that he was holding on to the fence (that was separating the aircraft from the people who were waiting) "for dear life" and that his legs were going up and down like "little pistons." He remembered owning the experience as a very private, magical world. He concludes that, "It became a corner stone for my life and served me, I mean it was a deep, deep, deep emotional foundation that was established."

Lived consequence: In answering the question investigating the lived consequences of the memory, P2 first answers: "It is my life... it became my magic carpet. It provided my food. It provided my entertainment. It provided my security. It provided everything that I could ever value in life above anything else for the next 38 years." He then goes on to give some specific examples. The experience grew with him and he did everything in his power to be close to the world of the aircraft. Already at age 14 he was solo flying and at age 20 he dropped his education completely and started working for an airline. It was in the early days of the airline industry and he worked in all different positions. He did everything from doing the weight sheet, to selling tickets, to loading the baggage, and to fill in for a sick flight attendant. He also experienced some tragic moments in the airline industry. For instance, he stated that "we had a plane crash and half our office was killed. That affected me, that experience. It goes back to fear and love and dissonance and what was planned for the rest of my life at that point was really, it became a lifestyle." Furthermore he describes his life revolving around the world of the aircraft. He would use it as a source of entertainment, flying on his time off from work, just for the purpose of being near an aircraft. In other words, he would not use the aircraft for the purpose of mere transportation. He would also stay up all night waiting for the headlights to appear on the horizon when a company delivered a new type of aircraft. He would also take his days off from work and sit at the airport with a friend (who was a mechanic) and who would teach him to identify the different aircraft models in the sky. He continues to provide what seem to be endless examples of the lived consequences

of the early emotional memory. At the latter part of the interview he states: “I was laid off 11 times in one year between four airlines, and I never missed a day of work... My life was my job. I used to get on a plane in Seattle and I would fly from here to Anchorage, change planes, fly to Hawaii, change planes, fly to L.A., change planes and fly back to Seattle all on my day off and my weekends. I guess this goes back to that beginning as a child too, to be able to sit next to the window and listen to the pitch change of the wind outside the skin and listen to the hydraulics of the aircraft itself, it would just mesmerize me. It just mesmerized me.”

One can start to sense the lived impact of an early emotional memory for these participants. In particular, one can also, after reading these lengthier summaries, get a feel for the vividness of the early emotional memory and how these early emotional situations are almost as if they are re-lived in the present. As Giorgi (1989, p. 108) states about the phenomenon of memory, “... memorial presences... that are awakened belong more to the earlier perceived intentional acts rather than to the contemporaneous memorial intentional act.”

General Psychological Structure

A general psychological structure was discovered during the last step of the data analysis. The structure is held together by constituents which are different from that of elements in that they are context dependent and cannot so to speak “stand on their own.” Not being able to “stand on their own” thus means that one of the constituents cannot in any way account for the whole phenomenon, but instead can only be seen as an essential part forming a whole phenomenon in relation with the other constituents. Hence, every constituent counts in order for the structure of the phenomenon to be intact. If one constituent is removed, the phenomenon will collapse (or perhaps form another phenomenon). To use an analogy from the world of mathematics, if one corner of a triangle is removed, it is not a triangle anymore. In other words, a structure is the holistic understanding of the phenomenon. In addition then, the relationship between the constituents becomes the cornerstone of the dynamic levels of understanding within the structure. The psychological structure of the lived persistent meaning emerging from an early emotional memory is presented here in form of a short paragraph followed by the identification of each specific constituent.

In the context of an early emotional situation in which a person's emotional equilibrium has been significantly challenged, a person incorporates the meaning of a present object as a personal value constituting a foundation of one's emotional life. The meaning of the object is perceived by the person as a constitutive of his or her emotional life and is fully accepted as part of the permanent perception of self that is frequently relived and never challenged. The early emotional situation is vividly remembered throughout life in similar or analogous emotional challenging situations in which the meaning of the object is present. The lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory is revealed by the person's motivation to go to extraordinary efforts throughout life to maintain his or her emotional equilibrium using the meaning of the object as a thematic foundation for his or her emotional coping strategy. To maintain one's emotional equilibrium and to continue perceiving one's self as whole, the person structures daily activities as well as life-long goals in conjunction with the emotional coping strategy (based on the meaning of the object). The meaning of the object is directly used or avoided (as an emotional coping strategy) in real and potential situations in which a person's emotional equilibrium is, or could be, challenged.

The above structure thus includes the five constituents necessary to constitute the psychological structure of the lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory. These are: 1) full acceptance of the meaning of an object as part of one's emotional life 2) a vivid memory of the early emotional situation 3) consistent use of an emotional coping strategy based on the meaning of the object 4) the need to maintain emotional equilibrium through the meaning of the object, and 5) the meaning of the object as a guide for daily activities and life goals.

Constituents and Their Empirical Variations

Whereas the general psychological structure accounts for the whole phenomenon, i.e., a so-called "top-down" presentation, it is also essential from a rigorous human scientific research perspective as well as from a pedagogical point of view that one offers a so-called "bottom-up" presentation of the results. Such a presentation makes the raw data "come alive" vis-à-vis the phenomenological psychological analysis, and perhaps contributes, in a pedagogical sense, to some clarity of the transformation from raw data to psychological human science. This section of the results can provide for such a presentation, simply because the empirical variations provide for a

specific presentation of the concrete account of each constituent. I have chosen to present more in-depth examples for P1 and P2 (mostly following the above summaries) throughout the result and the discussion section, mainly because they provide a good example (from a pedagogical point of view) of empirical variations within the constituents. In addition, Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical variations within the constituents of P1 and P2. I have also included some raw data and findings from a previous phenomenological psychological analysis on memory (i.e., Giorgi, 1989); in order to show how a phenomenon such as the lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory has relevance to the lived experience of memory (or emotional memory), in terms of the general psychological structure in relation to the empirical variations.

Table 1. Empirical variations within the constituents

Constituent	Participant 1	Participant 2
1. Full acceptance of the meaning of an object as part of one's emotional life.	Object: Physiognomic atmosphere.	Object: The meaning of the world of aircrafts.
2. A vivid memory of the early emotional situation.	<p><i>Remembers</i> perceiving the situation as disturbing.</p> <p><i>Remembers</i> perceiving the object (i.e., physiognomic atmosphere) as displeasing.</p> <p><i>Remembers</i> feeling helpless, abandoned, alone, afraid, and uncomfortable.</p> <p><i>Remembers</i> not being able to control the situation and own emotional state.</p>	<p><i>Remembers</i> perceiving the situation as electrifying, thrilling, "magical" (in a positive sense), exciting.</p> <p><i>Remembers</i> perceiving the object (i.e., the airplane) and its "acts" as powerful, impressive, beautiful, and having living attributes.</p> <p><i>Remembers</i> feeling joy, happiness, and overwhelmed by positive emotions.</p>
3. Emotional coping strategy based on the thematic presentation of the meaning of the object.	To maintain emotional equilibrium, consistently avoids the object.	To maintain emotional equilibrium, consistently approaches the object.

Table 1. (cont.)

Constituents	Participant 1	Participant 2
4. The need to maintain emotional equilibrium through the meaning of the object.	Avoids the object in a state of anticipation or leaves situation in a socially inappropriate manner.	Makes sure object is close by at all times, both professionally and during leisure time.
5. The meaning of object as guide for daily activities and life goals.	Moves to a different city to avoid object and act socially inappropriately on a daily basis in order to avoid the object.	Chooses daily activities in the presence of the object, such as using it as a main source for entertainment and leisure activities as well as working as a professional in the industry in which the object is present.

Constituent 1. The first constituent identified was: Full acceptance of the meaning of an object as part of one's emotional life. The choice of the phrase emotional life might at first seem reductionistic of the lived self or perhaps as something theoretical and abstract; however, it is meant here as a concrete phenomenological psychological description. More specifically, the participants described an attempt in trying to maintain the meaning of an object as a personal value constituting a permanent foundation of one's emotional life. It is also essential to point out that the emotional life is not separate from other parts of our lived self or from the self as a whole or from the world of others or from the natural world. Neither is the emotional life meant as an ontological foundation of human emotions.

As can be seen in the summaries above, the participants incorporate a particular meaning of an object. P1 experiences a particular negative physiognomic atmosphere and P2 the world of aircrafts. When present to the meaning of their object in other situations (or possible situations), they experience similar feelings almost as if these feelings were thematically "frozen" in time. Below is a more specific account of the different memories and their lived consequences (as experienced by P1 and P2). Memory 1 being the situation in which the participants remembered the early emotional memory, followed by Memory 2 which is the early emotional memory.

Memory 1. P1 remembers not wanting to visit her great grandmother that day because it was dismal outside and she anticipated her great grandmother's house to have an unpleasant odor. She remembers walking up to the house and in through the door, and being present to a displeasing smell that she describes as mold and old, as well as a displeasing perception of an army green carpet. Furthermore, she remembers the great grandmother's house as dark and dismal, similar to a small cave. She remembers "just sitting there" trying to look as if she had a nice visit.

Memory 2. P1 remembers and describes the experience of walking into the father's girlfriend's house as similar to the great grandmother's. She remembers experiencing the father's girlfriend's house as similar to that of a cold, dark bunker with displeasing smells and colors. She remembers wanting to leave, not feeling at home, or being loved, or welcomed, and experiencing the whole situation as "icky."

Lived consequence. P1 can leave situations in which the negative physiognomic atmosphere is present. Even though the situation might be pleasant, for example, on a date with a pleasant company, she will leave immediately. Or attending college classes or a library where she is present to the memorial object, she leaves or does not attempt to attend. Or moves to another city, in order to avoid visiting her great grandmother's house.

Thus, P1 maintains the meaning of the object, i.e., the negative physiognomic atmosphere, in situations in which similar feelings are present. P1 perceives the negative physiognomic atmosphere, along with some of the concrete environmental attributes such as the moldy smell, the color of the carpet, and so forth, as an object of consciousness or experience and incorporates this object as a personal value constituting her lived emotional life. The lived consequence is that she becomes overly sensitive to this object in moments, or possible moments, in which her emotional equilibrium is/or could be challenged.

Whereas P1 consistently avoids the object, P2 approaches his incorporated object when his emotional equilibrium is/or might be challenged.

Memory 1. P2 remembers being out walking and suddenly aware of the flight pattern overhead that he experiences as "absolutely beautiful." He is aware of a similar comforting feeling of warmth and peace, and how he was once affected as a child. The situation stops him and is experienced as a break of his

momentum of his walk. The peacefulness in the experience brings him back to the age around five years old.

Memory 2. P2 remembers a childhood situation in which he and his mother are on their way to the airport to greet his father who is returning home from a business trip. He describes his state of intense anticipation waiting for the aircraft to land. He remembers experiencing the situation in one way as magical and himself almost as if he was animated and another way also as spiritual. He experiences a sense of joy and “wonder overload.” He remembers that his energy level was so intense and that he was so excited that he was holding on to the fence (that was separating the aircraft from the people who were waiting) “for dear life” and that his legs were going up and down like “little pistons.” He remembers owning the experience as a very private, magical world.

Lived consequence. Worked in the airline business for 38 years. He describes his life revolving around the world of the aircraft. He would use it as a source of entertainment, flying on his time off from work, just for the purpose of being near an aircraft. P2 still today gets butterflies in his stomach just being near an airport.

Although the models of the aircrafts and the roles within the airline industry change throughout the life of this participant, it seems as if the meaning of the world of aircrafts serves as the object that is fully accepted and incorporated as a value by this participant into his lived understanding of his emotional life. During situations in which his emotional equilibrium is challenged (and in order to maintain his emotional equilibrium), this participant makes sure he is close to the world of aircrafts at all times. At times he also goes so far as to bordering on being obsessed about the object in order to maintain his emotional equilibrium.

Thus, in describing the lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory, the general psychological structure revealed the constituent in which the participants incorporate and fully accept the meaning of an object into their emotional life, which appear vital in order for them to maintain a sense of their own emotional equilibrium. In the above two examples the empirical variations are clearly shown in the differences of the nature of the object.

Giorgi’s previous descriptive phenomenological psychological study on memory provides similar findings, although not explicitly described in the

same way as the first constituent due to the fact that the phenomenon is not the same. As mentioned earlier, the structure changes when the phenomenon changes. However, Giorgi provides three examples of the phenomenon of memory. Two of them that could be seen as involving emotions, and one in particular that is an early emotional memory. Let me first cite the raw data of the former.

Today as I walked across the lawn from Stevenson Hall to the bookstore I decided to walk on the grass because it looked like a carpet. As I walked hurriedly at first, I looked down upon the grass and took joy in the greenness of it. I slowed down and began to remember a time over 15 years ago when a boyfriend and I used to sit on the lawn at SRJC and have lunch together. The very same sort of yellow dandelions were on that lawn, and he used to pick them and make minibouquets for me. I felt myself filled with the warmth of the emotion I felt then—and as I got to the bookstore I was smiling in a most peaceful way and felt very loving towards others.

Now I did not consciously call the memory to me—maybe the smell of the grass, the color, the yellow flowers—who knows for sure. It was a moment of remembrance with a nice payoff. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 104)

Giorgi's (1989) analysis of the psychological structure of memory shows some direct relevance to our previous constituent. First, Giorgi (p. 105) concludes that “..the object of the act of memory is a past-lived event that has its own intentional acts and objects.” This is evident in that all subjects (including the study reported on) have a “memorial situation I” and a “memorial situation II” (pp. 104–109). Now, what connects them is a meaning of an object within constrains of one's emotional life. Similar to that of P1 (and the negative physiognomic atmosphere), the woman walking across the grass is present to “the smell of the grass, the color, the yellow flowers.” However, there are also other aspects of the phenomenon that are interesting such as the “grass looking like a carpet” and “the very same sort of yellow dandelions” and the memory of a pleasant lunch dates with an old boyfriend. The participant also experienced the same emotions in Memory 1 as she did in Memory 2. She stated “I felt myself filled with the warmth of the emotion I felt then.” Now, once again, this is very similar to that of the participants in the study reported on, in which the same emotions are present in their accounts of Memory 1 and Memory 2. In addition, it is essential to note that it is not my intention to include

Giorgi's data as evidence and as part of the results;² instead, it is well worth presenting it in this result section, in order to show some relevance with other related phenomena, namely that of memory and perhaps emotional memory.

The other brief description in Giorgi (1989) of an experience of memory that is somewhat more relevant to the present study read as follows:

I was getting ready for the senior ball, and I asked for my mother's help. (I really wanted her to look at me, admire me, praise me—but mainly to be happy for me). I wanted her validation.

She refused to do so. I felt empty inside—and no matter what I looked like in the mirror—it was translated into “not good enough.”

Suddenly I remembered, vividly, standing before my mother at age 4 1/2 begging and crying to continue in kindergarten. She was refusing, loudly screaming and threatening me—complaining that I got my dresses too dirty with watercolors to be able to continue school. I cried hysterically and then stopped short as my mind found one loophole: the one that told me that I would have to go to school in first grade and that she'd have to let me. I would somehow feel present at school, if not always pleased within myself in school.

I flashed back to the dress I was in and decided to go to the dance despite my mother's attempt to prevent me from attending with her approval inside of me. I would be present and functioning, if not exactly comfortable with myself for going. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 104)

In fact, present to the researcher in this brief description was similarities to constituents 1, 2, and 3 of the study reported on. I will elaborate on the first constituent here and return to the the other two, when appropriate.

Giorgi (1989), although having another phenomenon in mind (i.e., memory), discovers the following:

² Note that Giorgi's (1989) intention was not to conduct an extensive descriptive phenomenological psychological study on memory. In his own words (from the introduction), “. . . what is said here should be considered as the tip of an iceberg, as exemplifications of dimensions of learning and memory that could be explored in more depth. In brief, what follows are suggestions of how phenomena of psychology can be approached phenomenologically and some hint of the value that such an approach can have.” (p. 99)

In this case, the memory that ties the two memorial presentations together is practically identical. Each time the subject is seeking approval for an activity (going to the ball; going to kindergarden; each time the mother refuses), and each time the subject's relation to her dress is important (to look pretty enough in it; to wear it without getting dirty).

Hence, the relevance of such a discovery is that lived meanings of certain object or objects connects emotional memories in which similar feelings are present. One could describe the object as, "mother's approval," or perhaps in a more general sense as, "the disapproving significant other" and the feelings and perception of self as "not good enough." However, it is not clear, coming from this brief description, the extent of the lived persistent meaning of this early emotional memory. If nothing else, the comparison with Giorgi's results and raw data provide us with insight how these two phenomena relate and differ to one another in terms of their general psychological structure.

Constituent 2. The second constituent supporting the general psychological structure of the phenomenon and present in the participants' descriptions was: A vivid memory of the early emotional situation. The situation in which they remembered an early emotional situation (i.e., Memory 1), indicated that all participants could describe in great detail a situation in which they had remembered the early emotional situation (i.e., Memory 2). All participants could also provide concrete examples of how Memory 2 was present during several instances of their lives and the participants' continuous detailed description of Memory 2 seem to indicate a vivid memory of the early emotional situation. P1 remembers all perceiving the situation as disturbing; perceiving the object (i.e., physiognomic atmosphere) as displeasing; feeling helpless, abandoned, alone, afraid, and uncomfortable; and not being able to control the situation and her own emotional state. P2 remembers perceiving the early emotional situation as electrifying, thrilling, "magical" (in a positive sense), exciting; perceiving the object (i.e., the airplane) and its "acts" as powerful, impressive, beautiful, and having living attributes; feeling joy, happiness, and overwhelmed by positive emotions.

The vividness of the emotional memory clearly showed the participants re-living the same acts and objects of consciousness constituting the meanings (not the facts) present in the initial early situation (i.e., Memory 2). Let us take a closer look at P1's second memorial situation.

Memory 2. P1 remembers an early childhood situation in which her father had been in a bicycle accident and suffered injuries to his head. The accident took place when out on a bicycle ride on a sunny day with her younger brother and her father and his girlfriend. The love between the father and his girlfriend was not out in the open, although P1 claims that she intuitively knew about it. After the accident, they all went to the father's girlfriend's house so that she could care for the father's injury. She describes the situation as strange and having an alienated type of experience, in which she did not feel as if she was real. The father's girlfriend's house felt unfamiliar and thus strange. While the father's girlfriend was tending to the father's injury, P1 and her younger brother just sat there waiting. She describes this experience as just sitting there and not knowing what to do with herself. She also experienced the father's girlfriend's house as similar to that of a cold, dark bunker with a displeasing smell and colors. P1 felt scared, shocked, abandoned, unsure, alone and her younger brother was behaving recklessly, making her very uncomfortable. P1 had to constantly try to control the younger brother. She also felt sad because another person than her immediate family was tending to her father. In addition, she felt frustrated because she was not being tended to. She wanted to leave, did not feel at home, or loved, or welcomed, and experienced the whole thing as "icky." After a while, the father's girlfriend acknowledged the children and gave them both something to do. The stay at the house was experienced by P1 as "being a very long one" and also "being anti-fun." P1 claims that the worst part of the experience was not to have a choice to be in this uncomfortable place and situation.

Thus, the initial emotional situation seems to be remembered vividly and the acts and objects as part of this situation is being re-lived in the present. Take for example, P1's memory of experiencing the seriousness of the situation and how the unfamiliar atmosphere frightened her and made her feel uncomfortable and "icky."

Now, let us take a look at P2's second memorial situation.

Memory 2. P2 describes the childhood memory in which he and his mother is on the way to the airport to greet his father who is on his way home from a business trip. He starts to describe the whole airport and what it looked like in details and his state of intense anticipation waiting for the aircraft to land. He experienced the situation as magical and himself almost as if he was animated. He also remembers himself being hyper and experiencing "wonder overload." He goes on to further describe how the suspense would build up. He remembers having had the intense experience of ecstasy when the aircraft

landed. He remembers all the smells and how he yelled with delight; an experience in which everything in his whole being was present. He states, “I mean, it could have been the second coming of Christ and I couldn’t be more excited.” He goes on to describe in detail the process involved when the aircraft landed and, in addition, refers to the exterior of the aircraft as “skin.” He remembers that his energy level was so intense and that he was so excited that he was holding on to the fence (that was separating the aircraft from the people who were waiting) “for dear life” and that his legs were going up and down like “little pistons.” He remembered owning the experience as a very private, magical world.

Hence there are clear empirical variations and “opposite” emotional reactions between these two participants and their vivid memory of the early emotional situation, yet evident in the vividness of the memory of the initial emotional situation is the ability to describe such details indicating presences to meanings.

This takes us back to Giorgi’s (1989) study in which a similar form of this constituent is present in the phenomenon of memory. I am presenting the description of the woman who remembered her initial situation as she was getting ready for her senior ball (because it is more of an emotional memory).

Memory 2. Suddenly I remembered, vividly, standing before my mother at age 4 1/2 begging and crying to continue in kindergarten. She was refusing, loudly screaming and threatening me—complaining that I got my dresses too dirty with watercolors to be able to continue school. I cried hysterically and then stopped short as my mind found one loophole: the one that told me that I would have to go to school in first grade and that she’d have to let me. I would somehow feel present at school, if not always pleased within myself in school. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 104)

One can sense even from the above short description provided by Giorgi’s participant that she is re-living the moment and also (as she actually states) remembers the situation vividly. The vividness shows that we tend to as Giorgi (1989, p. 108) claims that “...In remembering, one reawakens intentional acts that are still related to their original noemata.” The vividness is somehow an essential constituent if one would want to talk about this “re-awakening” of the original acts and objects and of memory in general and not some other phenomena.

Constituent 3. On the basis of the participants' approach and/or relationship with the meaning of the object, it is clear how they all have a distinct emotional coping strategy based on the thematic presentation of the meaning of the object. The term emotional coping strategy could be seen as another problematic theory laden term, however, it is meant here to describe the relationship between the need to maintain one's emotional equilibrium (i.e., constituent 4) and a behavior pattern based on the meaning of the object as incorporated into one's emotional life (i.e., constituent 1). For instance, P1 consistently avoids the object by withdrawing from the setting in which it is present (or might be present) whereas P2, on the other hand consistently use the object. All for the purpose of maintaining their emotional equilibrium. Hence the participants consistently use an emotional coping strategy based on their object in order to maintain their emotional equilibrium. The empirical variation lies in the nature of their strategy.

Let us take a look at an example from P1.

Emotional coping strategy (P1). In certain places P1 experiences this empty, alone, frightening, and uncomfortable feelings, and she does not tolerate this but leaves the place. She gives an example of being on a date about two months ago and gone to a place in which she felt uncomfortable. She states that she was not frightened by the person she was on a date with but by the situation. At some point during the dinner she said, "You know what, I have to go" and that she just left the dinner. She describes her behavior as primitive and similar to that of an immature child who just can't take it any more.

Thus, P1 is having dinner at a restaurant, she abruptly leaves the establishment because she is present to a similar physiognomic atmosphere that includes the feelings present in the early emotional memory (empty, alone, frightening, and uncomfortable feelings).³

As an empirical variation, P2 uses the meaning of the object in order to maintain his emotional equilibrium. P2 almost develops a habitual relationship with the object in order to maintain his emotional equilibrium.

³ This is not to claim that the real issue here was that the situation and place was uncomfortable, but rather that P1 connects her behavior (in a meaning sense) to the lived consequences of her early emotional memory.

Emotional coping strategy (P2). P2 describes his life revolving around the world of the aircraft. He would use it as a source of entertainment, flying on his time off from work, just for the purpose of being near an aircraft (in order to be close to all the sensational qualities of the airplane such as the sounds and smells). In other words, he would not use the aircraft for the purpose of mere transportation.

Hence, both P1 and P2 are motivated to go through certain efforts to maintain their emotional equilibrium using the meaning of the object as a thematic foundation for his or her emotional coping strategy.

Also in Giorgi's (1989) study, in the emotional memory (i.e., the woman getting ready for the senior ball) a strategy is developed in order to "fulfill conflicting desires" (p. 107). I would guess from the result above that "fulfilling conflicting desires" comes fairly close to maintaining one's emotional equilibrium, although the difference might be due to the difference of phenomenon. However, let us take a look at Giorgi's data.

Strategy in memory 2. I cried hysterically and then stopped short as my mind found one loophole: the one that told me that I would have to go to school in first grade and that she'd have to let me. I would somehow feel present at school, if not always pleased within myself in school.

Strategy in memory 1. I flashed back to the dress I was in and decided to go to the dance despite my mother's attempt to prevent me from attending with her approval inside of me. I would be present and functioning, if not exactly comfortable with myself for going. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 104)

Giorgi (1989) analyzes the aspect of the strategy in the description above as follows:

What is also amazing is that the subject solves each situation by the same strategy. As a child, she stopped crying when she realized that her mother would have to let her go to first grade, and until then, she would "somehow feel present at school" until she could go, even though she would not always feel pleased about it. It is at that moment that she flashes back to memorial situation I and says that she decided to go the ball anyway and tried to attend with the feeling of her mother's "approval inside of me," but again, not fully comfortable with this decision. Thus, the two memories seem to be supported by a common intentional structure: When the subject wants to fulfill conflicting desires, she decides to fulfill one and makes up the lack of the other

through pretense (in one case her presence at school; in the other her mother's approval), even though she is simultaneously aware that the pretense is not the real thing. (p. 107)

In the above examples we have seen strategies such as avoiding, using, to creating an emotional coping strategy which is also a type of avoidance, perhaps a "cognitive" avoidance. It is difficult to compare Giorgi's (1989) results, mostly because he follows a different question and thus researching a different phenomenon. Nevertheless, if one would consider the possible dialogue between the results of two phenomena, it is striking to find that similarities of the constituent 1, 2, and 3 can also be found as part of the phenomenon of emotional memory.

Constituent 4. The last two constituents do not need as an elaborative section here in the results as do the previous three. This is not to say that the previous three constituents are more important in relation to the structure, but simply to say that the last two are somehow more implicitly imbedded. Thus it seems unnecessary to appear here as redundant and repeat the same specific examples as above. However, it is still necessary to properly describe and to briefly exemplify the last two constituents.

As shown in the previous section, the participants use an emotional coping strategy (based on the meaning of the object) serving the purpose of maintaining their emotional equilibrium, i.e., constituent 4. P1 is very determined to protect her emotional equilibrium at all times and will rather remain at home when she anticipates that she might encounter a negative atmosphere. For example, P1 describes how this childhood memory has affected her in that she has a very limited tolerance for staying in a place she does not want to be. She describes this very limited tolerance to a childish type of fight or flight instinct that she has to respond to. In certain places she experiences these empty, alone, frightening, and uncomfortable feelings, and she does not tolerate this but leaves the place. P2, however, has such a need to maintain his emotional equilibrium through the object of his memory at all times that he makes sure that it is present both in his profession and private life. For instance, P2 states, "It became a cornerstone for my life and served me, I mean it was a deep, deep, deep emotional foundation that was established." He would use the aircraft as a source of entertainment, flying on his time off from work, just for the purpose of being near an aircraft. Hence one can already now start to sense the intricate relationship between the constituents,

especially that between the coping strategy and the need to maintain an emotional equilibrium.

Constituent 5. The last constituent of which the structure consists is the “The meaning of the object as guide for daily activities and life goals.” One could perhaps claim that the fifth constituent is somehow representative of the ultimate form or evidence of the *lived persistent meaning* of an early emotional memory. In a traditional empirical psychological sense this might be true; however, it is far more important from a phenomenological psychological perspective to understand that without this constituent, the structure of the phenomenon would collapse. Hence, it is essential vis-à-vis the general psychological structure and not the evidence that early emotional memories cause people to make certain decisions.

Also this constituent includes some notable empirical variations among the participants. P1 perceives all her daily activities, such as going to school or going on a date, through the object. For example, the meaning of the object even influenced her to move to another city in order not to have to encounter visiting a house of a relative in which the negative physiognomic atmosphere is present. Another example would be that she would quit studying for an important exam in the library or break a date in the restaurant because she experiences the environment as negative, reminiscent of the childhood memory. P2, on the other hand, chooses all his activities in the presence of the object, such as using it as his main source for entertainment and leisure activities as well as working as a professional in the industry, despite extraordinary sacrifices, in which the object is present. P1 states: “I was laid off 11 times in one year between four airlines, and I never missed a day of work . . . My life was my job. I used to get on a plane in Seattle and I would fly from here to Anchorage, change planes, fly to Hawaii, change planes, fly to L.A., change planes and fly back to Seattle all on my day off and my weekends.” Thus daily activities and life goals are experienced as having a psychological meaning in relation to one’s early emotional memory.

Relationship among the Constituents

The earlier presentation in which the constituents are accounted for separately are meant mainly for pedagogical purposes. In reality, the constituents cannot be understood without their intricate relationship with one

another and as part of the whole, i.e., the general psychological structure. This intricate relationship is presented in a short paragraph below.

The meaning of an object as experienced and held on to (whether conscious or not) as a personal value, evolving during the life span as a foundation for the perceived emotional life which is experienced as initially taking shape during an early emotional situation. This early emotional situation is vividly remembered in relation to a person's persistent need to maintain an emotional equilibrium (vis-à-vis a possible situation) based on the meaning of the initial object. As a lived consequence, the meaning of the object is valued to such an extent that emotional coping strategies are used on a daily basis to serve one's emotional equilibrium as well as determining one's life activities and life goals through these strategies (based upon the potential thematic meaning of the object or its sudden occurrence).

Hence, one can see the intricate relationship between the constituents meaning that each of them are dependent upon one another in order to form a general psychological structure of the phenomenon.

Discussion

The following discussion will consist of a critical dialogue between the results from this phenomenological psychological study and some of the literature of the past that presented itself to the researcher as being relevant (in a scientific psychological sense) to the research findings. Note that this critical dialogue could have been far more exhaustive; however, its purpose, in its present presentation, will still be valuable. In order to follow the purpose as set in the introduction, the results will be placed side by side with those of other psychological systems. For organizational purposes, this section will first follow the order based upon the five constituents that support the structure and, secondly, end with a very brief dialogue of the structure's relevance to phenomenological philosophy and then followed by some overall concluding remarks including possible implications for human service, as well as suggestions for future research in the areas of human memory, personality, and life-span developmental psychology.

Full Acceptance of the Meaning of an Object as Part of One's Emotional Life

Interestingly enough, the meaning of the object is fully accepted as a value and part of the permanent perception of one's emotional life that is frequently relived and never challenged. It seems logical not to challenge an essential part of one's lived understanding of one's emotional life since this might imply that one has to go through some major psychological re-organization. In a way, such an observation seems relevant from a classical psychoanalytic point of view, since it is well known that this perspective in psychology does not refer to behavior alone without making reference to the dynamic aspects of the personality. For example, Hall (1954) claimed that a psychosomatic symptom is an expression of repressed material from a traumatic memory. Although psychoanalysis has an "external" view of the human being by perceiving him or her from a deterministic theory, this approach still seems to understand memory in terms of not just memory alone, but as part of our way of "being." Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, p. 83) tries to phenomenologically "translate" the psychoanalytic view of a traumatic memory, and claims that a memory "... does not survive as a representation in the mode of objective consciousness and as a 'dated' moment; it is of its essence to survive only as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality." He goes on to describe the psychoanalytic view of the phenomenon of repression as, "... the transition from first person existence to a sort of abstraction of that existence, which lives on a former experience, or rather on the memory of having had the memory, and so on, until finally only the essential form remains" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p.83).

The incorporation of the meaning of an object as a personal value within one's emotional life comes fairly close to Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962, p.83) comment that memories "survive only as manner of being." Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) statement that the memory has a certain generality applies to the findings of this particular study in the sense that the object incorporated by the Participants only "survived" as the meaning of the object and not a specific object. For instance, Participant 2's first experience of one particular airplane became, during the course of his life, the meaning of the world of airplanes. From a psychoanalytic point of view one could then perhaps say that the participants' objects survived as thematic presentations in their unconscious. Merleau-Ponty (1960/1969,

p. 86) claims that we might not have a better way of expressing, "... that intemporal, that indestructible element in us" which, according to Freud's psychoanalysis, would be the unconscious. However, this study clearly shows that there is a way of describing the meaning of an object (as incorporated and fully accepted during an early emotional situation) and that it has become a part of a person's perception of their emotional life, having such a lived impact on one's whole life. The lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory is, thus, structurally dependent on a person during an early emotional situation fully accepting the meaning of an object as a personal value, experienced as forming an essential foundation of their emotional life and that this meaning (of an object) is persistent throughout life.

The full acceptance of the meaning of the object as an essential part of the participants' emotional life is somehow closely related to the cognitive view of "autobiographical memories." For example, Howe (2000, p. 147) states, "... it is now clear that memories serve to preserve the gist of experience, particularly for those experiences that are personally consequential." In dialogue with the cognitive perspective, the first constituent shares some resemblance to Howe's theory that meaningful experiences are better "stored" if they relate to a person's "cognitive self." Howe writes, "What makes autobiographical memory so special is that it links events with one-self, imbuing a sense of personal importance to the memory for that event" (p.135). Hence, both the phenomenological and the cognitive perspectives agree that a memory has some sort of "special" persistency if it is perceived by the person as relating to their definition of a "self," although the epistemological agreements between the two perspectives are far apart.

It is very difficult to dialogue with biological psychological studies in academic psychology when it comes to the lived understanding of "being a part of somebody's emotional life." Studies in biological psychology seem to look for the anatomy and/or physiology as the "part" of somebody's self. Perhaps most of these studies seek to transform any experienced object (irreal or quasi-real) of consciousness into a real object, so that it can exist in space, time, and causality and become exclusively empirical. In fact, most of the current academic psychological literature on emotional memory is often associated with anatomy/physiology, i.e., with the amygdala in the temporal lobes (e.g., LeDoux, 1993; Davis et al., 1995; Cahill & McGaugh, 1998). The intent of such research is to locate the brain anatomy and/or functions involved in emotional memory. However, as Giorgi

(1989, p. 110) has suggested, “To seek physiological or a chemical model is to try to understand memory externally and nonpsychologically.” The claim is not that biological psychological investigations do not conduct legitimate and important scientific investigations into the phenomenon of emotional memory, however it gives us little insight into the lived experience and thus the psychology of an emotional memory. The fact is that the lived experience cannot be directly accounted for by anatomy or physiology. For instance, a human being cannot experience the actual chemical and/or electrical activity in the nervous system, instead they can experience joy, fear, sadness, and so on. Hence the difference in something being a “part” of somebody’s emotional life can be seen differently if viewed “externally” from the natural sciences as opposed to as part of the lived experience.

If we were to make an inquiry into this “part” of the participants’ emotional life, as contributed by the incorporation of the meaning of the object (not necessarily caused), in the brain, where would we look? Is it perhaps a part of the amygdala and the hippocampus or perhaps some complex cellular activity? Studies focusing on the loss of such regions in the brain seem to emphasize our ability to encounter future emotional situations and how our memory of such situations might decline (e.g., Hamann, 1997; Phelps, 1997). But if we view the lived persistent meaning of our early emotional memories as a “part” of our emotional life, would not biological psychology also be interested in our plausible loss of perception of self? The fundamental question was voiced by Merleau-Ponty (1963): Why are we looking for psychology in anatomy when it can be found in the experience? The challenge that we have in front of us is to find a more meaningful collaboration between natural and human scientific psychology.

A Vivid Memory of the Early Emotional Situation

The participants had a vivid memory of the early emotional situation almost to the point as if they relived the situation while describing it. This is interesting if compared to psychoanalysis and the phenomenon of traumatic memories that are sometimes labeled as being repressed and thus not accessible to consciousness. One of the participants (P1) described a negative emotional memory; however, she did not report this memory as being traumatic. Thus, by trying to dialogue with psychoanalytic findings that

have studied phenomena from the perspective of psychopathology, it is much more difficult to find a common ground. One might claim that the difference between a traumatic memory and a perhaps an alleged non-traumatic emotional memory is the ability to recall the original event more vividly. However, when the repression is “broken through” in, for example, a psychotherapeutic session, the person seems to be able to report an earlier traumatic situation vividly. Terr (1994) claims that once the “door is open” to a traumatic memory it cannot “close” and the person seems to be able to vividly describe in much detail almost every aspect of the situation. However, this observation does not imply in any way that such a memory is declarative and contains accurate factual information; however, it does show that a memory that has a significant meaning in our lives can be described vividly (whether it is “accurate” or not) as if it had been relived in the present.

Some cognitive scientists seem to focus on how well a memory can be retrieved later in life depending on what type of emotional stimulus that may have been present during encoding (i.e., the initial learning process). Cahill and McGaugh (1995) concluded that the retrieval capacity of a long-term memory is better if an emotional stimulus was present during encoding. Others claim that the retrieval capacity is better if the emotional stimulus during encoding had a negative connotation (see for example, Ceitlin et al., 1995; Daum, Flor, Brodbeck & Birbaumer, 1996; Kitayama, 1996). It is interesting to note that the participants in the present study seem to remember their initial emotional situation equally well. However, it is essential to note that a phenomenological study does not measure the factual accuracy of the participants’ memory, it only attempts to describe it as it was for the experiencer. No claim is made that it is accurate. For example, Participant 1 described a negative memory whereas Participant 2 described a positive memory. If any of the descriptions were to stand out as being more vividly remembered, it was that of the positive memory. Nevertheless, Howe, (2000, p.135), a cognitive oriented scientist, claims that it is the distinctiveness of the memory that determines the “special status” of a memory, not because it is negative or positive. In other words, it is the meaning that the memory contains that helps it to survive, not factual constructive representations.

The biological psychological studies that can somehow be relevant to our discussion on the vividness of an emotional memory are those focusing

on the role of the amygdala. Hence, if we surgically remove a part of our brain, it is quite obvious that some functions that we were capable of performing prior to the operation will be somehow diminished. However, the search for the location of emotional memory seems to be endless and the conclusions drawn from current research seem contradictory in nature as they move from one order of reality to another (see, Giorgi, 1970, p.191). For instance, Farb et al. (1992) claim that emotional memory is dependent upon complex cellular activity, whereas Cahill and McGaugh (1998, p. 294) claim that, “Considerable evidence suggest that the amygdala is not a site of long term explicit or declarative memory storage, but serves to influence memory-storage processes in other brain regions, such as the hippocampus, striatum and neocortex.” So it is “interesting” to find so many different places in the brain where emotional memory might reside.

Nevertheless, one could conclude that the vividness of the past (as a constituent) is essential in order for a person to be present to the acts and objects in the situation remembered. Hence, vividness of the past might be an essential constituent of the phenomenon of memory. This was accounted for more fully above in the Results section in which a dialogue with some phenomenological results on memory, as analyzed by Giorgi (1989), was included. However, Giorgi (1989) states that,

...all of the conscious processes that happen in waking life can occur again within memory. Thus we can think, perceive, desire, feel, and so forth but with a memorial index. To attach the memorial index means that we reawaken our own earlier “thinkings,” perceivings, desirings, and the like. This is what differentiates memory from other iterative modes of consciousness such as imagination or dreaming consciousness. (p. 107)

Hence, if one would to talk about the psychology of memory, a certain *vividness of the past* is required in order to separate this phenomenon from imagination, dreams, or other phenomena. Note that other phenomena can also be vivid, but they would not be of the past.

Consistent Use of an Emotional Coping Strategy Based upon the Meaning of the Object

To maintain their daily experience of emotional equilibrium, all participants consistently use an emotional coping strategy based upon the meaning of

the object. This particular constituent seems relevant from a clinical psychological point of view because in a way the participants are repeating a behavioral pattern. Is this not consistent use of the same strategy that is so frequently observed among people suffering from a traumatic memory? For example, Terr (1994) reports on two clinical cases in which one woman consistently is using dissociation to avoid another traumatic reaction and another is using repression. Are not then all so-called defense mechanisms similar to an emotional coping strategy? Giorgi's (1989) results from a phenomenological psychological study on memory (as reported on earlier, in the Results section) also show that people tend to use similar strategies when faced with a situation in which the same meaning is present. Therefore, perhaps, there is some "phenomenal truth" to patterns, defense mechanism, or emotional coping strategies in relation to our emotional life and a meaningful emotional memory whether such a memory is traumatic or not.

Once again, it is rather difficult to find a meaningful dialogue with the biological psychological research results and the present phenomenological findings. Nevertheless, Davis et al. (1995) comes close in his research on rats in which he used a fear-potentiated startle paradigm in which the rat kept avoiding the electrical shocks. Davis et al. (1995) concluded that the "amygdala and its efferent projections to the hypothalamus and the brainstem form a central fear system" (p. 32). Thus the rat avoided the shocks, which can be seen as an emotional coping strategy, but does the rat really have an emotional memory? How do these researchers know if they are measuring an emotional memory? These researchers might just as well be measuring emotional recognition, emotional repetition, or emotional reaction to a stimulus. It seems interesting that researchers who conduct animal studies are making claims that they are studying a certain psychological phenomenon, claims that only could be possible if they were capable of entering the animals' stream of consciousness.

The Need to Maintain Emotional Equilibrium through the Meaning of the Object

The consistent use of an emotional coping strategy based upon the meaning of the object (as integrated as a part of the lived understanding of one's emotional life) rests on the need to maintain emotional equilibrium through the meaning of the object. For example, Participant 1 will go to

extraordinary efforts in order to avoid the physiognomic atmosphere, whereas Participant 2 would make sure he is in contact with the world of aircrafts at all times. Clinical psychologists can probably list thousands of such needs for objects of people suffering from the lived persistent meaning that has emerged from a traumatic memory. One speculation is that such a psychopathological attachment to objects that might have emerged from a traumatic memory could be what clinicians refer to as a “phobia” (c.f., avoidance) and/or “dependency” (c.f., making sure that object is close by).

The Meaning of the Object as Guide for Daily Activities and Life Goals

The last constituent of the structure is the meaning of the object as a guide for the participants’ daily activities and life goals. The participants are structuring their lives based on the object they incorporated (during the initial emotional situation) as a personal value forming the foundation of their emotional life. As noted earlier, this constituent points to the lived persistent meaning of an early emotional event and thus such a result does not, in any way, imply a natural scientific cause and effect relationship between the early emotional memory and the impact on a human life. In other words, the true cause of an individual’s life could just as well have been due to some basic biological predisposition; however, the lived consequence has a lived motive. As a comparison, clinical psychologists have noted that traumatic memories have a similar type of powerful influence on people’s daily activities and life goals. Take for example, a person suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association (1994, p. 428), a person diagnosed with PTSD will most likely make certain “efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma.” Although the purpose of the present study is not to discuss the diagnostic criteria of PTSD, it is certainly interesting to note that people who possibly do not fit the diagnostic criteria of a psychopathology might have similar structures of behavior.

The Structure and Phenomenological Philosophy

Another area that we can seek a dialogue with is the philosophical; however, I have chosen not to do so extensively, mostly because philosophical

methods are different from human scientific methods and philosophy (in comparison to human science) is also interested in different phenomena (see Giorgi, 2000a, 2000b, for a more extensive discussion between phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological science). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Casey (1987), a phenomenological philosopher, stated that the emotional aspects of a memory refer to the memory's "atmosphere" or "aura." Although the present research has revealed the possibility that Participant 1's object of memory is the physiognomic atmosphere, it is not clear if Casey refers to the same phenomenon. The difference could be rooted in the type of inquiry (i.e., philosophical versus scientific). Also, Casey is interested in memory in general, whereas the present research has focused on the lived persistent meaning of an early emotional memory. Nevertheless, if the differences show some possible similarities, it is worth noting that the present research suggests that the emotional aspect of a memory is not limited to the "atmosphere." In addition, Husserl (1991) has referred memory as belonging to that of internal-time consciousness and his philosophical insights have been valuable in order to understand that one can be present to a memory in the *now* and experience the acts and objects from the initial situation as if one were re-living those in the present; hence, making the acts and objects of a memory presentational. On the other hand, Bachelard (1958/1994, p. 9) puts memory in close relation to space and claims that "memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are." This philosophical insight somehow relates to all the three memories as they are the early emotional memories that stand out and have the persistency to live on as a part of the participants' emotional life. One could then claim that the meaning of the object as present in the early emotional memory (e.g., atmosphere, aircraft) is localized in the space of the person's closest intimacy, their emotional life. In a sense then, following Bachelard, having accepted the meaning of an object into one's lived understanding of one's emotional life, whether it is the world of aircrafts or a negative physiognomic atmosphere, the meaning of the object has become a matter of intimate, permanent, personal space.

Concluding Remarks

The meaning of the object has such an influence that the participants perceive it as a personal value forming an essential part of their lived

emotional life; they have a vivid memory of what they perceive as the situation in which the acceptance of the personal value took place; they perceive the meaning of the object as relating to their fundamental emotional needs; they use or avoid the object as a strategy to deal with experiences of their personal emotional equilibrium; and they guide their daily activities and some life goals, all related in some way to the meaning of the object. As mentioned in the Results section, all these constituents support the general psychological structure of the lived persistent meaning emerging from an early emotional memory. In other words, if one constituent would be removed, the structure would collapse. Most of these constituents have in one form or another been recognized and studied by different scientists; however, nobody has studied the phenomenon from a rigorous and descriptive human scientific approach in which the entire phenomenon has been accounted for. The main goal of using the descriptive phenomenological psychological method was to reveal the whole phenomenon with its supporting constituents instead of using traditional natural scientific psychology in which the phenomenon would be reduced to elements and perhaps cause-and-effect or correlational type of analyses between variables. The second goal was to stay true to the descriptive mode of qualitative research and use the phenomenological reduction throughout the data analysis in order to dwell with the data until meanings were discovered.

The constant difficulties in engaging in a meaningful dialogue with biological psychological studies on emotional memory is due to the fact that a phenomenological psychological approach does not study anatomy or physiology but instead tries to describe the acts and objects of consciousness vis-à-vis the phenomenon (as described by the participants). Although biological psychological studies are legitimate attempts to conduct science, they do not always attempt to reveal the lived aspects of the phenomenon. On the other hand, cognitive scientists have come close to some aspects of the phenomenon as lived, especially Howe (2000); however the perspective still looks at the phenomenon from a pre-established theoretical framework in which the human being is analogously viewed as functioning similarly to a machine (e.g., an information processing device). Howe's (2000) focus on the importance of *the meaning of experiences* is opening up for fruitful future dialogue with phenomenological psychological findings. Howe (2000) stresses to the scientific community that new methods are

needed in order to better understand the fate of early memories (p. 145). What Howe does not seem to know is that qualitative methods have existed for decades that follow the general criteria of science and that can reveal such aspects of a phenomenon that is usually only present to practitioners. In addition, more research is also needed having to do with the lived persistent meaning of a non-emotional memory in order to have a better dialogue with findings in cognitive science and also to determine if some of the aspects of the present study can be generalized to a non-emotional memory. It is possible that the tremendous impact these memories had on the participants' life and the significant meaning they all attached to the object was due to the strong emotions being present.

The study reported on belongs first and foremost in the realms of life-span developmental psychology and also in a sense personality psychology. Life-span developmental psychology is more often than not associated with academic psychology, although the research from this field are perhaps read by most practicing professionals in the human service arena; most likely by counselors or clinical psychologists as well as social workers and nurses, just to name a few. For example, if the human service professional could understand that some clients behave in relation to their emotional life which has a strong *lived foothold* to an early emotional memory, they would have access to a personal world that gives meaning to the psychological structure of their clients' behavior. The practicing human service profession could, for example, structure the therapeutic sessions or caring situations from the meaning of the object in relation to the client's entire lifespan and how it directly relates to a person's emotional world in the *now*. If, let us say, a counselor met with P1, for example, would it not be essential to help her to bring psychological clarity to the relationship between the persistent meaning of her early emotional memory and her emotional world and emotional coping strategy. If nothing else, maybe it would help her to attend class or remain in the library when studying for an exam. Evidently, this type of psychology is nothing new, human service professionals have known about this for a very long time. However, the history of psychology tells us that such insights have more often than not been structured to fit into an already deterministic developmental model (e.g., psychoanalytic theory) or a natural scientific explanation (e.g., biological psychology) or a theoretical cognitive model or considered as

part of common sense knowledge of the practicing clinician. Hence, the psychological structure discovered in this study could thus provide for a holistic, human scientific foundation of the phenomenon as seen from the lived experience, and thus contribute to a meaningful human service of the *whole* person throughout a person's *whole* lifespan.

This research has made a small contribution to the understanding of the lived persistent meaning of early emotional memories by using the descriptive phenomenological psychological method. The phenomenon is very complex and reveals dynamic complicated psychological aspects, which directly suggest that much more research is vital in order to reach a better understanding of the phenomenon. In the meantime we can conclude that some peoples' early emotional memory lives on throughout their life-span as an integral and essential aspect of their emotional world. As James (1890/1950, p.650) once wrote, "Memory requires more than mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in my past."

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