

# Chapter 8

## The Case for the Psychobiography as a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Case Study: A New Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Method of Analysis for Life-Narrative Investigations



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**Abstract** Both description and interpretive understanding are the long established hallmarks of phenomenology and phenomenological research. If the psychobiography as a case study includes description and interpretation it can be aligned with phenomenology. As such, it can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. With an emphasis on life-narrative, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study requires a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis. While there are existing methods of both narrative and life-narrative analysis, they are not strictly phenomenological-hermeneutical. A new method of analysis for psychobiographical and other life-narrative research is presented. It is referred to as ‘Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis’ (PLA). Furthermore, the notion of the researcher’s unconscious bias is introduced and included in this new method of analysis. It is termed the ‘researcher’s transferential implant’.

**Keywords** Psychobiography · Phenomenological · Hermeneutic · Unconscious bias · Life-narrative

### 8.1 Introduction

The need to ‘psychobiographize’ or to make psychological sense of a biography has a long history dating back to the Greek times when the lives of significant persons were documented (McAdams, 1988; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Since then the study of lives has undergone major methodological changes and evolved and reappeared in a variety of forms (Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 2005). The study of lives, of which the psy-

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chobiography is one form, is in contemporary times allied with narrative psychology and its associated research methods. The contemporary psychobiography is defined as the study of a single life across the entire lifespan with the purpose to develop psychological theory pertaining to personality development (Schultz, 2001, 2005a). McAdams (1988, 1993, 1997) and Schultz (2005b) both assert that the examined life-narrative should be on a 'finished' life as opposed to persons still living. Fouché and van Niekerk (2010) defined it as a form of life history research. The psychobiography uses psychological theory as a lens to illuminate the life story (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) but at the same time, the life story in turn explores the lens itself. This is the value of the psychobiography. In this regard, the psychobiography may thus be seen as an assimilation of, and blending between, biography and psychology (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) to generate theoretical insight into, and understanding of, the individual.

In recent years, different methods to collect, manage and analyse the data in the psychobiography has been endorsed. Such methods have been designed by seminal theorists in the field of psychobiographical research, such as Alexander (1990), Schultz (2005b) and McAdams (1988, 1997). Moreover, in terms of research methods, the psychobiography has been positioned as a case study and as life-narrative research (Anderson, 1981; Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994, 2007; Ponterotto, 2013; Runyan, 1982a, 1982b; 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 1997, 2003, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). The psychobiography, however, as an investigation of a life-narrative, has not been positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. Furthermore, while there are established methods for narrative analysis (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Gergen & Gergen, 1993; Hyvärinen, 2007) and life-narrative analysis in psychobiographical research (Alexander, 1990; McAdams, 1988, 1997; Schultz, 2005b) they are not phenomenological-hermeneutic methods. The well-known phenomenological research method, known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as developed by Smith (2004, 2008, 2011) commonly used in phenomenological research, is not designed to investigate a life-narrative and, thus, not suitable. A new phenomenological-hermeneutic method suitable for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic life-narrative investigation is thus required. This is not to suggest that other qualitative research methods currently used in the contemporary psychobiography are not suitable or invalid. When it is approached, however, specifically as phenomenological-hermeneutic, the psychobiography requires a matching method.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, to position the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. This is achieved by linking the psychobiography to the ideology of phenomenology and its related phenomenological research approaches. Secondly, to present a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis suitable for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. This new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of life-narrative analysis is called 'Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis' (PLA).

Furthermore, the notion of the researcher's unconscious bias, something not linked to phenomenology and phenomenological research, is introduced and included in this new method. It is suggested that unconscious bias has an impact on the interpretation of the life-narrative within the psychobiography, and it needs to be managed methodologically. The unconscious bias is referred to as the 'researcher's transferential implant'.

## 8.2 Structure of the Chapter

The chapter content is a theoretical chapter with two aims. The structure of the chapter is to logically fulfil these two aims. The chapter thus presents the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. In order to achieve this, the structure of the chapter is as follows: (a) a brief presentation of the psychobiography as research is presented, and (b) links are made between the psychobiography and phenomenology as well as phenomenological research. The second part of the structure of the chapter is associated with the second aim which includes a presentation of a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis that is aligned with the positioning of the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study.

## 8.3 The Psychobiography as a Method of Inquiry

"Where is the person in personality research?" cried out Rae Carlson in 1971. At the time, in the previous decades (1950s–1960s) research methods in psychology had been predominantly quantitative, nesting within the discourse of positivism. This focus on quantitative methods had not always been the case. The psychobiography by Freud on Leonardo da Vinci (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 2005; Simonton, 2003) was recognised as using idiographic methods that put the individual narrative as the pivotal centre of investigations into life and living. Perhaps the development of psychoanalysis was the unacknowledged methodological renewal of the focus on the individual and biography as a research unit in terms of theory building (as Dilthey noted earlier in the previous century, see Mullen, 2019). Other psychobiographies were to follow, such as Erik Erikson's work on Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther. While these early psychobiographical research projects were criticized for their lack of methodological rigor, the trend to focus on life narrative research had (re)taken root in psychology. Allport and Murray, working in the field of personality psychology in the 1930s and 1940s, advocated for the use of biography, and thus, life narrative research, as a way to begin to understand the development of personality. To this end, they contributed substantially to the development of both personality research and modern psychobiographical research (Kőváry, 2011). A theoretical slump or decline in interest in psychobiographical research, however, occurred in the 1950s

and 1960s because of the attention paid by psychologists to quantitative research methods. In the 1970s, Carlson was not alone in the call to return to biography, narrative research, and idiographic methods that located the individual life-narrative as a dynamic source of knowledge and information; information not only about human development, but about life itself. Psychology in the late 1960s and 1970s began to shift towards research methods that ostensibly aimed to put back into psychology the unique individual person.

The so-called ‘narrative turn’ in psychology in the 1980s (Bruner, 1986; László, 2008) was an important development in research methodologies because it heralded the notion of using biography as a story, or the storying of individual lives, in relation to psychology and theory building.

Within the narrative turn in psychology, narrative itself in research has a long history, long before narrative analysis occurred. At an early stage, narratives were used as factual resources. This evolved into the study of narratives as texts with a particular form (a hermeneutic exegesis, as in the sense of studying texts within scripture). More recently, shifts occurred towards more than a single narrative text into the study of life-narratives and storytelling of individuals so as to discover their personality structure and personal identity. “Narratives bring into the open rich, detailed and often personal perspectives” (Hyvärinen, 2007, p. 447). It is easy, however, to misunderstand narrative *simply* as a method, and narratives *as resources* with which to explore the phenomena of which the narratives make a descriptive account (Hyvärinen, 2007).

A more ambitious version of narrative analysis emerges from the social constructionist notion that narratives already always are part of the constitution of the social, cultural, and political world (Bruner, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 1993; Hyvärinen, 2007). Psychobiography as a particular form of narrative research—the *life-narrative* investigation of an individual life—contributed to the value of the narrative as both *resource* and *method* with a focus on description and interpretation - core to qualitative research methods. In the history of personality psychology and psychoanalysis, life experiences were, therefore, a profound source of understanding existence. Psychobiography as a narrative method became a crucial medium for contributing to this important understanding. The growing appreciation of, and value in, idiographic and interpretative research methods, further set the scene for the development of the contemporary psychobiography.

At around the same time as the emergence of the narrative turn, the groundbreaking works of pioneers within the field of psychobiography, such as Runyan (2019), McAdams (2019), Schultz, Carlson, Winter, Elms, Anderson (2019), Alexander, Simonton, and others, sought to design a clear and consensual agreement as to the theoretical foundation of, and good methodological practice when doing, a ‘good psychobiography’. Stolorow (see his introduction to this book—Foreword) and Atwood (2019) (1984) blended phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory (self psychology) to advocate for a shifted towards the inclusion of the use of the concept of intersubjectivity. Their book, *Faces in a cloud: Subjectivity in Personality Theory* (1979) suggested the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity on that which is researched; specifically the subjective sources of personality theories of the 20th century. This

book is one of the important references for contemporary psychobiographical and the dynamics of personal subjectivity (Kőváry, 2011).

Schultz (2005b) identified markers for both good and bad psychobiographies that become central for many aspiring psychobiographers treading into this field of research. Methods of narrative analysis, however, have existed since the narrative turn in the social sciences. Early versions of narrative analysis can be identified by the models of Vladimir Propp (1968) and Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997). Narrative analysis has evolved since then and has been successfully used by other seminal scholars of narrativity, such as Bamberg (2006), Bruner (1991), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Czarniawska (2004), Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), Gergen and Gergen (1993), Riessman (1993, 2001) to name but a few.

These methods of narrative analysis, however, as indicated, are not phenomenological-hermeneutical in approach. These methods are mostly aligned with other theoretical perspectives of narratives and life-narratives such as the social constructionist approach. As it is life-narrative research within the framework of personality psychology, the psychobiography has its own narrativity methods. These methods, however, are also not phenomenological-hermeneutical in approach because psychobiography itself is not approached as such.

In terms of research, the case has been made that the psychobiography, as an investigation into a life-narrative, is a case study (Anderson, 1981; Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994, 2007; Ponterotto, 2013; Runyan, 1982a, 1982b; 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 2003, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Moreover, the psychobiography can be both a single case study and a 'multiple case psychobiography' (Isaacson, 2005) pointing to the notion that more than one individual life can be investigated in one single psychobiography.

There are, however, various types of case studies in various settings, and with various foci or units of investigation, adopting various theoretical frameworks to make sense of the case. Given the emphasis on life-narrative, the psychobiography is a type of case study—a narrative case study, or a case study of a life-narrative. Moreover, the case has been made for the psychobiography as a psychological case study because it uses psychological theories to make sense of the individual life (Elms, 1994, 2007; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2011; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). In this sense, the psychobiography is a psychological life-narrative case study with the purpose of psychological theory development. Not all psychological case studies are, however, psychobiographical, and not all narrative (as opposed to life-narrative) research is psychological or psychobiographical.

## 8.4 Phenomenology, Phenomenological Research, and Psychobiography

Both description and interpretive understanding are the long established hallmarks of phenomenology and phenomenological research. If the psychobiography as a case

study includes description and interpretation it can be aligned with phenomenology, and as such, it can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. In order to make the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study, connections are made between it and phenomenology as well as research values associated with phenomenological research.

It should be noted that it is not possible to present a detailed description of the complexities and nuances of the different branches of phenomenology that have emerged. Instead, only what is relevant to making the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is presented.

Phenomenology has a rich history rooted in early twentieth century continental European philosophy. Phenomenology is not easy to define because of this rich and long history that includes several philosophical branches, developments, and deviations. In its broadest definition, phenomenology is a philosophical approach to human experience (Smith, 2008). It focuses on the description of the essential nature of an experience, or the ‘essence of a phenomenon’ (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011). Phenomenology is thus concerned with experience, or more accurately, with lived experience obtained through detailed or ‘thick’ description of those experiences (Smith, 2004, 2008). The description of experience or lived experience is, therefore, given a central position in phenomenology.

In phenomenological research, the honouring and centralising of the description of the phenomenon or experience in order to begin to understand the essence of the experience, is rooted in the early work of one of the central figures in developing ‘descriptive phenomenology’—Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). His distinctive theory of phenomenology he called ‘pure phenomenology’, which he later termed ‘transcendental phenomenology’ (Husserl, 1970). Husserl (1970) aimed for phenomenology to provide a rigorous and unbiased study of life experiences as they appear, (what he referred to as ‘*back to the things themselves*’) in order to come to an understanding of such experiences. As experience is related to consciousness, and that consciousness, according to him, is always conscious of something, Husserl’s phenomenology is defined as the study of human consciousness (Giorgi, 2010).

#### ***8.4.1 The Concept of the Life-World***

In this regard, Husserl’s particular brand of phenomenology included various concepts related to human consciousness, experience, and human living. Concepts such as ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘life-world’ or ‘*Lebenswelt*’<sup>1</sup> (Giorgi, 2010) became central to phenomenology, and foreshadowed much of the later psychological

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<sup>1</sup>The European life philosophy or the *Lebensphilosophie* of the late 19th century concerned the value of studying the human ‘individuum’ in an idiographic way. It supported the importance of the psycho-biographical approach to understanding the individual life, and thus it had links to the value of detailed descriptions of experiences of that life, a hallmark of phenomenology.

notions regarding the value of understanding individual experience within a social-psychological context of both self and world.

In phenomenology, not only is the description of the lived experience validated as a worthy unit of analysis and contemplation, the meanings that individuals attach to their lived experiences are also prioritised. Meanings attached to experience are subjective. Thus asking different individuals about similar experiences will often result in varied responses and meanings because individuals are different. In this sense, investigation into human experience can be an investigation into difference, and thus into individuality and personality. It can be said that phenomenology is an investigation into personality difference through its rich description of lived experience.

In a sense, phenomenology concerns the study of experience as it manifests itself, and is contextualised, in the life-world or *lebenswelt* of an individual. This core concern with human experience, and its description, was translated into distinct phenomenological research methods of inquiry. Such phenomenological research has the overarching aim to describe lived experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008) and the meaning or understanding of the lived experience for the individual experiencing it (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Smith & Eaton, 2007). Description is, therefore, the central analytic method in phenomenology and phenomenological research (McLeod, 2001). A phenomenological case study would, therefore, seek to describe, in as much detail as possible, the meaning of lived experiences for individuals (Galvin & Todres, 2012). In other words, the purpose of phenomenological research, and the methods adopted, is to obtain a clear, precise, and systematic description of human experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

In phenomenology, with its focus on description and meaning or interpretation of lived experience, there were two main theoretical deviations and developments of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. These extensions of Husserl's phenomenology are of 'existence' and 'phenomenological hermeneutics' (Bengtsson, 2013). These directions originated in Heidegger's (1927/1962) early philosophy, and have since been expanded by other leading phenomenologists, such as Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty in the phenomenology of 'existence', and by Gadamer and Ricoeur, in 'phenomenological hermeneutics'.

#### 8.4.2 *Phenomenological Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics in phenomenology and phenomenological research is rooted in the seminal works of early hermeneutic theorists, namely Dilthey, Heidegger, Schleiermacher, and Gadamer. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and, later, William Dilthey (1833–1911) are cited as the early pioneers who contributed to the modern beginnings of hermeneutics or the interpretive alternative in Western philosophy (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Dilthey's work on hermeneutics arguably foreshadowed and prepared for the important shift from epistemological understanding towards an ontological understanding in the human or cultural sciences (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Dilthey (1883/1989) emphasized the value of studying the unique or whole

‘individuum’ as a way to understand the human condition. He can, therefore, be seen as a pioneer of the idiographic approach in research. In this regard, Dilthey (1989) also came to view biography as an essential tool in understanding such life.

Hermeneutics is defined as the theory and practice of the interpretation of the meaning of texts (Smith, 2011) (See Kóváry, 2019; Mullen, 2019). The origin of hermeneutics in its modern day use dates back to the 17th century, where it gained value in the context of biblical studies (Crotty, 1998; McManus Holroyd, 2007). Since the 17th century, hermeneutics has been adapted in other areas of scholarship and to text other than scriptures (McManus Holroyd, 2007). The primary concern of hermeneutics is the philosophy of understanding. Understanding is defined as the original distinguishing mark of the being of human life itself (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 259). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, all understanding is ultimately self-understanding; it is the individual’s mode of being (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

Hermeneutics proposes that there is no such thing as measuring behaviour or measuring life experiences in order to gain understanding. Instead, investigation, or the process of discovery, is prompted through such things as encounters with individuals and their life-worlds (McManus Holroyd, 2007) either directly (interviews) or indirectly (archival material). The interpretive hermeneutic research tradition proposes that in all journeys of discovery, such as those involving human experience and human research, one can never hope to discover everything fully. In other words, when embarking on this type of practical philosophical inquiry, it is important to note that all resulting understanding will never be complete: some aspects of an experience will remain undiscovered (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

In phenomenological hermeneutics, both Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1977) identify language as integral to the hermeneutics of understanding: it is in language that our world is made meaningfully, and thus, in how the world is disclosed to us (McManus Holroyd, 2007). The world that is spoken of here is not the environmental scientific world, but the life-world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). This has a direct relation to phenomenological research and the phenomenological aim to describe not only the experience but also to document and understand the meanings attached to experience through the use of language. The avenue that makes this understanding of the world possible is language (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Language is where the world exists or resides, and hermeneutic experience, as we understand it, occurs in and through language; it is language that reveals and discloses the world to us (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

In this regard, Heidegger made the case for a *phenomenological hermeneutics*. He asserted that access to meaning is always through hermeneutics or interpretation. For him, some things are not always apparent or seen, but have a latent nature and this must be discovered too. Thus Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1960/1989) were concerned with examining things that may be latent or disguised, as well as examining the manifest things as they may appear to one in the world. Heidegger was concerned with the conceptual basis of existence, or the concept of ‘worldliness’.

This worldliness concerns the notion of self-other as reciprocal in influence, as co-constitutional, thus fore-grounding the concept of ‘inter-subjectively’ which permeates so much of psychology and related social science disciplines. He asserted



that hermeneutics was not a simple issue because of this co-constitutional nature of self and the world. Hermeneutics, according to Heidegger, or the event of understanding, is rooted in an encounter with personal experiences of being here in this world, and thus, the essential structures of meaning is located in the basic categories of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

### 8.4.3 *The Notion of Fore-Structures and the Co-construction of Meaning*

Linked to this is what interpretive hermeneutic understanding offers phenomenological researchers who wish to discover the meaning of things is the ability to begin to see the way in which such researchers' blind attachment to certain classifications and categorizations about the world limit how they understand and come to know the world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Heidegger, as explained by Gadamer (1960/1989) speaks at great length about the disclosure of the *fore-structure* of meaning or understanding in the hermeneutic experience. Heidegger (1927/1962) describes this fore-structure is an innate capacity that exists in all individuals to intuit the meaning of being (McManus Holroyd, 2007). What the fore-structure offers is a shadowy grasp of the nature of existence (McManus Holroyd, 2007). More specifically, what is implied is that every encounter we have is grounded by something that exists in advance—an already decided way of conceiving that which we are interested in (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

Within the fore-structure of understanding, whenever we know and understand something, the interpretation is founded essentially upon what Heidegger (1927/1962) frames as our fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception (McManus Holroyd, 2007). What all of this guides us to understand is that there can never be a presuppositionless stance in any act of interpretation (McManus Holroyd, 2007) and thus, awareness of this is commonly taken for granted as an aspect of our existence—that we possess a fore-structure of understanding—is what helps us to surrender our attachments to how we currently know and understand the world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Fore-structures are thus the modern day understanding of personal bias.

Phenomenological hermeneutics is of particular relevance to phenomenological research methods. The subjective nature of a life-world lends itself to the implication that individuals can experience the same phenomenon differently. Because there are variances in how individuals' experience the same phenomena, Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes to understand human experience as an interpretative and co-constructed process (Willig, 2008). This means that in a phenomenological research process, the researcher's life-world can blend and merge with that of the researched/the participant, resulting in a co-creation or co-construction of meaning (Willig, 2008). This co-construction of meaning is a dynamic process, and as such, the researcher's personal bias should be explored and made explicit as it has an influ-

ence on the kinds of inquiries that take place because such inquiries are part of the subjectivity of the researcher (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Willig, 2008).

In phenomenological hermeneutics, given the notion of inter-subjectivity, it is not possible for researchers to completely set aside or blatantly bracket their perspective and interpretations (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). In fact the presence of the researcher's own history and experiences are resources in understanding the experience under investigation. Smith (2004, p. 45) refers to this as the "biographical presence" of the researcher which is needed to make sense of what is said or described by the other. From a hermeneutic view point, the interpretation of lived experience undergoes a "double hermeneutic" process (Smith & Eaton, 2007, p. 36). Sullivan, Gibson, and Riley (2012) define double hermeneutic as a complex process of interpretation which emphasises that in the same way that people seek to make sense of (interpret) their life experience, so the phenomenological researcher needs to interpret individual's interpretation of those experiences (Smith & Eaton, 2007) thus all experience that is described between researcher and researched is already interpreted by the researched, and again by the researcher.

Grasped in this sense, the hermeneutic process may be viewed from two vantage points. Firstly, the researcher makes an effort to make sense of the participant's meaning making. Secondly, while the researcher assumes an empathic stance towards being on the 'side' of the participant, he or she is also expected to assume a critical and questioning stance when analysing the text (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2011). This researcher bias should, however, not dominate in the research process. Therefore, it is important that any researcher implementing phenomenological research minimise the effect of personal bias (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Willig, 2008). Heidegger called for researchers to actively engage in a process of personal reflection rather than to adopt a non-realistic stance of non-engagement, so as to increase awareness of preconceptions, and the effect that one's preconceived ideas can have on research processes and research findings (Langdridge, 2007).

This approach of personal reflexivity ties in with qualitative research methods that acknowledge that suspended judgment is not a realistic goal: researchers are continuously interpreting others experiences through the tinted lens of their own experiences.

In summary, phenomenology regards the description and understanding of lived experience as they are encountered, engaged with, and lived through of prime value in understanding human existence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Phenomenological-hermeneutics has the aim to describe and interpret, or make meaning of, the experience as it is experienced in the context of 'worldliness'.

#### ***8.4.4 The Case for the Psychobiography as a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Case Study***

Given phenomenology's approach to human experience, as described above, and its related research methods that are concerned with lived experience obtained through description (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011) the psychobiography also seeks to explicate, through description, lived experience and, as such, can be positioned as a phenomenological case study. Moreover, as a phenomenological case study, the psychobiography also focuses on interpretation. In this context, the psychobiography is distinctly hermeneutic. As such, the psychobiography can be more accurately positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study.

In this context, the psychobiography is essentially a series of phenomenological descriptions and interpretations of lived experiences of the selected individual's life-narrative. From within this perspective, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study pays watchful attention to both a) description of the life-narrative, and b) the meaning attributed to such experience. In other words, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is, therefore, meticulously aligned to the philosophical underpinnings of both descriptive phenomenology and interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology in that it involves detailed description of the life-narrative as well as the hermeneutics of the life lived. It must be noted, however, that the phenomenological researcher is not always a psychobiographer but all psychobiographical research can be approached as phenomenological-hermeneutic in nature.

Moreover, phenomenology advocates that the exploration of the lived experience must necessarily be within a context. Research methods within the phenomenological conceptual framework emphasize context (as does other qualitative research). The implication is that psychosocial and historical-cultural factors are taken into account when investigating lived experience. The psychobiography as phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is aligned to research contextualization principles of phenomenology, and can be viewed as not only appreciative of contextual factors, but insightfully informed by context.

Additionally, the philosophy of phenomenological research methods and the psychobiography itself recognise the inter-connectedness between the researcher and the researched. Both insist on declarations regarding their attachments to certain assumptions about the world because these limit how understanding is achieved. The notion of the disclosure of fore-structures and researcher reflexivity, applied to the psychobiography, has direct ideological underpinnings to phenomenology.

Furthermore, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study undergoes a "double hermeneutic" process (Smith & Eaton, 2007, p. 36) in that it interprets the selected individual's experiences (primary sources) as well as other people's interpretations (secondary sources) of those same experiences. In this setting, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is thus subject to the inevitable methodological position whereby the researcher's life-world

blend, mix, and flow together with the life-world of the researched, resulting in a co-construction of the hermeneutics of meaning.

Language is central in phenomenology as it is for the psychobiography. As Gadamer (1977) noted language in phenomenology is integral to the hermeneutics of understanding: it is in language that our world is made meaningfully. The psychobiography is linked to the phenomenology of language in that it too is concerned with the language in which that life-narrative is conveyed and understood. This has a direct relation to hermeneutics in the psychobiography. In the psychobiography, because the meanings that are attached to experience are intimately conveyed through the use of language, close attention to the use of language is encouraged by the inclusion of the actual words of the individual under investigation. This inclusion of the actual words used by the selected individual in the psychobiography is a uniquely phenomenological stance towards research, and the role of language in the process of discovery.

#### ***8.4.5 A New Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Life-Narrative Method of Analysis***

A psychobiography is a phenomenological description and hermeneutic understanding of a life-narrative. It can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study that investigates life-narrative. In this light, it focuses on a series of chronologically connecting or connective lived experiences that make up such a life. Narrative research methods of analysis of the individual life have been successfully used in the psychobiography, such as those structured and documented by Alexander (1990), Schultz (2005a, 2005b) and McAdams (1988). Other qualitative research methods such as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, (2014) have also been used in the psychobiography. None of these methods are, however, distinctly phenomenological-hermeneutic life-narrative analysis, including the well-known IPA method (Smith & Eaton, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Smith, et al., 2009) because the psychobiography as life-narrative research has not been positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. When the psychobiography is approached as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study a new method of analysis is required. This new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis that examines the life-narrative within the psychobiography is termed '*Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis*' ('PLA'). Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA) can also be used for other types of life-narrative research (such as auto-ethnography) that endeavours to phenomenologically explicate human life events and lived experience. The word 'psychobiographer' in the new method, described below, can be substituted for the word 'researcher'. The new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis is adapted from IPA as presented by Smith et al. (2009). The new method that is proposed is shown in Table 1. The new method has nine stages. These nine stages

are organised into two categories corresponding to two main columns in the Table—Activity and Description.

It must be noted that PLA, as a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis for investigation of life-narrative in the psychobiography, is not meant to be prescriptive. It is important to understand, therefore, that the suggestions and guidelines in the nine-stage method are not a ridged recipe to be mechanically followed. Some steps may not always be sequential, especially the middle steps when interpretation is the focus. Research is not always lineal in practice.

When used as a research method in the analysis of the life-narrative, PLA is an iterative procedure, and it is necessary that the psychobiographer remain close to the data and immerse him or herself in it so as to gain a holistic and comprehensive view of understanding. Reading and re-reading material allows for this immersion in the data, and of obtaining of a holistic, aerial, or bird's eye view of the data. With such immersion in the data through a reading and re-reading, PLA includes the process that entails (a) allowing the data to reveal itself, and (b) addressing particular questions of the text/description of the life-narrative. Both are a distinctively phenomenological initiative.

In stage three, unconscious researcher bias is noted as a step in method. The unconscious is not normally viewed as a part of psychological research. The notion of the unconscious ushers in a psychoanalytic perspective which can be used as a framework in research practice, especially life-narrative research which involves interpretation. If, as indicated earlier, all interpretation is self-understanding, the implication is that interpretation may have an unconscious bias. From within this perspective, it is one thing to disclose researcher bias in the form of 'fore-structures of understanding' (the disclosure of that which is conscious) and another thing to disclose the unconscious. While phenomenology does not recognise the notion of the unconscious, it remains a powerful construct for many interpretive researchers. As such, it does influence conscious actions and decisions, including research actions and decisions. In other words, the researcher is inevitably influenced, to some extent, by unconscious bias.

I would like to offer a new term for the unavoidable unconscious bias in research—the '*researcher's transferenceal implant*'. In this regard, some aspects of the biography of the psychobiographer is unconsciously transferred onto the life-narrative, impacting on the interpretation. The researcher unconscious, however, is not only transferred onto the life-narrative, as in the process of projection, but it is also 'implanted' into the narrative, as in planting a seed into soil. The implant or 'insertion of self' into the soil of the life-narrative/text is the same process as the psychoanalytic understanding of projective identification, as first introduced by Melanie Klein (1946). The implication is that interpretation of the life-narrative in the psychobiography (and any other interpretive research) is rooted in the unconscious. Because of this, it needs to be managed. In this case, the process of implanting aspects of the unconscious self into the life-narrative is a process of inserting bits and pieces of the self into the text so that 'understanding' is always imbued or permeated with the psychology of the self. In this light, the implant becomes embedded in, and a part of, the process of interpretation. The researcher's transferenceal implant thus becomes an integral part

**Table 1** Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA) as adapted from Smith et al. (2009)

Stage	Activity	Description
1	Read and re-read the life-narrative	As a psychobiographer immerse yourself in the original data by reading and re-reading all the archival documents collected regarding the life story of the selected individual Treat the final archival material collected on the individual life as a narrative text, as a life-narrative Allow the data to reveal itself Be aware of the life-world/context (historical, cultural context) as you read the life-narrative Record personal reflections and responses to the life-narrative of the selected individual
2	Disclosure of 'fore-structures of understanding' as a way to work with researcher bias	Make explicit your 'fore-structures of understanding' as in the phenomenological tradition of research
3	Disclosure of the psychobiographer's life-narrative as a way to work with unconscious researcher bias	As a way to disclose and manage unconscious bias ('researcher's transference/implant') document and reflect on your own life-narrative. Highlight various facets of your life-world that may add to context, and thus, to the process of meaning-making when approaching and interpreting the life-narrative of the selected individual
4	Initial noting of phenomenological themes within the life-narrative	Initial level of analysis includes describing the content, commenting on the language used, such as key words, phrases or explanations, and conceptual coding Asking the data questions. The material is eventually organised in terms of how it answers the questions As a psychobiographer, aim to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes about the life story of the selected individual Record comments directly into the text of the life story of the selected individual (a good idea is to use tracking for comments)

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

Stage	Activity	Description
5	Develop emergent themes and identify 'meaning units' of experience within the life-narrative	<p>As a psychobiographer, at this stage, the aim is to organise, write-up, and interpret the data. This stage forms a part of the hermeneutic process of interpretation. It is the process of understanding and discovery in terms of the phenomenological hermeneutic tradition</p> <p>Analyse one at a time discrete segments or portions of the life story of the selected individual</p> <p>Analyse the explanatory notes and map the interrelationships, connections, and the patterns in the life story</p> <p>Aim to produce a concise statement about what is important in each particular part of the life story of the selected individual</p> <p>At this stage, further re-clustering and renaming of themes or 'meaning units' of experience is possible</p> <p>Use the exact words of the selected individual so as to remain faithful to the description of the life under investigation</p> <p>Notes on this stage can be done in another column or new tracking comments in another colour</p>
6	Search for connections across emergent themes within the life-narrative	<p>The process of mapping how the themes within the life story relate to one another. For example, develop a superordinate theme by putting similar themes together. Some emergent themes might be discarded at this stage, but should be kept in mind when approaching the other life story of the other selected individual(s), as in the multiple case psychobiography</p> <p>As a psychobiographer, write all themes out in larger bold font substantiate why this is a theme by referring to the exact words used in the text</p> <p>Develop a graphic representation of the structure of emergent themes, e.g. a table or figure. Each theme should be annotated with a page number, line number, and a few key words to illustrate</p> <p>Continue to focus the hermeneutics of the life-narrative or the meaning that appear at this stage</p>
7	If using multiple life-narratives (multiple cases) repeat the previous process for the life-narratives	<p>Repeat the process detailed above for the other life-narratives</p>
8	Look for patterns across other life-narratives	<p>This stage involves laying out the table of themes for each life story and looking for patterns and connections</p> <p>Ideal to represent patterns and connections in a table of themes for the group, with each theme illustrated by each of the selected individual's life story</p>
9	Theory building	<p>This stage involves the dialogical process between psychological theory and the description of the relevant events and experiences in the selected life. This process is referred to 'analytical generalization' (Yin, 2014)</p>

of the act of interpretation. It is useful for, and should be used explicitly in, the act and event of hermeneutic understanding.

The nature of the unconscious means it is unknown and not easily open to disclosure. A way is needed to manage unconscious processes that impact on interpretive research including in the psychobiography. The question becomes what can be done to manage the researcher's unconscious bias? The uncovering of the unconscious, however, is a complex process in both psychoanalysis and research. It is suggested, however, as a way to manage unconscious bias that the psychobiographer engage in a process of writing up their own life-narrative. The life-narrative of the researcher must necessarily 'sit parallel' to the life-narrative of the selected individual when engaging in the process of interpretation. When the psychobiographer is engaged in the interpretative process, both life-narratives need to be constantly compared to each other in such a way that phenomenological themes within each life-narrative can be identified as possibly impacting on each other. Moreover, it is recommended that the psychobiographer discuss with a research supervisor or colleague any possible unconscious issues within his or her life-narrative that could impact on this interpretive process, and any of the other research stages and process. It may be prudent for the psychobiographer to include his or her life-narrative in the write-up of the psychobiography so that reader can also 'pick up' and identify where the psychobiographer may have had some 'blind spots' in terms of his or her interpretation of the life-narrative. This inclusion of the researcher's life-narrative in terms of unconscious bias management is not the same as researcher reflexivity because reflexivity is a conscious process.

Furthermore, this inclusion of the researcher's life-narrative in terms of 'disclosure' of unconscious bias it is not to say that all unconscious elements can be captured, disclosed and noted. It does, however, go some way to acknowledge unconscious bias and it is an attempt to manage some aspects of it.

Finally, the last stage concerns theory building. While theory building is implied in all research it is made explicit as a specific stage. Theory building in the psychobiography as a method has been documented (Carlson, 1988) and relates to the widely recognised notion of 'analytical generalization' (Yin, 2014) which basically means that the research findings are not generalized to the wider population, as in the case of quantitative research with large numbers of participants, but instead, generalized to psychological constructs within psychological theory (Carlson, 1988; Schultz, 2005a).

## 8.5 Final Brief Comments

If I know your story, I know something about you.

The understanding of life as narrative means that the story of life is the story of identity formation. McAdams (1993, p. 5) stated



In the modern world in which we all live, identity is a life story. A life story is a personal myth that an individual begins working on in late adolescence and young adulthood in order to provide his or her life with unity or purpose.

The life story is the basis of the psychobiography. The life story becomes the conveyer of individuality and personal identity. It is encrusted by levels and layers of collective engagement of community, culture, history, heritage and language. It is infused with meaning, ritual, suffering and triumph. If the life story is known, it is a glimpse into human experience and existence. It becomes a storied version of existential being-ness. To tell the story of a life, as does the psychobiographer, is to make it, for a moment at least, a living life; a celebration of a life lived. The way the life story is received is, however, a complex process of a meeting of minds between the story of the life lived and the story of the life still being lived. Layers of inter-mingling stories and psychologies between the two occur, rendering the psychobiographer as a co-author in the documentation of the life of the other.

In this regard, the writing about the other's life story is imbued with the psychobiographer's own subjectivity, or psychic transference templates of personalised existence and mental topographies of meaning. As indicated above,

'If I know your story, I know something about you' can be extended to, as a result, 'I also know something about myself'.

Understanding the life story of the other is, in part, self-understanding; the psychobiography, in part, is a document of self-understanding.

While there have been other research methods used to make sense of the selected life of an individual within the psychobiography, it is when the psychobiography is positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study which investigates lived experiences of the entire life-narrative, that a new research method that aligns itself with this position should be introduced. In this context, a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis has been presented. It is called 'Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA)'. PLA is a suitable method of analysis for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study in that it aims to phenomenologically elucidate the entire life-narrative, and thus, explicate both the phenomenology of lived experience and the hermeneutics of experience lived.

This chapter is a great contribution for students to improve their understanding of the embeddedness of psychobiography and phenomenology. It will help to improve research on a well-written basis. I do not have any further comments and would accept this chapter as is.

Great contribution that is about the clarification of the epistemological background of psychobiographical research. Maybe It should be opposed to the positivistic approach of mainstream "natural science psychology" to see why this epistemological approach is necessary in case of life history researches.

Talking about the heremenutic-philosophical roots of idiographic-psychobiographical research it is highly important to refer to the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, who might be more important in this context than the others. His "methodological heremenutics" is sometimes regarded as the meta-theory for idiographic/qualitative researches, and he was explicitly talking about integrating

psychology and biographical approach. That is why he was criticized by Gadamer and others for being too psychological, while Heidegger and Gadamer were rather anti-psychological (their approach is called “philosophical hermeneutics”).

It is also important to refer to the works of Robert Stolorow and George Atwood! Their 1979 book *“Faces in a Cloud”* was the first modern application of psychobiography, and their conclusions made them formulating “psychoanalytic phenomenology”. In their next book, *“Structures of Subjectivity”* they tried to establish “the science of human experience” and its relation to existential phenomenology, hermeneutic tradition (like Dilthey) and structuralism. I think that modern day psychobiography cannot avoid this as they were the pioneers of it.

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