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The Age of Uncertainties: Why (?) is it so Difficult to Understand?

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Abstract
Unannounced emergence of Covid19 has created chaos to the entire world, with none were left unaffected by this unseen but lethal microorganism. No one would have thought in this 21st century, humankind regardless of nationality, races, religious beliefs, etc. would have to go through a war with the unseen. In this trying time, one thing becomes apparent, it is important *how* we interpret things that happened around us. Schools and university are closed. Businesses are suspended. The debate about how people are going to survive in the next few months seems to reach no end as no one is prepared for this circumstance. Reflecting from my doctoral student research work, I elucidate the ways in which I try to understand participants' worldview through phenomenological design and link it with what is currently happening in the world through Husserl Transcendental Phenomenology and Heidegger Hermeneutics Phenomenology.
Keywords: Phenomenology, Transcendental Phenomenology, Hermeneutics Phenomenology, Qualitative

Introduction

As we live in a world full of complexities and economical challenges, human are separated into not just different social classes but also divergent economic classes from one another. The gap in between classes is so huge that somehow, simple things can be misunderstood as one group bearing a different reality than the other. During this trying time where the world is battling a modern war that requires human to fight against the unseen but lethal microorganism, it is apparent that human holds multiple realities and each of us understands things differently from the other. This idea where human hold different realities has long been established by constructivists who believes that human understanding cannot be viewed through a single lens. Reality is constantly evolving and constructed (Lincoln et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). Unlike positivists, who incline to seek scientific rigour and objectivity by identifying the relationship between cause and effect (Cohen et al., 2007), constructivists seek to understand how individuals construct reality in their natural setting by focusing on their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, it accepts that there are multiple realities to human experiences and therefore it rejects the objective view associated with positivism.

The notion that humans hold multiple realities is relevant when, in this challenging time, where we are all facing a lot of uncertainties, not knowing what could happen in the next few weeks or even what could happen tomorrow, people make assumptions about what they hear, see, and read. People start to interpret things differently from one another and each of us has our own understanding of certain issues. What goes unnoticed or is given less attention, but seems obvious now, is how people from different socio-economic background interpret things. To better illustrate the circumstance, it is when rich people do not understand what poor people have to go through and vice versa also, when employer does not understand their employee.

Rich Vs. Poor: Different Logic

When the social and physical distancing order was announced in most countries, everyday normal routine change. In order to put a stop to the virus outbreak, university and schools are closed, shops and cafes are closed and business struggles to the point of disaster due to worker shortages. Concern raised by entrepreneur about their businesses must close due to the government order for movement restriction made sense to people who are facing the same situation but may not to non-business people. Likewise, people whose source of income depends on day to day basis salary now worry about their future and how to survive the coming days, may not be understood by billionaires. Each party, regardless rich or poor, employee or employee ask, *'Why can't they understand my situation? Is it so difficult to understand?'*. Due to this difference in sets of beliefs, there exists a tension between people from a different socio-economic background with each party demanded one should put themselves in their shoes. Believe it or not, again this explains the beliefs that constructivists and interpretivists held for years, about how people have different sets of realities and no one has the same understanding about things that happened in this world.

Miller (1986) in her writing discussed in a great detail about the power dynamics between what she called dominant and the subordinate group. People from the subordinate group are usually treated as less important group of people. They are those group of people who provide the service to the dominate group people and therefore treated as somewhat less important, and less experience beings. The dominate group on the other hand, who are

always the receiver to the services usually regard themselves as one who are a group of people with 'power', experience and hence much important than the subordinate. This explained the circumstance discussed previously to which why the rich are unable to understand the poor and the employer does not understand the employee. Rich people are those who came from the dominant group and they regard themselves as those with much power, experience and importance. They believe they are the one who are much superior than the other group.

Husserl Transcendental and Heidegger Hermeneutic Phenomenology
As a doctoral student, I could not help but reflect on the study that I have been working on for the past years. Building on my doctoral student work that employed a phenomenological design, I can relate to the aforementioned circumstances, where it is evident how completely different my sets of beliefs are in relation to the participants of my study. Nevertheless, the differences did not prevent me from scrutinizing and understanding the phenomenon under exploration. To understand the phenomenon, there are two different views I can adhere to, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutics phenomenology. Edmund Husserl, a German phenomenologist put forward the concept of 'epoche' when a researcher tries to understand a phenomenon that participants are experiencing. He asserts a researcher should bracket themselves to set aside their own views about the phenomenon and focus only to what is told by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). When the researcher listened to what is told by the participants, the listener should remain present and focus on his own consciousness, "by returning to whatever is there in…memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there" (p. 84). Moustakas adds, "no position whatsoever is taken…nothing is determined in advance". References to others, their perceptions and judgments must be put aside to achieve epoche and only the researcher's perceptions are retained as indicators of knowledge, meaning, and truth. Husserl believes that in understanding a certain phenomenon, the phenomenological findings encompass *the* truth, rather than *a* truth (Mcleod, 2001). Despite his firm belief about understanding the phenomenon, he was criticized by some scholars as he failed to include factors such as social context, the importance of previous knowledge, pre-existing biases and/or knowledge about the phenomenon that can inform research (Laverty, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). This is especially true when he emphasized how the researcher should bracket the researcher's experience when attempting to understand participants' experience to certain phenomenon.

Other phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre have different points of view where they believe that understanding the phenomenon and individual are rooted and immersed "in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns" (Smith et al., 2009, p.21). Unlike Husserl's idea of bracketing that requires one to put aside the existing beliefs and assumptions in order to build new understandings, Heidegger stressed the importance of past experiences in order to understand the phenomenon as phenomenological inquiry could not be suspended (McLeod, 2001). He also believed that most of the times, experiences are influenced by one's perspective, temporality and in relation to something. In addition, Merleau-Ponty, who holds similar beliefs as Heidegger stressed that it is human nature to have interactions with world that consequently lead to each person's individually situated perspective of the world (Smith et al., 2009).

In contrast to Husserl transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's understanding of a phenomenon is based on hermeneutics. Hermeneutic approach begins with the notion that human experiences are imbued with meaning, gained from socio-historical contexts and founded on experience. Heidegger and other hermeneutic phenomenological researcher assume that people function within the world of language and social relationships (Finlay, 2009) where the researcher and participants are co-constructors of meanings, where "inter-subjective understanding" (Standing, 2009, p. 21) about lived experience may be gained. In hermeneutic research, understanding is drawn from a participant's perspective, but always involves interpretation by the researcher. It involves the researcher to understand the art of reading the text so that meaning behind the phenomenon that is being studied can be fully understood by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutics process go through the process where it requires the researcher to correct and set aside their prejudice and hear "what the text says to us" (Gadamer, 1976, p.xviii).

The text, which is obtained through the interview will provide important descriptions of conscious experience shared by the participants. When the researcher conducts a reflective interpretation of the text, it will result to a fuller, more meaningful understanding and hence bring "before me something that otherwise happens 'behind my back'" (Gadamer, 1976). This notion of understanding phenomenon engaged the belief that it is almost impossible for the researcher to let go of their pre-existing assumptions or biases that have developed from their past and present experiences. Therefore, it is likely that the question being asked in the research, as well as the findings obtained from the research, have the potential to be framed within the cultural perspective of the researcher (Mcleod, 2001). Mcleod (2001) further emphasizes that it is not possible to eliminate culture and history in understanding a certain phenomenon. It is because, our understanding of anything, whether text or event, is built up from a set of cultural constructs, embodied in language (Gadamer, 1976). In order to understand something, it involves the 'fusion of horizon' where the world of the interpreter coming together with the text; the things that are said by the participants, obtained from the interview.

Conclusion
Knowing the differences between Husserl transcendental and Heidegger hermeneutic phenomenological view, and from the reflection of my own study to what is happening in the real world, it is apparent that Heidegger's approach of understanding phenomenon made so much sense to how current world operates, in comparison to Husserl's. Especially at the current time, it seems that a lot of people are following hermeneutic way in order to understand certain phenomenon. Instead of bracketing themselves, setting aside their own view about certain phenomenon and put their total focus on what the other person is telling and see the phenomenon "freshly, as for the first time" and is open to its totality (Moustakas, 1994, p.34) as what transcendental phenomenology framework put forward, people interpret what they see, what they hear and what they read. They then construct their own set of understanding based on their own interpretation. McLeod (2001) asserts, if we share the same context as the originator of the text, we would understand it well enough. People do not bracket themselves, and accept the phenomenon 'as it is'. They let their preconceptions, past experiences and biases frame their understanding about what is happening. Hence, that is why, at the current time as the entire world is facing a hard time fighting the unseen microorganism of Covid19 and forces the government to implement certain measures it

creates total chaos. What is right for one party may not necessarily be right for another party, what suitable for one may not be suitable for others, what works for poor people, may not work for rich. Taking a Heideggerian perspective, knowledge about how and what poor people need to survive in this trying time could may be unfathomable by the rich and vice versa. As people continue to interpret things according to their existing knowledge and experience, this debate will never end.

Acknowledgments

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