

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Phenomenology of Everyday Life presents results deriving from a rigorous qualitative approach to the psychological study of everyday human activities and experiences. This approach is grounded in the philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology and employs dialogue as its major method of inquiry. The reasons for these choices are not arbitrary; all derive from the view that a proper study of human events must be framed in terms of a philosophy explicitly developed to encompass human activities. In addition, such events can properly be investigated only on the basis of a method sensitive enough to articulate the nuances of human experience and reflection. In this latter regard, it is important to note that insights deriving from literature and the humanities are equally revealing of the human world as those deriving from experimental psychology, biology, or medicine. The purpose of the present work is not to replace scientific observation with humanistic analysis but to provide an additional perspective on significant human questions.

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Cambridge University Press
0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life
Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

HOWARD R. POLLIO
University of Tennessee

TRACY B. HENLEY
Mississippi State University

CRAIG J. THOMPSON
University of Wisconsin

with

James Barrell	Elizabeth Myers
Marilyn Dapkus Chapman	Bethany Nowell
Bruce Erdmann	Katherine Parks
Laurel Goodrich	Lawrence Ross
Michael Hawthorne	Bruce Seidner
Jean Hunt	John Shell
Randy Lang	Abi Sills-Lang
William MacGillivray	John Sproule



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life
 Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
 CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1997

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1997

Typeset in Times Roman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pollio, Howard R.

The phenomenology of everyday life / Howard R. Pollio, Tracy
 Henley, Craig J. Thompson with James Barrell . . . [et al].

p. cm.

ISBN 0-521-46205-3 (hardcover)

1. Phenomenological psychology. I. Henley, Tracy B.

II. Thompson, Craig J. III. Title.

BF204.5.P65 1997

150.19'2 - dc21

96-40020

CIP

*A catalog record for this book is available from
 the British Library.*

ISBN 0-521-46205-3 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

Contents

Preface	vii
PART I: EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE SCIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY	1
1 The Nature of Human Experience	3
2 Dialogue as Method: The Phenomenological Interview	28
PART II: GROUNDING THE WORLD OF EVERYDAY LIFE	57
3 The Body as Lived: Themes in the Human Experience of the Human Body	61
4 Time in Human Life	93
5 The Human Experience of Other People	124
PART III: SELECTED TOPICS FROM EVERYDAY LIFE	155
6 Feeling Alone	157
7 Making Amends: The Psychology of Reparation	191
8 Love and Loving	227
9 Falling Apart	263
10 The Meanings of Death in the Context of Life	298
PART IV: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE	335
11 Toward an Empirical Existential-Phenomenological Psychology	337
References	366
Name Index	391
Subject Index	398

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

The purpose of *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* is to describe an alternative approach to the psychological study of everyday human activities and experiences. This approach is grounded in the philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology and employs dialogue as its major method of inquiry. The reasons for these choices are not arbitrary: Both derive from the view that a proper study of human events must be framed in terms of a philosophy explicitly developed to encompass human activities. In addition, such events must be investigated on the basis of a method sensitive enough to articulate the nuances of human experience and reflection. It is important to point out, in this latter regard, that insights deriving from literature and the humanities are equally revealing of the human world as those deriving from experimental psychology, biology, or medicine. Language, whether in dialogue or drama, is never beside the point in human life.

As we hope subsequent chapters will demonstrate, our purpose is not to replace scientific observation with humanistic analysis but to provide an additional perspective on significant human questions. If we are to be successful in interesting colleagues in this endeavor, the work must be both relevant and rigorous: relevant to the everyday concerns of human existence and rigorous enough to pass critical evaluation by colleagues more comfortable with regression equations than thematic analysis. Thus the challenge is twofold: (1) to suggest new topics for research that will be recognized as significant by the empirical researcher as well as the clinical practitioner; and (2) to describe our procedures with sufficient clarity and precision to allow for public scrutiny of their utility and rigor.

To meet these goals, our present book begins with an introduction to existential and phenomenological philosophy. The intent here is not to say anything philosophically new but to present certain implications of this tradition for psychology. Although a number of significant philosophers are

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Preface

presented (i.e., Heidegger, Sartre, Buber, etc.), the most important position for our work is the more psychologically oriented one developed by Merleau-Ponty. Using his approach, in combination with the psychological perspectives provided by Gestalt Psychology and the continually contemporary William James, we seek to provide in Chapter 1 a clear and useful description of what philosophers call *consciousness*, which we term, more conservatively, *human experience*.

Chapter 2 presents details of the general methodological procedure used in each of the subsequent content chapters: the phenomenological interview. Although it is possible to situate this procedure in terms of either dialogic (Buber) or hermeneutic (Gadamer) contexts, it also may be characterized as a rigorous version of the clinical interview familiar to practitioners. One major difference between the two is that phenomenological interviewing always has its primary focus on the phenomena being discussed rather than on the person discussing it. In addition, the interviewer's concern is radically descriptive, and not ameliorative in nature, and thematic analysis takes place both within the unfolding dialogue and in a special postinterview setting known as the *interpretative group*. A final difference between clinical and phenomenological interviewing is that interpretation is never inferential in phenomenological research but always seeks to remain at the level of the dialogue itself.

With philosophical and methodological commitments in place, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explore the major existential grounds brought to light by existential-phenomenological philosophy. As befits an overriding concern with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the first of these chapters deals with the human experience of the human body. Chapter 4 also has clear philosophical roots (in this case to Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger) and concerns the human experience of time. Finally, Chapter 5 deals with the human experience of other people; here, as before, there are phenomenological (Schultz) and existential commitments (Buber, Sartre). Although each chapter is sensitive to its philosophical origins, the thematic descriptions are empirical in nature and in no way limited by prior philosophical argument. Our descriptions always derive from our interviews and never from our theoretical or philosophical commitments, no matter how significant these were for contextualizing the research initially.

The third major section of this text concerns selected topics from everyday life. Within this set of five chapters, three deal primarily with interpersonal relationships (feeling alone, making amends, and love and loving), one with the experience of falling apart, and one with the meaning of death in the context of life. In each chapter, an intellectual debt is acknowledged not only to existential philosophy and Gestalt psychology but also to psy-

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

ix

choanalysis and empirical social psychology. It is in these chapters, perhaps more than in previous ones, that the clinical origins and implications of the present approach may be seen most clearly.

The final chapter, as is the case with final chapters, is meant to convince the reader once more that there are distinct benefits to be derived from an empirical existential-phenomenological approach to psychology. Within this context, Chapter 11 discusses issues such as the relationship of behavior to experience, the existential meaning of reductionism, the nature of consciousness, the conceptual and empirical status of the concept of self, and, finally, the need for both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The purpose is to summarize what has gone before and to make a final attempt at describing a radically empirical approach to the topic of human experience that derives at least as much from humanistic sources as from more strictly scientific ones.

At this point, a question may arise as to the intended audience. The answer is a simple one: anyone interested in obtaining a clear and comprehensive description of someone else's experience. Although the area of clinical psychology comes easily to mind, so too do the related disciplines of social work, nursing, and education. Certain nontherapeutic contexts also suggest themselves in which the professional consultant seeks to discover the wishes and needs of a client – that is, seeks “to understand other minds.” Included in this group are research and practice deriving from business, marketing, architecture, and law. Finally, we hope that more research-oriented colleagues in anthropology, sociology, and social psychology will find both our methods and our findings of interest. Perhaps even a philosopher or two might be interested – if only to see what we have done with a significant line of contemporary philosophical thought.

The title page of this text lists sixteen different names in addition to the authors. Although some of these individuals conducted the research on which specific chapters are based, some did not. Who, then, are these individuals, and how did they get on the title page? Basically, these good folks formed the core of individuals attending the Wednesday Night Seminar Group during that period of time when the present set of ideas and methods were being developed. Each of these friends and colleagues was instrumental in shaping the overall approach articulated in the present book, and each contributed not only clinical and research expertise but also ongoing personal support. Each also wrote his or her dissertation on a topic initially proposed at one Wednesday Night Seminar and interpreted in the course of many subsequent Wednesday Night Seminar meetings. This book is as much the product of group process as it is of individual researchers working on individual problems. So as not to have the various chapters

Cambridge University Press

0521462053 - The Phenomenology of Everyday Life

Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thompson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

appear to be separable elements of a patchwork quilt, however, the final text was written in a single style to provide for a continuity of voice.

This, then, is what *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* is about and how it got that way. It is truly a collaborative effort that evolved over the course of the past decade. During this period, everyone participating in this work experienced a certain excitement and a certain awe as various projects were completed; we can only hope that some of these feelings have made their way onto the printed page and will serve to interest other colleagues in pursuing a dialogic approach to the study of human experience.

Howard R. Pollio, Knoxville, Tennessee

Tracy B. Henley, Starkville, Mississippi

Craig J. Thompson, Madison, Wisconsin