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## AN APPLICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL METHOD IN PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A STRANGER IN A FOREIGN LAND?

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Dr. Collen shares his research on experience using procedures he characterizes as methodologically pragmatic, democratically collaborative, and independent of the philosophical foundations presented by most of this volume's authors. In this chapter he shares his reflections on having served as researcher and participant with three separate groups of persons attending his qualitative research seminars held in Burgundy, France. The topic they all explored was the experience of a being in a country in which the participants were foreigners. Comparisons of outcomes allowed exploration of replication in qualitative research. Although tables of themes related to being in a foreign land are presented, the chapter's focus is exploration of the research outcomes of procedural decisions. Throughout, Dr. Collen reminds us of similarities to traditional research design choices and issues, such as convergent and discriminant validity, independence of observations, cross-case analysis, content analysis, meta-analysis, replication, cluster and factor analysis, ipsative and ideographic presentation of data, and within-type and between-type design.

Referring concretely to the activities of his three groups, Dr. Collen also discusses a range of issues of importance to most qualitative researchers, but elsewhere too often not mentioned or mentioned only in passing. These issues include the difficulty of obtaining useful reports for analysis, reports of ongoing experience versus remembered experience, direct versus interpreted experience, multiple accounts by the same participant versus single accounts, multiple researchers versus single researchers, pluses and minuses of bias owned by researchers, manner of posing

requests for participant accounts, inclusion of researchers' own accounts versus only those of others, degrees of collaboration among researchers and with participants, and the difficulties of wording experience. I anticipate that as qualitative research expands, we will find ourselves engaged in systematic discussion of just such issues as these raised by Dr. Collen.

The word *experience* refers to one of the main hypothetical constructs in psychology and related fields of study we use extensively to communicate with each other the multitude of events that has happened to us in daily life. The accumulation of events, as we can recall and convey them, we call human experience. We describe it in terms of our feelings, thoughts, reflections, and interpretations of events. In psychology research, we take these descriptions as data, and we call them narratives, memories, self-reports, and recollections. The accumulation of experiences gains a seemingly endless breadth, depth, and richness over our life span. Researchers mine human experience through various forms of disciplined inquiry. This chapter describes and discusses one version of disciplined inquiry to study human experience that makes use of these forms. It has been given the name *experiential method* (Barrell, Medeiros, and Foley, 1990). The approach is a method of research, and it should not be confused with other uses of this phrase in reference to creativity, psychotherapy, and organizational development.

Given the central importance of experience to human nature, it comes as no surprise that many approaches to formalize human inquiry work directly with human experience, according to specified rules and procedures. Taken with those methods presented in other chapters, along with those found in other sources such as Braud and Anderson (1998); Camic, Rhodes, and Yardley (2003); Denzin and Lincoln (1994); McLeod (2001); and Reason and Rowan (1981); the method described in this chapter may serve even further to illustrate the diversity available to and utilized by contemporary researchers of human experience.

It must be clarified that the subject of this chapter is a very limited and modest activity among the many spheres contributing to the study of human experience. This chapter considers neither important philosophical approaches, such as Dewey (1938), Heidegger (1982), and Husserl (1931), nor other research methods for the study of human experience in psychology and allied fields, such as Denzin (1989), Giorgi (1985), and Glaser and Strauss (1967). The purpose of this chapter is to invite your consideration of one specific form of research method called the *experiential method*, as it has been applied to a common human phenomenon—namely, traveling to a place or country that is not one's own. Moreover, this chapter is more about the study of the research method and less about the phenomenon studied, even though I shall cover both during the course of the chapter.

It shall soon become evident that the research occasion provided the opportunity to study the method, and the choice of phenomenon facilitated that study.

The chapter consists of four parts. First, I situate experience as a psychological construct for the experiential method. Second, I describe the form of the method that I used, with particular attention to the steps and decisions I made chiefly for pedagogical reasons to learn about the method. Third, I present the findings of three groups reporting their experiences of the phenomenon designated "being a stranger in a foreign land." And fourth, I discuss the features, shortcomings, strengths, and methodological issues keen to my experience working with the method. Again, primarily my purpose is to present and discuss the method, and secondarily to convey the research findings.

### EXPERIENCE AND HUMAN INQUIRY

Essential to our everyday life and applicable to research methodology in psychology, experience has both an active and passive side. An examination of the entries in the dictionary makes this duality clear (Table 12-1).

Experience [L., *experientia*] stems from *experiri* meaning "to try, put to the test." From the 14th to 18th centuries, the idea was an active one, as seen in definitions 1 through 4 in Table 12-1, even though they seem obsolete today. We tend to think of experience in terms of those given in definitions

TABLE 12-1 Denotations of Experience (The compact *Oxford English dictionary* [1994])

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1. The action of putting to the test; trial; *obs*
  2. A tentative procedure; an operation performed to ascertain or illustrate some truth; an experiment; *obs*
  3. Proof by actual trial; practical demonstration; *obs*
  4. The actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge
  5. The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event; also an instance of this; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected
  6. A piece of experimental knowledge; a fact, maxim rule, or device drawn from or approved by experience; *obs*
  7. What has been experienced; the events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, mankind at large, either during a particular period or generally
  8. Knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone
  9. The state of having been occupied in any department of study or practice, in affairs generally, or in the intercourse of life; the extent to which, or the length of time during which one has been so occupied; the aptitudes, skill, judgment, etc., thereby acquired
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6 through 9, a more passive and indirect notion compared with the earlier usage. But some derivatives, such as *experiment*, have continued to carry the former emphasis.

The historical development of various contemporary research methods to study human experience springs from a common origin in experience itself. For example, experiential, experimental, and observational types of human inquiry were not as distinguishable methodological tracts in prior centuries, as they are described and applied today. Therefore, some caution is justified, because developing a methodological line of inquiry and calling it the experiential method may be more of a partial return to clarify roots than charting new territory. Given the contributions of numerous others to research methodology during the last 200 years (Collen, 1990), the choice of this name for a human-oriented research method will likely be a cause for confusion as well as skepticism from many researchers and consumers of research.

Two additional points about the central construct are important to mention early in the chapter, because they have a profound influence on all forms of methodology pertinent to human experience. Experience forms the implicit and often taken-for-granted context for the study of the content and structure of human consciousness. Similarly, like a sedimentation process of a flowing river, experience is the residue of what happens to us every day in reference to our stream of consciousness. In contrast to the long-standing Husserlian and Jamesian notions, experience is increasingly discussed in contemporary methodology in terms of story and narrative construction (per ex, Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). Experience is implicitly organized and expressed in spatial-temporal terms (Bruner, 1986). That is, underlying the storytelling and narrative accounts are space-time relations. In the crudest form of organization, we expect an experience to involve a situation and circumstance. Furthermore, it has a beginning, middle, and end. Embellishments of detail upon this skeleton involve descriptions of characters, objects, events, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, viewpoints, and various interpretations of them. The connections and relations among them are seemingly endless. On the side of the construct termed *space*, one takes one's self (the narrator and storyteller) as the point of reference in a first-person account, and experience varies. It varies from an ever deeper inwardness into one's private thoughts and imaginings on the one hand to an unmeasurable outwardness beyond one's self to unseen others and distant lands on the other hand. The complement is the construct of *time*, importantly organized again from the person's point of self-reference. One can go backward as far as one can remember to dwell upon events of the past. Alternatively, one can go forward as far as one prefers to the imagined events of the future.

Regardless of the form that a particular method for human inquiry may take, space-time schemata are central to formulations of disciplined

inquiry, especially with regard to research design, data collection, and data analysis (Collen, 1998).

The phrase *experiential method* chosen by James Barrell, Donald Price, and associates is intended to convey their approach to the study of human experience. Greatest details of their method can be found in Barrell and Barrell (1975) and Price and Barrell (1980). Their productivity and application of the experiential method to various human phenomena are evident in their published studies over three decades, and in their experiential descriptions of pain (Barrell and Price, 1975; Price, 1988; Price and Aydede, 2004; Price, Barrell, and Gracely, 1980), emotions (Barrell and Neimeyer, 1975; Lyons and Barrell, 1979; Price and Barrell, 1984; Price et al., 1985), control of time (Barrell and Barrell, 1976); honesty (Barrell and Jourard, 1976), openness (Barrell and Jourard, 1977); stress (Barrell and Price, 1977a, b), motivation (Barrell and Waters, 1980), jealousy (Barrell and Richards, 1982), and performance anxiety (Barrell et al., 1985). More recent examples of their approach to research are to be found in Barrell Foley, and Lueders (1990a), Barrell, Medeiros, and Foley (1990b), and Price and Aydede (2004).

In coming across the body of published work by Barrell, Price, and associates, I began using it and later decided to study its pedagogical and methodological potential in my international summer seminar on human science research methods (Collen, 1995a). Because the purpose of the experiential method is to describe a chosen human phenomenon of experience from first-person reports of those who experienced the phenomenon under study, it fit easily into the seminar work as a means to study, compare, and contrast the experience of participants of the seminar.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

Beginning in 1987, I offered a week-long seminar about various research methods for human inquiry. The seminar involved lecture, discussion, and hands-on research skill-building activities. Participants resided on-site, working as a group six hours per day and individually up to three hours additionally per day with methodology concepts and principles, and methods of human inquiry. Group participatory activities were often complemented by analogous solo assignments later presented to the group. But some solo activities did initiate assignments to be completed after the seminar as part of a longer term educational course or consulting arrangement with me.

In the case of the three seminar events reported in this chapter, they occurred in a renovated country house in the Morvan, a rural national park southeast of Paris, in Burgundy, France. The rustic accommodations and atmosphere of farmland intertwined with forest were very agreeable

to an informal, relaxed, and supportive learning environment, in which participants were encouraged to challenge conventional conceptualizations and assumptions about doing research and to think creatively about human-oriented research methods. The seminar was an arena for inquiry to improve research knowledge and skills, explore research interests, and further research projects from home settings. The seminar was the context of the research activity reported in this chapter, and only that group activity designed to bring the participants some familiarity with the experiential method shall be discussed. Although the results of the research activity provided a preliminary study of the phenomenon, to reiterate, my primary aim was pedagogical. Consequently, the results presented in this chapter serve mainly to illustrate various aspects of executing the research method.

### CHOICE OF PHENOMENON

It was important to select a phenomenon that would favor quick acquisition of the essentials of the research method, given the brevity of time for didactic group activity. Furthermore, it had to be a phenomenon familiar to all members of the group, and if possible, a phenomenon recently experienced and interesting to them to foster participation and active learning of experiential method. For these reasons, I decided upon the phenomenon I called "being a stranger in a foreign land."

I came to comprehend this phenomenon from my own experience traveling extensively in Europe and the United States. I pondered almost obsessively upon the process of moving from my country to another, and from nation to nation, especially when dramatic and obvious altercations in culture, language, custom, and physical terrain occurred. The dislocation, disorientation, confusion, anxiety, excitement, curiosity, human predicaments, unexpected circumstances, helplessness, frustration, base simplicity, estrangement, new learning, and solitude were some of the many aspects of my experience that came to characterize each personal journey abroad.

Parenthetically, I note that the previous paragraph constitutes my presuppositional statement about the phenomenon. It conveys something of my personal attitude, meanings, and understanding that I brought *a priori* to the study of the phenomenon. The relevance and importance of such a statement are matters for discussion later in the chapter.

Having grown fond of and empathetic to the arrival of the seminar participants to France from distant lands with the beginning of each new seminar, this experience of travel I had coined, "being a stranger in a foreign land," seemed to be a natural and sufficiently common human experience, ready made to apply one or more research methods for pedagogical purposes during the course of the seminar. However, some caution was warranted here, for I had not completed an extensive review of

the literature of the phenomenon, and its authenticity could be questioned. The phenomenon was (and still is) meaningful to my experience, and I was curious to know whether this was so for others. It had been repeatedly validated in my personal life and corroborated a number of times in conversation with previous seminar participants and fellow travelers. But one's deep-seated belief coupled with conspiring with others, although a plausible wellspring for phenomena to study, may not in itself be a sufficiently sound scientific basis to accept the authenticity and generalizability of the phenomenon. Certainly thousands of human beings spend their entire lives within a circumscribed and familiar habitat, even though many other thousands traverse to unknown lands. The seminar provided a more public forum to manifest, discuss, and critique the legitimacy of the phenomenon and certain human-oriented research methods, such as the experiential method, to study it.

### CHOICE OF RESEARCH METHOD

The importance of the decision connecting the phenomenon to a research method cannot be overemphasized. Ideally, there is a fit between the nature of the phenomenon to be researched and the research method to be applied. The experiential method is intended for the study of the structure and content of human experience and, conversely, human experience is most directly and currently studied via methods developed specifically to study its structure and content. Either way one approaches the decision, the match must result in compatibility. That is, it must contribute to an internal consistency and coherence of the inquiry, most often termed *method validity*. Making the choice of method seems a bit like shooting an arrow to the bull's-eye of the target. It is a matter of accuracy. Does the method enable one to study accurately the phenomenon of interest? Without such accuracy, the findings dim in relevance and importance. Furthermore, under critical scrutiny in the research community, the value of the study usually fades with regard to its overall contribution to the study of the phenomenon.

But note that the researcher may competently execute a research method meeting specific evaluative criteria, such as credibility, reliability, validity, and still miss the mark, because the choice of research method is a somewhat tangential means to the nature of the phenomenon under study. In this case, had I chosen naturalistic observation in its most orthodox form for example, I would have had to make inferences about my participants chiefly from their overt actions at some distance without the benefit of conversing directly with them. Likely I would have had to make many inferences about their thoughts and feelings of being in a strange land that would make it more probable I could miss the mark to know in some depth

the phenomenon as others experience it. In the case of the seminar, the findings come to me also indirectly by tapping self-reports of their experience of the phenomenon. Certainly it may be that constructing a methodology from complementary methods would have provided a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon, and therefore I do not want to dismiss the potential value of naturalistic observation. Given the context and restraints that come with a research study, it is a matter of choosing the research method that will likely yield the richest and most accurate picture of the phenomenon. Again, it is aiming as best as one knows how to hit the bull's-eye of the target.

It must be clear that my inquiry was designed for studying the experiential method as part of the program for three groups taking the seminar, rather than an investigation recruiting persons to study the phenomenon. The challenge for me was to find a phenomenon that had a high potential to maximize the educational value of the seminar for the participants, while simultaneously being one manifest in the experience of the participants and appropriately studied via the experiential method.

To make the phenomenon-method connection, it is critical to stress in human inquiry that the bias tends to be first choose the phenomenon and second choose the research method best suited to study it. The phenomenon becomes the preoccupying concern initially, and secondarily, the researcher selects the research method (or methods) compatible with its study. But in practice, however, methodolatry seems epidemic in human inquiry. Although rarely discussed, the propensity for researchers trained in a particular form of doing research is to study every human phenomenon that interests them by means of their way of doing research.

Despite methodolatrous leanings, I think the play back and forth with possible connections is the more fruitful research strategy than either unidirectional bias. Better also it is, I believe, to allow oneself a course correction early during the process of inquiry, before a large expenditure of resources has occurred, rather than assume the decision of research method is a singular definitive act that, once decided, is a *fait accompli*. Although one may certainly benefit from hindsight, and foresight cannot be assured, a quick decision of method often is a prescription to suffer downstream from repeated unnecessary compromises, awkward rationalizations, and even a neurotic defensiveness about one's research, when it comes time to publish and discuss one's research with peers. Having suspected that a better choice was available, careful study of the choices and pilot research, more often than not, positions the researcher to avoid the ensuing predicament and embark on a sounder, more informative path of study.

Important to mention in passing is the preparatory study of likeness and variation among a number of methods that draw heavily from the phenomenology tradition. Particular attention should be given to compare and contrast the works of Giorgi (1985) and Moustakas (1994) with Barrell



et al. (1990a). Barrell, Price, and associates make increasingly clear in their descriptions of the experiential method their interest in and debt to Husserlian phenomenology.

Had I been less interested in studying the experiential method and more serious about an in-depth study of the phenomenon, then auto/biography (Denzin, 1989; Runyan, 1984), case study (Stake, 1995), ethnography (Fetterman, 1989; Miller, Hengst, and Wang, 2003), focus group research (Greenbaum, 1998), grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), hermeneutics (Kvale, 1996; Packer and Addison, 1989), heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), narrative inquiry (Mishler, 1986; Rubin and Rubin, 1995), and phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003) represent a plentitude of alternative choices to the experiential method that might make an appropriate and productive connection to the phenomenon, because these forms of human inquiry make extensive use of first-person self-report to study as directly as possible the structure and content of human experience. Unfortunately, the literature of these research methods form research traditions that, until recently, infrequently intersected. Furthermore, the interests of researchers have yet to turn to more meta-analytical and cross-methodological-type syntheses of a specific phenomenon. But I expect comparative research will come. It represents a future focus for advancing human science research methodology, once a sufficiency of empirical studies occupies the subject matter domain of psychology and allied fields.

I suspect a less acceptable practice in coming years is to link the research question and phenomenon under study only to one's favored method. A critical review of method choices should be as important and beneficial as the critical review of research findings pertinent to the focus of inquiry. It is not only what we know already about a phenomenon that is essential to formulate inquiry and advance knowledge, but also what we know about the means used to know what we know that enables us to make sound choices of method and advance research methodology. If we are to improve our understanding of human experience, researchers can ill afford to limit themselves exclusively to one way of doing research.

## METHOD

The form of the research method presented by Barrell, Medeiros, Barrell, and Price (1985) provided the means to obtain individual experiential reports of the target phenomenon. At first, I followed what I understood to be their version of the method to generate the data, but I soon found in my seminar that context innovations were required both to apply the method and to make it a training and learning experience for the participants. I have extended substantively their version of it and thereby discovered

the value to the inquiry of the collective co-researcher/participant processing of the data generated. There are several steps or phases of the method. I describe them briefly in Procedures.

### PARTICIPANTS

Promoted by brochure mailings and announcements in the journals and newsletters of professional associations and societies as the "Human Science Research International Summer Seminar," it attracted a variety of colleagues and their graduate students, mainly from several countries across the European and North American continents.

The number of participants ranged from 5 to 18 persons. The three groups chosen for this report on experiential method had a size of seven, seven, and ten.

The persons in the seminar served simultaneously as both the researchers and the participants. As seminar leader and facilitator, I became a member of all three groups, and I participated in each step of the data collection and processing just as the other members. Thus, the terms co-researcher and co-participant became interchangeable. Parenthetically, the sample sizes stated do not disclose the repeated participation of myself.

### TRIGGER QUESTIONS

A trigger question is a prompt posed by the researcher to elicit a self-report from the participant. It is an initial direct question that sets into motion the self-reporting process of data collection. With the experiential method, trigger questions have been used to dialogue with solo participants as well as small groups of participants and/or researchers. I posed one trigger question that was supposed to elicit the phenomenon as directly as possible from a group of participants, asking the group to write down individually on a piece of paper an experience that came to mind in response to the question. Later in the procedure, they were to share their brief narrative reports and discuss them as a group.

In selecting the phenomenon "being a stranger in a foreign land," my presumption was that the participants were not citizens of the country in which the seminar occurred. However, it was not the case for three persons total in two of the participant groups. Consequently, I modified my original trigger question to make the task supposedly more meaningful for all participants. The decision to alter the trigger question had advantages and disadvantages to be discussed later in the chapter.

For group 1, the trigger question was: What is it like to be a stranger in a foreign country? This question was intended to commence the activity, and focus the group immediately and directly on the phenomenon under study.

For groups 2 and 3, the trigger question was: What is it like to experience the Morvan? I assumed this question tapped the phenomenon under study, but the question was clearly a more roundabout means of access to the phenomenon.

### PROCEDURES

Each group completed specific steps to generate and process the data. I drew upon previous research, particularly Barrell et al. (1990b), to detail the earlier steps, but freely modified their procedures to innovate and study the method itself. Table 12-2 paraphrases the steps and instructions followed by the three groups. These steps also conveyed to the participants the nature of what is meant by disciplined inquiry (Collen, 1995a, b), for an acceptable human-oriented research method is expected to follow clear rules and procedures in its execution.

Groups 2 and 3 used a variation of the procedure followed by group 1. The essential difference was that groups 2 and 3 were asked to report current and immediate experiences (step 1), and each person wrote an individual synthesis (step 9). Group 1 completed all steps of the activity shown in Table 12-2, group 2 completed steps 1 through 9 and stopped in the middle of step 10, and group 3 completed steps 1 through 9. The idiosyncratic pace of each group in combination with the time allotted for the activity in the seminar program largely determined the extent of completion of the activity. The data of group 1 were collected and processed during the summer of 1991; that of groups 2 and 3, during the summer of 1992.

### RESULTS

Each group had its own inquiry process and generated its own findings. True to the autonomous nature of the three groups, the findings were not pooled, but were presented separately. However, some comparisons were made across groups. The research issue concerning the common participant across groups, myself, is taken up later in the section entitled Replication.

Table 12-3 shows the number of experiential reports generated by each person. The experiential reports were subsequently aggregated, integrated, and expressed in terms of a descriptive paragraph that can be termed a *synthesis*.

The total number (T) of experiential reports provided each group with their pool of raw data to be processed. Although the grand total of 85 reports was obtained, the reports of each group formed a separate pool that was processed by each group respectively. Table 12-3 shows T was markedly greater in the first group compared with the second group, despite the equal sample size. However, the number of reports generated per participant was similar in the second and third groups compared with the



**TABLE 12-2** Steps and Instructions of Experiential Method Followed by the Three Groups

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*Group 1*

1. Present the trigger question. Notice an immediate experience or bring to mind a past one in response to the question.
2. Write down, using first-person present tense, on one piece of paper one experience that answers the trigger question. Describe it as directly as possible. Avoid interpretive, poetic, and historical accounts of the experience.
3. Write down a second experience in response to the question on a second piece of paper following the same instruction. Continue with repetitions of step 2 until a number of these experiential reports are completed. When the group ceases to write further, proceed to the next step.
4. Present verbally and post one experiential report to the group in turn. Continue around the group as many cycles as necessary until all experiential reports are publicly recorded before the group.
5. Study the reports. On a separate piece of paper, write down words and phrases that convey what the reports have in common. When the group ceases to write further, proceed to the next step.
6. Have each person share what is written regarding their words and phrases, and then have the group examine and discuss each experiential report to abstract it. The group task of abstracting is to state a word, a few words, a phrase, or a few phrases intended to capture and represent the content and meaning of the report.
7. As a group, examine the pool of reports as a whole. Discuss the areas in common among the experiential reports. What reports appear to share common meaning in response to the question? What reports appear to share a similar aspect of the experience? Which reports appear to belong together?
8. As a group, aggregate the experiential reports and generate labels for each aggregate.
9. As a group, integrate the aggregates into one paragraph of text, a group description, that represents the pool of experiential reports and their abstracts.

*Groups 2 and 3*

1. Present the trigger question. Notice an immediate experience or bring to mind a past one in response to the question.
  - 2-8. Same as group 1.
  9. Write one paragraph of text that represents the pool of experiential reports and their abstracts.
  10. Share the paragraph of text with the group. Post the paragraphs before the group.
  11. Discuss the paragraphs and write as a group one paragraph that represents the individual paragraphs, the pool of experiential reports, and their abstracts.
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first group. Clearly, in quantitative terms, group 1 was more productive in generating their pool of raw data than groups 2 and 3. However, it is important to remember that group 1 received the more direct trigger question to the phenomenon, and groups 2 and 3 received the same (although less direct) prompt to elicit the phenomenon. Furthermore, the instructions

**TABLE 12-3** Number of Experiential Reports from Each Participant and Their Distribution among the Three Groups

Group	n	Frequency of Reports	T
1	7	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	49
2	7	1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 4	18
3	10	1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3	18
Total	24		85

and data processing were biased to yield more reports in group 1, thereby rendering these differences artificial; that is, I think the sizes of the report pools were more illustrative of variations in procedure than a finding linked to the phenomenon studied.

The main results of the data generating and processing of experiential reports are shown in Tables 12-4 through 12-9. The tables convey the number of aggregations created by each group, the results of abstracting their reports, the labels each group chose to represent their aggregations, and the number and content of experiential reports contributing to each aggregation. The raw data are provided in a separate table for each group. When used, abstracting was an intermediate step before aggregation. The groups were not forced to sort each report into only one cluster of reports, and consequently some experiential reports appeared in more than one aggregation.

### GROUP 1

The results of group 1 are presented in Table 12-4. Abstracting was not used in this case. The group proceeded directly from their experiential reports to aggregation. There were six aggregations of the experience of "being a stranger in a foreign land." The aggregations are presented in rank order from the one with the greatest number of reports sorted together to the one with the fewest reports, as indicated after each label in Table 12-4. The most prevalent aspect of the experience was labeled "Disconnectedness." The next most common aspect involved various kinds of "Perceptions" of the experience. The third component of the experience centered on "Difficulties with Functioning." The fourth, fifth, and sixth aspects focused on "Excitement," "Connectedness," and "Threat-Anxiety," respectively. These labels for the aggregations came from group discussion and consensus.

### GROUP 2

The results of group 2 are presented in Tables 12-5 and 12-6. There were 18 experiential reports. Reviewing the reports yielded the distinct impression

**TABLE 12-4** Experiential Reports, Aggregations, and Their Labels from Group 1, in Response to the Question: What Is It Like to Be a Stranger in a Foreign Land?

**I. DISCONNECTEDNESS (n = 16)**

- 1-one of the stones at Stone Henge (England)
- 1-a Coca Cola in Moscow
- 1-an Idaho spud being fried at McDonalds' in Munich
- 1-singing mimi in Russian
- 1-being Ozawa interpreting Mahler
- 1-a California white fly being in a red ginger flower in Honolulu
- 1-being the fingers of a pickpocket
- 1-a BMW in Los Angeles or an MG in Druisburg
- 1-being a cowboy in Newark
- 1-being a behaviorist at Saybrook
- 1,2-people react to you in different ways (welcome, anger, other)
- 1-I feel distant and apart from natives because I don't speak the language
- 1-I do not feel connected because I cannot communicate thoughts and needs
- 1-less links/connections with life than ordinary life
- 1-being in a movie in real life than seeing it on the screen

**II. DIFFICULTY WITH FUNCTIONING (n = 10)**

- 1,2-people react to you in different ways (welcome, anger, other)
- 2,6-I assume things won't work as well as at home
- 2-I do not understand what people say
- 2-I can't express wishes/thoughts in words
- 2-I don't know how things function, how to get things (e.g., toilet paper)
- 2-your own things don't function (e.g., appliance cord)
- 2,6-to look for equilibrium
- 1,2-disconnected from adult self, more child-like
- 2-looking for clues of what to do, because I cannot understand signs
- 2-flooded with unfamiliar sounds, conversation that's overwhelming

**III. EXCITEMENT (n = 9)**

- 3-being a child again, everything is novel
- 3-live and see different places and situations
- 3-forget ordinary problems and try to enjoy as much as possible
- 3-lots of stimuli because find different organizations of life
- 3-excitement at experiencing something new
- 3-excitement in prospect of learning about the place
- 3-to start again

(continues)

TABLE 12-4 (continued)

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3-excited I'm not just at home

3-energetically depleted from so much social interaction

IV. CONNECTEDNESS (n = 6)

4-I feel lots of connections with fellow man

4-looks like universal connection (i.e., human communication/interactions as home)

4-being between old conceptions and new ones

4-problems in communication with people (written and spoken)

4-feeling completely at home until seeing written language

V. PERCEPTION (n = 12)

5-people think in a different way

5-people and surroundings look different

5-people value you in another way than home

5-hypervision (encompass as much of surroundings as possible)

5-being clumsy and awkward in my movements

5-gratitude for the adventure

5-at the beginning seems to be different, more than it really is

5-different habits of people around that agree/disagree with your behavior

5-being surrounded by a bubble everyone can see but me

5-feeling a different size (larger) than those around me

5-pink rose in a garden of red roses

5-everyone knows something that they are not telling me

VI. THREAT-ANXIETY (n = 5)

2,6-I assume things won't work well as at home

6-I feel more secure, I seek out familiar symbols of civilization

6-scary (to work everything out by myself)

2,6-to look for equilibrium

6-obviously different in feeling exposed when people stare

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they were less cryptic and more first-hand, present-tense narratives than those produced by group 1. The reports of group 2 were also markedly more mundane and anchored to current situations and circumstances.

The experiential reports (Table 12-5) were examined and discussed as a group to complete the next steps of data processing: (1) abstract the reports, (2) aggregate the reports and abstracts, and (3) to label each aggregation. The results of these three steps are shown in Table 12-6. The aggregations are presented in rank order, similar to Table 12-4 for group 1.

Group 2 clustered their data into seven aggregations: "People, comradeship, group, being together," "Nature, natural landscape," "Person,

**TABLE 12-5** Experiential Reports from Group 2 in Response to the Question: What Is It Like to Experience the Morvan?

1. We drove through the countryside and all around are white cows. *Lots* of cows and all white. Very unusual to me. I am fascinated by cows lazily sitting or grazing. So opposite the city.
2. Very clearly I can hear the mooing of cows. Loud, undiluted mooings. To hear such a constant sound is to be stripped of a lot of unnecessary stimulation that fills up my senses.
3. When we were returning from dinner, we saw fireflies. I had always read about fireflies but had never seen one. It was to realize something that had always been in the wings, ready to come on stage and be recognized. Finally I have seen a firefly.
4. Time spent in the morning is a holistic experience that includes nature, comradeship, conversation, and good Burgundy wine in the matrix of scholarly pursuit—an optimum adventure in life.
5. Looking out the farmhouse window at the green mostly highlands of the Morvan, I experience a communion with nature and the peace, contentment, and tranquility reminiscent of past journeys into the countryside.
6. The Morvan beckons to exploration of the area and one's place in the world more deeply. The setting is rural and peaceful in the best sense of the words, excellent for reading and introspection.
7. Yesterday afternoon, I took a walk by myself with my camera. I walked slowly so that I could observe the houses (and hopefully talk with people), the different kinds of trees and flowers. I saw many cows, modern houses, and I was surprised to realize that barns were not barns but also houses, because I saw and heard people in there. And I finally walked in the cemetery. Everywhere it was calm.
8. I observed a cow stopping near the house, a green little two-horse power car. I saw a blond girl with boots walking in the field with her big German shepherd. She was looking to see if everything was OK.
9. I was driving to my son and back through hilly roads in rain, storm, and sunshine, being in the hotel, helping my son to get settled in camping. He forgot his passport, so it meant waiting for the postman and experiencing the adequacy of postal service here. It meant to experience the loneliness of my son and the ways he can be cheered up. He learned to like to eat in restaurants, every time a new restaurant in France. He knows to be with people together in one campsite. Because he is an only child, he knows how to make contacts.
10. The Morvan and to experience it right now is an experience with maps and distances between names and places, and some, to write information. And more close, it is a somewhat hidden, lost village without much life of which I question if I could/would live here. An ongoing question: Do I like to love a house in France? And furthermore, where do I want to live in the coming years?
11. The Morvan means being together with a group of new people working on a subject that is of great interest to me.
12. I took a walk and I saw strange animals. I stopped and, as I thought they were donkeys, I made some hee-haw sound. They looked at me and I was confirmed that they were donkeys. I then made another hee-haw sound. The biggest one walked toward me and the other two followed him. I was surprised and afraid because it was my first experience with donkeys. I didn't know if it could be dangerous. So I kept on my way.
13. Walking around Chateau Chinon, listening to spoken French, wandering in and out of shops, down side streets, looking down at a valley, round a narrow alleyway

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(continues)

TABLE 12-5 (continued)

- 
14. Pulling into the train station at Autun and drinking beer across the street waiting for a ride to our house
  15. Sitting, eating, drinking around a communal table, discussing psychology and life experiences
  16. Viewing the graveyard from the vantage point of the fence
  17. I walked up the street from the house beyond the graveyard and looked across the valley toward the village. It was peaceful, green, and permanent. It conveyed a sense of long history, as if it was always here before I was born and like this long after I live.
  18. I was sitting on the road when a girl about 25 years old came by me on a bicycle. She was riding side saddle and wearing a country, cotton, picnic dress like I've seen in the U.S. American movie *Oklahoma*. She smiled and I did too. She coasted down the hill and no word was exchanged between us. I felt her civil friendliness, as I imagined she felt from me. She disappeared around the corner toward the village.
- 

TABLE 12-6 Abstracts of the Experiential Reports, Aggregations, and Their Labels from Group 2

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**I. PEOPLE, CAMARADERIE, GROUP, BEING TOGETHER (n = 9)**

- 4-camaraderie, nature, good wine, conversation, scholarly pursuit equals adventure
- 8-girl with dog walking in field inspecting everything to see all is in order; little two-horse power car
- 9-hilly roads, rainstorms, sunshine, riding back and forth, hotel, camping, forgot passport, mail service; loneliness; ways to enjoy here
- 11-being together with group; working subject, great common interest
- 12-strange animals, beckon them—hee-haw sounds, donkeys follow, surprise and fear, new experience
- 13-listening, spoken French, wandering, observing, in/out shops and sidestreets
- 14-into train station, drinking beer, waiting
- 15-sitting, eating, drinking, communal table discussion life experience
- 18-local girl, country dress, side saddle, bicycle coasting downhill on country road; no words but smiles exchanged, civil friendliness.

**II. NATURE, NATURAL LANDSCAPE (n = 7)**

- 4-camaraderie, nature, good wine, conversation, scholarly pursuit equals adventure
- 5-communion with nature, peace, content, tranquility; reminiscent of past experiences
- 6-rural, peaceful, opportunity reading and introspection
- 9-hilly roads, rainstorms, sunshine, riding back and forth, hotel, camping, forgot passport, mail service; loneliness; ways to enjoy here
- 

(continues)

TABLE 12-6 (continued)

10-maps and distances between places with some tourist information; hidden, lost village without much life here; where to live?

17-across the valley, green, permanent long history, always there

18-local girl, country dress, side saddle, bicycle coasting downhill on country road; no words but smiles exchanged, civil friendliness

### III. PERSON, HUMAN-MADE STRUCTURES (n = 7)

7-walking, surprises, barns were houses, modern houses, calmness

8-girl with dog walking in field inspecting everything to see all is in order; little two-horse power car

9-hilly roads, rainstorms, sunshine, riding back and forth, hotel, camping, forgot passport, mail service; ways to enjoy here

10-maps and distances between places with some tourist information; hidden, lost village without much life here; where to live?

13-listening, spoken French, wandering, observing, in/out shops and sidestreets

14-into train station, drinking beer, waiting

16-viewing graveyard from fence

### IV. DIFFERENCES, NONFAMILIAR (n = 7)

1-white cow, sitting, grazing

7-walking, surprises, barns were houses, modern houses, calmness

8-girl with dog walking in field inspecting everything to see all is in order; little two-horse power car

9-hilly roads, rainstorms, sunshine, riding back and forth, hotel, camping, forgot passport, mail service; ways to enjoy here

10-maps and distances between places with some tourist information; hidden, lost village without much life here; where to live?

13-listening, spoken French, wandering, observing, in/out shops and sidestreets

18-local girl, country dress, side saddle, bicycle coasting downhill on country road; no words but smiles exchanged, civil friendliness

### V. MOVEMENT (n = 6)

7-walking, surprises, barns were houses, modern houses, calmness

8-girl with dog walking in field inspecting everything to see all is in order; little two-horse power car

9-hilly roads, rainstorms, sunshine, riding back and forth, hotel, camping, forgot passport, mail service; ways to enjoy here

12-strange animals, beckon them—hee-haw sounds, donkeys follow, surprise and fear, new experience

13-listening, spoken French, wandering, observing, in/out shops and sidestreets

18-local girl, country dress, side saddle, bicycle coasting downhill on country road; no words but smiles exchanged, civil friendliness

(continues)

TABLE 12-6 (continued)

## VI. ANIMALS (n = 5)

1-white cow, sitting, grazing

2-mooing of cows; nature sounds

3-seeing something in my imagination and realizing it with my senses (fireflies)

8-girl with dog walking in field inspecting everything to see all is in order; little two-horse power car

12-strange animals, beckon them—hee-haw sounds, donkeys follow, surprise and fear, new experience

## VII. INTROSPECTION (n = 5)

3-seeing something in my imagination and realizing it with my senses (fireflies)

6-rural, peaceful, opportunity reading and introspection

10-maps and distances between places with some tourist information; hidden, lost village without much life here; where to live?

15-sitting, eating, drinking, communal table discussion life experience

17-across the valley, green, permanent long history, always there

human-made structures," "Differences, unfamiliar," "Movement," "Animals," and "Introspection." The rank order of the aggregations showed a more rectangular distribution, not as marked in descent as those of group 1. Also, compared with group 1, there were many more instances of the same experiential report contributing to more than one aggregate, and finding a clear label to represent each aggregation was more ambiguous and difficult.

## GROUP 3

The experiential reports of group 3 are presented in Table 12-7. Group 3 wrote the same number of reports as group 2. Their immediacy was more salient than group 2, and dramatically more so compared with group 1. However, the brevity of reporting fell between those of groups 1 and 2.

As with group 2, group 3 proceeded to abstract and subsequently cluster their reports. The results are shown in Table 12-8. Group 3 clustered their reports as follows: "Personal reflections and feelings," "Weather," "Village life," and "Roads." Although group 3 organized their reports into four aggregations rather than seven (group 2), examination of the content of both groups showed substantial overlap, such as shared references to weather, driving, animal life, landscape, human habitation, and their seminar group. And both groups, to a similar extent, applied their reports to more than one aggregation.



TABLE 12-7 Experiential Reports from Group 3 in Response to the Question: What Is It Like to experience the Morvan?

1. Driving through the Morvan we traveled on brick-colored, one-lane roads that twisted through the trees. We drove as fast as we could and prayed for no oncoming cars.
2. My experience of the Morvan is driving on curvy roads, uncertain of dangers and destination, and experiencing the differences of vegetation and landscape.
3. The wind blows in the afternoon.
4. My first experience of the Morvan was driving through village after village. I found it enchanting and delightful.
5. I walk more briskly in the mornings and my sense of sight and smell is activated by the wet grass and white cows. I am ravenous at meals and sleep deeply.
6. The wind is softly blowing as I sit here on my hard chair in class in the old rehabilitated farmhouse on the hill. I hear the trees shift as the breeze gains force. Now I would like to go lay in the damp grass in the backyard in this Morvan region of France.
7. At eight o'clock in the morning I looked out my window to see a man in T-shirt and shorts and sandals walking out of the bakery with a basket filled with three long loaves of French bread.
8. There is a sense of being at home while not at home. Comfortable, nonthreatening, outdoorsy feeling.
9. The Morvan has been an experience of nature and people living in harmony.
10. It is very green and warm. There is a large, clear lake and sailboats and people and cool water.
11. The snails are large orange slugs without protection and are easily squashed by tires as they cross the road.
12. I hear the rumbling of a small plane overhead. People are shifting in their chairs as they write. I feel content as I notice the simplicity of our task.
13. We slowed down on the narrow one-lane road and drove slowly, half on the grass, so that a man driving a tractor-trailer rig could pass.
14. Stars show in the sky at night.
15. Relaxing in an open unfamiliar natural area, feeling the warmth of the sun and thinking of nothing
16. My experience of walking in the early morning in the Morvan was very enjoyable. I visually experienced the beauty of the surrounding valley, beginning with the village that lay below and the pastures beyond. The sky was clear and the flowers and foliage were beautiful.
17. The midday sun is warm and the breezes cooler, as we struggle to stay awake after meals.
18. I very much enjoyed the ambiance and digestion of the wonderful evening meal. Sampling French and German cuisine while conversing with new people from Saybrook also added to the pleasure of the meal.

### GROUP SYNTHESIS

Taking the process of aggregating and labeling one step further, each group attempted to integrate their work. Group 1 did this collectively to produce a one-paragraph description that represented the epitome of

TABLE 12-8 (continued)

## IV. ROADS (n=5)

- 
- 1-brick colored, one lane, windy roads, going fast, worried about oncoming cars
  - 2-curvy roads, uncertain dangers and destination, differences in vegetation and landscape
  - 4-driving village after village, enchanting, delightful
  - 11-large orange snails squashed as cross road
  - 13-slow down on one-lane road, drive on grass slowly, man in tractor-trailer rig could pass
- 

TABLE 12-9 Synthesis and Summaries

*Synthesis from Group 1*

There are altered perceptions, difficulties with functioning, a sense of disconnectedness, and feelings of anxiety, accompanied by and leading to excitement and feelings of more universal connectedness. This is what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign country.

*Summaries from Group 2*

1. The unfamiliar contrasts with common experience to create an experience that is descriptive of the Morvan. White cows, barns that are not barns, nice landscape, foreign language, dress and customs *surround* the familiar objects of animals, people, interactions, structures, self-reflection, and the movement within the setting.
  2. The Morvan is experienced through observations of animals, persons, human-made structures, and landscapes through movements conducive to contact with nature, people, and unfamiliar things that bring some introspection. At the same time, the Morvan is also experienced through the togetherness in a group.
  3. The provincial French countryside evaded meaningful introspection when I saw the unique and ancient buildings, a landscape like a patchwork quilt, farm animals, and local people who seem to move in slow motion. The camaraderie of the group left an indelible imprint on our souls.
  4. The Morvan with its special landscape, animals, buildings, roads, and unfamiliar features brings me to a deep introspection of how people here live their lives and, even further, of how I can think about my own life and future.
  5. The Morvan elicits both personal introspection and group camaraderie. This happens as we move through the areas noticing the nature, animals, structures that are often different from what we either know or expect.
  6. To experience the Morvan is to move about human-made structures and interact with unfamiliar people and animals in nature, which provokes introspective thoughts about them and their differences.
  7. (Not received—missing data)
- 

their experience of the phenomenon. This synthesis is presented in Table 12-9. Group 2 was asked to write a one- to three-sentence summary to be presented and discussed by the group. These summaries are presented also in Table 12-9. Other events in the seminar precluded group 3 from continuing to process their data beyond their results shown in Table 12-8.

Regarding group 1, the integrations of experiential reports shown in Table 12-9 are not intended to convey every detail of the phenomenon described earlier, because each report often has idiosyncratic features. Rather, the descriptive paragraph represented a meaningful synthesis for group 1—that is, their collective expression of the phenomenon.

In group 2, the paragraphs retained some individualistic views, although a commonness was emerging in the participants' use of the same terminology taken from their abstracts shared earlier. After posting their paragraphs, a group discussion ensued, during which they attempted to integrate their summaries into one group synthesis. They did not accomplish this task in the time allotted within the seminar schedule, but there was general agreement on the terminology used throughout the summaries (Table 12-9). Furthermore, there was the general introspective point of view the experience of the Morvan dramatized: One is a member of a group that is separate from but at the same time within the country setting. The tension and dynamics of this belonging within a social group (seminar), while simultaneously being within and different from the surroundings (Morvan), dominated the discussion. It was this highlight that best represented the epitome of the experience for group 2.

## DISCUSSION

In this section I discuss the results of the data-processing experiences of the three groups, the decisions made by the researcher, and select methodological issues with regard to the experiential method. Again, the primary emphasis of this discussion is the learning about the skill building pertinent to the method, rather than the description, explanation, and understanding of the phenomenon, albeit the former is undoubtedly interrelated to the latter. The choice and sequencing of foci that comprise this section of the chapter reflect my personal interest in the method, not any prescriptive approach to research reporting. Furthermore, in the spirit of the method as executed in the seminar, this discussion certainly could have been enhanced by continued collaboration with the seminar participants.

### VARIATIONS IN PROCEDURE TO COLLECT AND PROCESS DATA

Given the nature of this book, I thought it *apropos* to begin the discussion with variations in procedure. Does one collect one experiential report from each participant or as many reports as possible from one participant? This choice, or some combination of the two, is a key research design decision with important implications for data processing, because

one choice will lead to findings based on (inter-) individual differences, and the other on intraindividual differences. Furthermore, in mixing the two alternatives, it is unlikely one will know the extent to which one or more persons influenced the outcome. To look for commonness among experiential reports either across several participants or within one participant is a choice point in the execution of this method, just as it is for other research methods for human inquiry, whether one labels the method or the design quantitative or qualitative. This basic decision illustrates nicely the ease with which one can generate variations of the method to study human experience. It also shows a pervasive design decision in the collection and processing of data that is typical in psychology research. This decision impacts the manner in which the researcher executes data collecting and processing.

Table 12-10 summarizes five fundamental means for the execution of the experiential method, although this scheme is basic to most research traditions for human inquiry (Collen, 1995a). The personal, or within-type, design features dependence on variability (diversity) within the solo participant who provides all the data—in other words, repeated self-reports. It is also referred to as an ipsative or ideographic-type design. The simple group or between-type design in its most basic form is, also known as a nomothetic-type design. It features dependence on variability (diversity) among a group of persons, each one of which provides one self-report. Mixing these two pure and simple designs involves multiple reports from each member of a group to maximize the efficacy of data collecting and

TABLE 12-10 Five Research Designs for Data Collecting and Processing in Experiential Method

1. *Personal or within*—Synthesize the self-generated experiential reports of a participant to attain the personal synthesis.
2. *Simple group or between*—Synthesize the individually generated experiential report of all participants, without regard to any particular participant's report, to attain the group synthesis.
3. *Complex pooling or mixed type I*—Synthesize the individually generated experiential reports of all participants, without regard to any particular participant's report or reports, to attain the group synthesis.
4. *Parallel pooling or mixed type II*—Synthesize the experiential reports of each participant separately to obtain a personal synthesis for each participant, then meta-synthesize personal syntheses to attain the group synthesis.
5. *Serial pooling or mixed type III*—Synthesize the experiential reports of one participant, then integrate the reports of the next participant into the initial synthesis, embellishing it to arrive at a synthesis of the pair. Following the same process for a third participant, arrive at a synthesis of the triad. Continue in this serial fashion until all participants have been included, thereby attaining the group synthesis.

processing that will enable the researcher to produce an accurate and precise description of the phenomenon.

In the case of my seminar participants, the three groups appeared not to follow the same procedure, even though all routes were aimed to attain a group synthesis. Group 1 appeared to process closest to the pooling procedure, in which the seven participants clustered their experiential reports directly into six aggregations (Table 12-4). The process for groups 2 and 3 was unlike group 1, in that these groups abstracted (summarized) their reports before sorting them into aggregations (Tables 12-6 and 12-8). And, unlike group 1 (Table 12-9), they did not have enough time to attain the group synthesis. However, abstracting (summarizing) may be viewed as one explicit step for groups 2 and 3 that was done implicitly by group 1 in their process of moving from experiential reports to the group synthesis. It would be one area for further inquiry into understanding the method and its versatility to articulate, through group work, various ways in an explicit fashion that groups can derive a group synthesis.

From the findings presented in the tables for the three groups, it has become clear that generating and processing the data consists of at least three levels of abstraction (Table 12-11). The level closest to the personal experience engages the participant to produce his/her own instances of the phenomenon from experience, after which the group process largely dominates. The second level of abstraction unites the group in discussion aimed to abstract, aggregate, and label clusters of reports. The third and most abstract level results in the group synthesis. It becomes somewhat obvious that the less abstract level precedes and greatly determines the content of the more abstract level. All movement toward a more abstract level takes the researcher farther away from the experience itself. In fact, one might claim the very act of experiential reporting produces a text that

TABLE 12-11 Levels of Abstraction in Data Processing Experiential Reports

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*Group 1*

1. Raw data
2. Abstracts, aggregations, and category labels
3. Group synthesis

*Group 2*

1. Raw data
2. Abstracts, aggregations, and category labels
3. Individual summaries

*Group 3*

1. Raw data
-

must not be mistaken for the experience itself, but represents the participant's imperfect attempt to communicate the experience. The data processing becomes more theoretical and less empirical as a result. In sum, the process is entirely conceptual, for although the initial instruction may conjure sights, smells, sounds, and other sensorial elements, the participant must be able to find concise wording to articulate them as part of the experiential report. As seen in the raw data (Tables 12-7 and 12-8), it is not necessarily an easy task, and despite instructions to the contrary, the participants freely include associations and metaphors in attempts to capture what presumably linguistic incapability and a limited vocabulary cannot communicate.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that one could ask the participants to abstract their own reports, followed by group work to aggregate and label them. This procedure would be expected in solo processing, and therefore lead to a four-level scheme rather than three levels of abstraction, but it was not done in any variations of the method reported and discussed here. The groups were instructed to abstract, aggregate, and label as a collective activity in one step of the data processing.

The content analysis and synthesis of the qualitative data generated in the forms termed experiential reports may be compared with some procedures for processing quantitative data, such as cluster analysis. There are many conceptual parallelisms between procedures of working with qualitative and quantitative data that polemicists of each persuasion conveniently leave out of their presentations. In the case of the experiential method, the divergent process of generating the data is followed by the convergent process of organizing data for subsequent synthesis. To converge, the participants must play with properties and dimensions that join as well as distinguish the experiential reports until each report has been located with those others that form its grouping. Note that in this section I use interchangeably the terms *aggregation*, *cluster*, and *grouping*. Communality is then considered for each aggregation in turn to generate a name label that can meaningfully represent the elements of the grouping. Like a facet of a jewel, each name label is to convey one side that is distinguishable from the other sides, yet all the while be a reflection of the phenomenon.

A parallel procedure is followed with quantitative data processing, particularly cluster analysis and factor analysis. Numerical designations are given to relevant features of the entities to be correlated and aggregated. The features can be weighted in order to sort each entity into one cluster or on each factor, and after numerous iterations to present a scheme of clusters and factors respectively (Grimm and Yarnold, 1995). Like an experiential report, each entity becomes part of one grouping, ideally distinguishable from the others. However, just as the researcher may find a variation in the data processing of the experiential reports—whether to impose the rule that



each report may contribute to only one aggregation or each report may contribute to more than one aggregation—in like fashion, the researcher may find it more appropriate to locate each entity in one group (cluster analysis) or allow each to contribute to (load on) each group (factor analysis).

The purpose of comparing and contrasting qualitative data processing in the experiential method with other methods, such as quantitative, is to understand more clearly the basic cognitive processes the human inquirer may utilize to make the data collected interpretable and meaningful. Both qualitative and quantitative data-processing platforms require the researcher to find a name label for communicating each aggregation. In the qualitative case, there is the search for common meaning among the words in the given text of the experiential reports comprising the grouping. In the quantitative case, there is the same search for a name label, but from the weighted loadings that resulted in placement of the entities together. The two means may be viewed as analogous, complementary, and multivariate. They may make use of similar cognitive research skills of data processing.

### EXPERIENTIAL REPORTING

One of the most critical requirements for the success of the method is adequate experiential reporting—that is, reports that lend themselves to data processing. The reports must contain the essential aspects of the experience. To promote experiential reporting, Barrell, Price, and associates emphasize the first-person, present-tense writing format when recounting a recent or immediate experience. They also distinguish four kinds of reporting (Price and Barrell, 1980). In contrast to the “in the experience”-type narrative is the interpretive, poetic, and historical types. These latter three forms are to be discouraged in experiential reporting, because they occupy the narrator in levels of thinking and reflection upon the experience, over, outside, and above being with and in the experience itself. It is the purpose of experiential reporting to engage as much as possible in pure description of the experience while one dwells within the reliving of the experience.

Interpretive reporting involves statements on what one thinks about the experience, or what is the meaning of the experience. Poetical (literary) reporting tends to interject statements of simile, metaphor, and free association catalyzed by the experience. Historical reporting tends to mix statements of events leading up to the experience with the event we refer to as the experience. Any exaggerated propensity of the reporter to engage in any one or more of these styles tends to detract from the succinct and direct reporting of the experience. We may think of the three types to be bracketed as most hermeneutic, and the type of interest here, closest to the original and lived experience to comprise the report, as the most phenomenological.

The experiential reports of being a stranger in a foreign country tended to follow the recommended format and style; however, generally, they suffered from another problem—that of brevity. Compression was evident between the attempt to describe the experience and locate its essential aspects. I believe the conflicting tendencies between two research skills—that of generating the report and that of reducing the data—worked against the production of full accounts expected in this application (experiential method), affiliated with the family of self-reporting methods of human inquiry noted earlier in the chapter. I interpret this tendency in experiential reporting to be largely accountable by the seminar activity and, perhaps to some degree, to the inexperience of participants in writing experiential reports. Somewhat cognizant of other materials and methods, such as phenomenology and content analysis, the participants engaged in a didactic and pedagogically oriented exercise to learn about the experiential method. As stated previously, the focus on the phenomenon was the secondary aim of this activity. As instructive as it was for the participants, it yielded truncated reports of lesser value for learning about the method and articulating the phenomenon.

However, engaging those in the data processing who generated the data afforded the advantage of minimizing the distancing commonly evident in research once the data are collected. Typically, data processing is executed by researchers, who are not the participants, and thereby this activity necessitates greater inference than if those closest to and generating the raw data are also those processing it. In the former situation, the researcher is removed from the reality of the phenomenon not only gathering the experience of others, but also working with this material in abstract ways, often far removed from the primary experience itself. When researcher and participant are one and the same person, presumably the researcher is closer to the reality of the phenomenon, because it is his/her experience that is being gathered, abstracted, and synthesized. In this case, the direct experience of the researcher and participants may come into play at any step of data processing to provide an inferential check and guide to the process of reaching the aim of the inquiry. Also, the researcher as participant is the dynamically active consciousness, who lived the experience being processed. In contrast, the researcher who processes only the experience of others is, by the very nature of the activity, removed from the reality of the experience of those others, and thereby the researcher must infer at any point in the process whether the step and aspect of the experience are relevant to the phenomenon generally and his/her own experience specifically. Such checks and guidance are usually more remote when the data of the participant are not that of the researcher. Experiential method exercised, reported, and discussed in this chapter presumes and takes advantage of the common identity of research and participant. Of course, this feature is both a blessing and a curse and is discussed in Researcher Bias.



Finally, it would have been better to engage in experiential reporting early during the seminar, rather than at the start of the learning module studying the method, to allow more time for all three participant groups to process the data to completion. As shown in the tables, only one of three groups reached a group synthesis. I believe this study of the phenomenon would have been of greater value to have three syntheses, instead of one synthesis only, to know more fully the phenomenon as all groups experienced it, and to critique more informatively the final result this method generates. Such cross-group comparisons and discussions would lead to efforts at qualitatively oriented cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and eventually qualitatively oriented meta-analysis that discerns the common base and diversity within a body of research studies by many investigators studying the same phenomenon (Collen, 1995a).

#### ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE METHOD AND THE PARTICIPANTS

The experiential reports generated by the group served as the raw data processed to describe the phenomenon "being a stranger in a foreign land." Even though more than one report was generated by all but four of the participants, it was assumed that each report could stand on its own, so to speak, as a separate and distinct presentation of an experience of the phenomenon. This assumption is known conventionally as the *independence of observations* in reference to quantitative data-processing procedures, but also may apply equally well to qualitative data processing. In short, for each group of participants, each report constituted a qualitative datum and recognizable contribution to the pool of experiential reports.

The idea of independence of observations may be questioned of course. The fact that each person wrote multiple reports subjects the research to the possible criticism that the act of writing one report determined in some way the writing of subsequent reports. As stated earlier, the participants were not experienced experiential reporters and the brevity of the descriptions, most notably in group 1, stood out. But if the participants followed instructions, such independence may be justified, because the disciplined human participant can effectively "start over" with each writing and hold in abeyance (bracket) what has been stated in previous reports. Be this as it may, exercising such skills is more safely assumed with training and practice than naive presumption. To the positive, practice writing experiential reports may favor their usability in research. Similar arguments in favor of research training may be advanced regarding other research skills required for data collection and processing. Given their interest in joining a seminar focused on research methods, it was further assumed that the participants possessed the capacity to abstract and aggregate data, generate name labels, and synthesize reports.

The research skill levels of both researcher and participants should not be confused with the manifestations of the phenomenon to be reported, because they involve a somewhat different set of assumptions. In common with other research methods that rely on self-reporting, it was assumed that the participants had experienced the phenomenon, understood the instruction to conjure appropriate instances to write, wrote instances of the phenomenon (rather than another phenomenon), and had the linguistic facility to write informative descriptions that could be data processed.

To the extent the assumptions stated are not met in this inquiry, and any other inquiry of this kind, certainly calls into question the validity of the research, as well the credibility and confidence one might have in receiving a research report claiming to describe and account for the phenomenon.

An examination of the experiential reports, shown in Tables 12-4, 12-5, and 12-7, revealed limited success in upholding these assumptions. Perhaps group 2 (Table 12-5) came closest to the kind of fuller and more usable reporting sought with the experiential method. Despite the paucity of data, various facets of the phenomenon were aggregated and acknowledged by each group to be relevant to the phenomenon at each stage of data processing. Such checks and corroborations may serve to counter tendencies for researchers to act in ways that jeopardize the validity of their research when findings begin to emerge that may not meet expectations. I can only speculate that having the co-researchers who generated the data also be the ones who processed the data lent more authenticity to the findings through their continued engagement with the phenomenon throughout data processing. The nature of collaborative team research, characteristic of all three groups, may also have compensated for the shortfalls in detail of the experiential reports. Nevertheless, I would recommend more substantive detail in experiential reporting than demonstrated in this study.

#### AUTHENTICITY OF REPORTING EXPERIENCE

It was taken as given that each experiential report was sufficiently rich in content to reveal one or more aspects of the phenomenon. This given enabled the groups to carry out the subsequent steps of data processing. The "assumption of authenticity" refers to the relevance and meaningfulness of the self-reports of the phenomenon. Without such an assumption, there is not an empirical foundation upon which to construct the aggregations and group synthesis. The discussion in the previous sections relates importantly to this assumption.

#### VARIATIONS IN THE USE OF A TRIGGER QUESTION

The form of the trigger question in this study differed in one subtle respect from those used by Barrell, Price, and associates. The difference was

in the exclusion of the phrase "in the experience of" after the predicate in the trigger question. Specifically, I used the form "what is it like to be a stranger . . . ?" where they would have likely preferred "what is it like to be in the experience of being a stranger . . . ?" The former directs attention within one's awareness directly to the focal phenomenon, that is to say, to *be once again that stranger*, whereas the latter places the inquirer within the focus of inquiry that implicitly informs the participant of separateness from the phenomenon. That is to say, you are not a stranger, now step into a time when you were the stranger. It also invites the participant to interject reflections upon matters likely tangential to the phenomenon itself, such as being witness to and in the act of experiencing and experiential reporting. My propensity is to prefer the most direct instruction. In the spirit of the method, any innovation that places the participant in touch as directly as possible with the phenomenon to be reported, I assume, enhances the chances that the experiential report will capture more of the lived experience of the phenomenon and contain less tangential text. The subtlety may seem a scholastic and semantic triviality to some in this case, but in my experience doing research using a range of methods for human inquiry, the choice of words and phrases to instruct articulate participants manifesting the phenomenon does influence what is reported. Relevant to this issue is the distinction noted previously regarding such an instruction as "describe in as much detail as you can what happened," in contrast to the instruction "describe what you think it means, about what happened." My point, however, is not to separate the subject from the experience; it is to favor conditions in inquiry that allow the phenomenological aspects of the experience to come into the foreground, while the hermeneutic aspects remain in the background. This bias is the preference of researchers when using the experiential method, but in my view this bias does not preclude increasingly more complex undertakings with the method that might include hermeneutic aspects as well.

Paradoxically, while intending to bring the person to relive intimately the experience, whether the stress is on "being a stranger" or on "being in the experience," the instruction encourages a kind of introspection, in that the participant's awareness is enhanced that one is separate from the experience. One is ordinarily neither a stranger to oneself, nor an inhabitant of unfamiliar territory. In this form of human inquiry, the participant partakes in "being a stranger"—an act that can easily be perceived as a residual entity to dwell upon and recount. Certainly one can argue that being the reflective and articulate participant one is, the act of entering into and reliving the experience is not the original experience itself—only one's memory of it. And more important, one is witness to this reliving while in the act of reexperiencing. It may help our understanding of this form of inquiry to dimensionalize one's relation to the experience in a series of gradations. At one extreme, one is a viewer (spectator, witness) moving into

the experience in which one sees oneself as a stranger in a foreign land. At the other extreme, one is the stranger in the foreign land, immersed and contained entirely in it. One can move back and forth between these two extremes, the director of one's movie in which one plays its central actor. This activity, akin to an application of imaginative variation developed as a research skill in phenomenological research methods, encourages an objectification of awareness to notice and select from that experience what to include in the experiential report.

Regarding variations in the trigger question across the three groups, one does wonder whether it had any bearing on the execution of the method. The trigger question of group 1 was biased in that it placed the participant as the stranger in the foreign land and communicated the dichotomy of self and other. The participant is the stranger and the context is the foreign land. One might argue that the question biased the research toward findings to corroborate the implicit dichotomy communicated in the question. The trigger question of group 2 communicated the same dichotomy or bias, but asked the participant to situate him/herself in context, which was already the case, having the seminar in a country other than the citizenship of the participants. But this question did not set up a self-referenced relationship as it did for group 1. However, it implicitly presumes that the second question manifested the first question. In other words, I had assumed both questions were equivalent forms of the same general question to tap the phenomenon studied. Yet there was no logical and necessary reason for equivalence. It is possible each trigger question solicited self-reports of a tangential phenomenon. The two forms of the question illustrate a common problem researchers face in posing questions to provoke self-reporting. Does one ask directly or does one approach the phenomenon more circumstantially, which minimizes bias to influence the participant to provide the researcher with a confirmation of the researcher's conception of the phenomenon studied. Generally, we want to avoid such self-fulfillment in scientific inquiry, especially if it leads to disingenuous, artificial, ideologically based, and distorted findings.

### OBJECTIFICATION AND SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

Use of trigger questions in the experiential method encourages an objectification of the entities that come to personal awareness. Furthermore, there is self-awareness about what one is attending to and selecting from experience to comprise the experiential report. This self-awareness enables one to experience movement along a dimension between the objectification to the subjectification of the experience. At one end of the dimension, objectification seems akin to scientific thinking, in that the treatment of selected entities of consciousness are named and described in the fashion of objects perceived externally in the environment, even though one knows all

the while they are parts of our experience. At the other end of the dimension, subjectification engages rather than distances one from that which occupies consciousness. Regardless of where one is along this dimension, scientific inquiry requires a careful and methodical description of what one experiences, whether one prefers to conceptualize the phenomenon in objective or subjective terms. In fact, one may favor not to dimensionalize as such, but to focus on the task of articulating, in linguistic terms, as precisely as possible to capture the essence and meaning of the experience for purposes of recording and communicating to others. In a large part, this activity is what science is all about, regardless of the propensity of a researcher to think in terms of the object and subject of study. Consequently, a methodological procedure that brings the researcher into the most direct and least disturbing contact with the phenomenon is often the preferred one, because there is always one's interpretation of what one has observed overlaid upon one's recording of what happened, which in turn overlays recollections of raw experience. In short, what one thinks about the meaning of the phenomenon and what the phenomenon means to its observer must be held from and not be confused with the essential qualities that comprise the experience.

The distinction between the direct and indirect aspects of one's experience often is a subtle one, but is critically important, as I understand the issue. It lines the border of a methodological gray zone between phenomenology and hermeneutics. The more the awareness of the researcher shifts from focus on the phenomenon as a pure manifestation of consciousness to inclusion of reflections upon that experience, the more likely the acts of self-observation and description become suffused with interpretations of the experience itself, hence a movement away from the primary experience to one layered and imbued with interpretive material that followed the experience. Unquestionably, one's experience becomes such, as one dwells upon the course of daily events and what they mean. Requesting a self-report of an experience of being a stranger in a foreign land, or whatever the experience may be in experiential research, one has to contend with this mix of raw experience and one's interpretations of it. The issue certainly represents a central one generating variations of mixed methodology from phenomenology to hermeneutics.

### RESEARCHER BIAS

In the previous section on Choice of Phenomenon I provided a brief narrative description I termed my presuppositional statement. It sensitized me to my prior experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon. It confronted me with the challenge to suspend (bracket) that which I consciously bring to the inquiry should it become evident such would interfere and bias the process of inquiry. All the while, I had to remain open



to new experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon contributed by the seminar participants. My heightened awareness of my experiences of being a stranger in a foreign land, it seemed, had to be checked, even though they always remained available to me. In fact, as a participant researcher and group facilitator, I had contributed my experiential reports to the pool of reports. The participants and I constantly compared through the steps of processing our reports. Our previous experiences always could potentially influence and bias the processing. In giving importance to particular experiential reports, the participants (as co-researchers) and I brought bias to the process. We had to embrace our personal bias as we proceeded through the data processing. As part of the skill building in becoming efficacious researchers, we sought a balance between recognizing one's experience and bias and admitting to evidence the experiences of others. In the end, what became paramount was not to privilege and exclude prejudicially any tangential report in this kind of research method, but to ensure clear representation in the final synthesis of all essential features of the phenomenon.

Researcher bias is a lean or propensity of the researcher to view or favor something affiliated with the inquiry at hand. It typically is tied to *a priori* experience and knowledge of the phenomenon, participant, research process, and theory about the phenomenon. It can be both advantageous and disadvantageous to inquiry. In its favor, bias may bring some familiarity with the phenomenon and acquired skill to discriminate relevant from irrelevant data. With the experiential method, it facilitates communication between researcher and participants that establishes a common language and enables the data processing. Bias makes available preliminary conceptual categories, metaphors, and hypotheses useful to inquiry. In its disfavor, bias tends to accentuate some aspects of the phenomenon and diminish other aspects of equal or even greater importance in the experiential reports and essential descriptions in anticipation of the group synthesis. Bias can select what one wants to see during the processing of the data. Perhaps worst of all, it can obstruct, even retard, the process of inquiry, when the particular participants become too ideological in the group work.

Although theoretical discussions help articulate the issues, I believe the researcher must find a balance between the two extremes on the matter of bias. The researcher must exercise skill and discretion in minimizing the disadvantages while maximizing the advantages. This requires practice, patience, and skill. Perfecting this balance is a research strategy that illustrates what I term the *minmax principle in human inquiry* (Collen, 1995a).

In common with other approaches to human science research, the experiential method is more competently conducted when the researcher confronts and embraces bias rather than fully brackets, denies, ignores, or rationalizes it away under the guise of probable unimportance

(Collen, 1997). It seems clear that this concern preoccupied Husserl (1931, 1970) and the phenomenology movement (Spiegelberg, 1960) sufficiently to place a high priority on articulating what has become known as the "natural attitude" in phenomenological research. The concern for researcher bias has been given a central place in training those who would conduct forms of human inquiry. This is as true for phenomenology as it is for the experimental method. To bracket one's attitude (that is, temporarily suspend one's *a priori* beliefs, presuppositions, interpretations, and knowledge), while reducing the data to the essentials of the experience, has relevance to the experiential method, although it does not appear as crucial to data reduction as it does in phenomenology. Again, note the balance discussed previously. Nevertheless, given the priority in training to minimize researcher bias, both the bracketing and the presuppositional statement represent two examples of the kinds of methodological skills researchers may use to address the disadvantageous side of bias in human inquiry.

In the case of the experiential method, the presuppositional statement is an option. It is an innovation when added to the experiential method. It is not part of the method as conceived and executed by Barrell, Price, and associates. It may help the researcher to become aware of his or her assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about the phenomenon to be studied. It may assist the researcher in gaining clarity of focus in preparation to pursuing an inquiry. At the same time, the researcher must have the restraint not to allow greater cognizance of his/her experience, knowledge, and understanding of the phenomenon to direct this pursuit simply reinforcing the *status quo*. This soft underbelly of vulnerability is by no means unique to the experiential method, but is inherent in all forms of inquiry across the sciences, because the researcher is a human being who is always susceptible to and at the effect of his/her own experience.

Having used the presuppositional statement in my case to study what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land, I was able to refer to it after the data processing to check whether the findings (1) merely reaffirmed my prior understanding of the phenomenon and (2) were biased in some way that recommended greater caution in accepting the findings. It may be instructive to point out that my presuppositional statement noted previously shared two aggregation labels (excitement and anxiety) generated by group 1 (Table 12-4) and a close similarity with a third (estrangement-disconnectedness), yet apparently little if any communality with those aggregations of group 2 (Table 12-6) and group 3 (Table 12-8), even though I participated in all three groups. The commonness lent some confirmation to my prior experience of and reflections about the phenomenon. But it also left me wondering whether my facilitating role in the first group was more influential than expected, compared with the other two groups. Moreover, the comparing and contrasting provided me with information to evaluate my bias.

## REPLICATION

Each group may be taken as a replication of the study of the phenomenon. However, a number of differences distinguishing the groups discussed earlier, for example the form of the trigger question, suggest that one cannot state the replications are exact. However, it need not be a problem with the method. To the contrary, it can be an asset. Variations are important, even when exact replication is attempted, for they provide opportunity to reaffirm what is known and to capture manifestations of the phenomenon to be known in broader contexts. In other words, whenever possible, we want to foster generalizability to a greater range of persons, circumstances, situations, and occasions in which the phenomenon appears.

Given changes in available resources, participants, and research setting, it is very idealistic to expect exact replication. Even in applications of well-known and established methods, such as experimental, observational, and survey research, the point is not exact replication, but reproduction of closely similar findings under similar conditions, such that an inference (generalization) may be justified. Yet the serendipitous nature of variations that occur in any event by mere execution of the study again and again make for one of the more exhilarating aspects of working with experiential and other methods for human inquiry.

In the case of studying what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land, the pool of experiential reports and aggregation labels provides a richer and more encompassing description of the phenomenon, without undue redundancy, than the results of any one group standing alone. The coverage across the three groups yields the fuller picture. Although more detailed data were preferred, groups 1 and 2 demonstrated the diversity of the phenomenon could be observed through replication. Thus, one might conclude that the replications enabled the researcher to attain a deepened and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon with each visitation through the research process.

Another, although complementary, perspective is to state that successive replications made it possible to find multiple facets of the phenomenon, while simultaneously gaining greater confidence in the core description of the phenomenon.

Whatever words one prefers to convey the aim of replications, it is to obtain an informative three-dimensional, essential description in which the researcher can communicate the center, breadth, and depth of the phenomenon. As much may be said about other methods for human inquiry, such as hermeneutic, phenomenological, and the constant comparative method leading to grounded theory. In my view, this replication effect is a distinct advantage for the human science researcher, just as it is a requisite for progress in other sciences that do not make human beings the focus of inquiry.



Examination of the output of groups 2 and 3 revealed they did not completely replicate each other (Tables 12-6 and 12-8). Interestingly, such an expectation may not be held to be a penultimate criterion in this form of research, although highly desired. The matter may be more akin to an interest in convergent and discriminant validity among the three groups. Are the results characteristic of the same phenomenon? Merely clear variations of it? Overlapping through differing manifestations of it across distinct subgroups of participants? Or all of these? In other words, replication of aggregations and the labels participants use to communicate them surely provide some corroboration across groups about the experience of being a stranger in a foreign land. But perhaps more informative is the complementary aspects of the phenomenon that may be revealed as the compilation of results comes across the groups. The richer picture from multiple groups, over one group only, informs us of shades and nuances of this basic human experience that may permit more stability of a basic finding, and more generalizability than one might risk from the findings of one group alone.

In general, multiple groups in the experiential method provide the consistency (reliability) we might come to expect, as well as a kind of validity (accuracy) through the repeated and expanding attainment of the more complete and comprehensive description of the phenomenon.

### INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP WORK

The manner in which I have implemented the experiential method has been through group work. A reading of the research by Barrell, Price, and associates suggests a range of possibilities—from the researcher collecting and processing individual experiential reports from participants to a group of co-researchers who are also the participants (again, much like I have done). Perhaps a modal example is Barrell et al. (1990a) on the experience of stress. Thirty participants wrote an experience of stress as a first-person, present-tense account, after which they read their individual descriptions to identify those aspects of the experience they believed are always present when stressed. The procedure then shifted from individual to group work. Given their essential aspects identified, they discussed their experiences as a group to come to a consensus on what aspects of their reports seemed to epitomize the experience.

My overall impression is that Barrell, Price, and associates seem to prefer the more collaborative mode, in which researchers as participants first generate their reports individually, then, second, collectively share, discuss, and synthesize their experiential reports. It is to the credit of the method that it lends itself to a range of variations with regard to the roles and extent of participation by researchers and participants.

### PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENTIAL METHOD

The ideas that participants can serve as researchers and researchers become participants in the same inquiry are not new to human science research methodology (Collen, 1995a, b; Reason and Rowan, 1981). Expansions in the roles and responsibilities in areas of decision making (e.g., research questions, research design, research plan, data collection, and data processing) give rise to the more participatory forms of a given method. More genuine collaboration, partnership, shared responsibility, and democratization of power occur when the researchers allow participants to engage more fully in the inquiry as they do, specifically as researchers.

The definition of participation may be applied to experiential method in four basic forms. The traditional form of self-reporting, research interviewing, and data processing is *researcher centered*. Researchers provide instructions and participants generate experiential reports. The researcher collects, processes, interprets, and synthesizes them. This form of the method corresponds to the standard formats (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986). Typically, research interviews are tape-recorded for later transcription. The transcripts provide the records for data processing.

When the researcher and participant dialogue heavily in experiential and related kinds of human inquiry, the traditional format shifts to an exchange that includes mutual feedback. The form of research is a more authentically interpersonal and participatory inquiry; yet, as before, the resultant transcript serves only the researcher. The second form of experiential method can have the researcher contribute experiential reports, but relaxes control over processing, interpreting, and synthesizing. The participants can be invited to comment not only on the instructions, procedures, and other aspects of the method, but also on their data generated. This invited commentary, which is regulated and largely controlled by the researcher, ensures critical feedback that helps the researcher to keep the inquiry on course and assess the internal validity of the inquiry. This form of inquiry, modified from the traditional form, I term *participant feedback*.

In the third form of method, the participant has an opportunity to examine the transcript and, with the researcher, provide clarifications and additions to it before processing the data. Furthermore, the participant begins to have more responsibility for deciding the nature and course of inquiry. I would characterize this third form of the method as *participant centered*.

Finally, in the most participatory form of inquiry, the researcher and participant serve in all capacities as co-researchers and co-participants to engage together in all phases of self-reporting, transcript review, and subsequent data processing. True collaboration, shared responsibility, and

TABLE 12-12 Eight Forms of Experiential Method Based on Participation and Social Dynamics between Researcher and Participant

Participation	Social Dynamic	
	Dyadic	Pluralistic
Researcher Centered	R decides and questions; P answers	R decides and questions; Ps answer
Participant Feedback	R decides and questions; P answers and comments	R decides and questions; Ps answer and comment
Participant Centered	R decides; R and P question, answer, and comment	R decides; R and Ps question, answer, and comment
Fully Collaborative	R and P decide, question, answer, and comment	R and Ps decide, question answer, and comment

P, participant; R, researcher.

democratization of power of the interpersonal relationship between researcher and participant are expected. This form may be termed *fully collaborative*.

Eight forms of inquiry are summarized in Table 12-12. Half the forms comprise dyadic relationships between one researcher and one participant for research purposes. Half the forms comprise collective relationships among one or more researchers and a small group of participants (e.g., 4 to 12 persons). Prototypical at one extreme is a method adhering to individual research interviewing; at the other extreme are group-oriented methods, such as focus groups and participatory action research.

Both the second and third forms of the experiential method characterized the research reported in this chapter. I was markedly restricted by the activities of the seminar program; had I been able to engage my participants in selection of the phenomenon and to allow the groups to decide the rate and extent of completion of their process of inquiry, the work of this chapter would have been more fully the participatory experiential method.

Before moving to conclude the chapter, two qualifying points are important to discuss with regard to the forms and extent of participation in experiential and related methods. First, the articulation of the four kinds of participation (Table 12-12) is rather arbitrary. There are other similar renditions (e.g., Heron, 1981). One could describe various forms of a given method, depending on the features of the interpersonal relationship among the researchers and participants one chooses to emphasize. The key point here is the dimension of participation; it must be examined, defined, and

described in each application of the research method. Second, I have mixed in the text of my previous paragraph a singularity, in contrast to a plurality, of persons comprising the inquiry. By this dimension one can double the number of forms of the method—that is, whether one chooses to interact with each participant separately or interact with a group of participants collectively. From solo to collective inquiry, individual work is most clearly understood in classical research interviewing, and group work in focus group research. The crux of this second point is the social dynamics that must also be examined, defined, and described in each application of experiential method.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter presents and discusses one form of the experiential research method for human inquiry. No claim is made that the form developed here is any more or less suitable to human inquiry than other forms (e.g., Barrell, Price, and associates). To the contrary, one theme of the chapter has been the diversification of forms among researchers to suit their styles and contexts of inquiry. This quality about the method prognosticates a healthy future.

Unquestionably, the experiential research method is a member of a family of methods stemming largely from the influence of phenomenology on human science research, especially in the latter half of the 20th century. There is acknowledgment of this influence, more recently (e.g., Price and Aydede, 2004). However, as far as I can determine, the experiential method does not follow phenomenological orthodoxy for the study of consciousness in the psychological sciences, such as is shown in the work of Giorgi and Giorgi (2003). It would appear that the experiential method of Barrell, Price, and associates does have some affinity with such research traditions as phenomenology, hermeneutics, thematic analysis, and content analysis, but its practitioners have freely innovated the course of inquiry to such an extent that it would be a difficult argument to convince staunch phenomenologists, hermeneuticists, and content analysts that the forms of experiential method discussed and utilized in this chapter, as well as those experiential research reports referenced in this chapter, are clear derivatives of these research traditions. My strong impression is that the innovations come from the confluence of phenomenology and hermeneutics with other continental North American influences, most notably methodological pragmatism and democratic collectivism. As such, the experiential method seems to be an outstanding example of one emergent and potentially fruitful method for human science research that does not require extensive and involved training by participants and researchers in such research traditions

as phenomenology and hermeneutics. In sum, the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the method remain obscure.

Through the empirical example of what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land, one form of the experiential method has been demonstrated. But like any research method for human inquiry, there are strengths and weaknesses a researcher must face as a practitioner of the method. The composition of the trigger question, training of the participants, quality of the experiential reports, researcher and participant biases, and the research context of data collection are chief considerations in this case. Furthermore, the empirical study of the method and the published research literature also help to accentuate variations of the method available to researchers. The distribution and definition of roles and responsibilities among researchers and participants, coupled with individual and group work at each stage of inquiry, foster various forms of the method. Finally, the empirical examples discussed in this chapter and study of the research literature anchor the experiential method in relation to other members of its family of human science research methods.

In its current state of development, the experiential research method does have its place among contemporary approaches to human inquiry that relies on descriptions of experience. Commensurate with many other human science research methods, the aims of the experiential method are to (1) obtain self-reports that capture in first-person present-tense one or more aspects of the phenomenon; (2) find structure, organization, and meaning in human experience; and (3) deepen the understandings of both researchers and participants engaged in the inquiry. More important, what the variations of the method covered in this chapter seem to show is that the method can fulfill the aim to articulate and establish a public and collective understanding of a phenomenon for a group of persons who manifest the phenomenon.

The experiential method would appear to have great potential for a range of applications in which individuals and groups work directly with self-reports of experience. The research method may be one means to bring disciplined inquiry more directly into clinical, peace and conflict, and psychotherapeutic settings that rely on empathetic mutual understanding. In the workplace of human organizations, the method may be a useful application of disciplined inquiry as part of a larger process to foster a collective understanding and to preface organizational change. These potentials represent important directions for exploring what the experiential method may do to further our efforts to aid and improve our world. However, currently, practitioners of the method cannot make direct claims to explain phenomenon, construct theory, test hypotheses, evaluate treatments and practices, and ameliorate the human condition. In its current state of development as a form of human inquiry, the method stands as preparatory and descriptive to these substantive aims.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

ARNE COLLEN, PhD, is a member of the Executive Faculty and Professor of Psychology, Human Science, and Organizational Systems at Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center in San Francisco, California. He also has a Research and Teaching Adjunct Faculty appointment at Alliant University in both the California School of Professional Psychology and the College of Organizational Studies. Over three decades with an affiliation at these two academic institutions, he has sustained long-term interests in human-oriented research methods and applications of cybernetic and systemic ideas to research methodology for human inquiry. One example is his well-known Human Science Research Summer Seminar, which has helped many professional researchers, academicians, and their students to obtain greater familiarity with several human-oriented approaches to human inquiry. It is from his seminar that he makes his contribution to this book.

After completion of his doctorate in experimental psychology at the main campus of Ohio State University in 1971, he spent three decades studying, teaching, and using a range of human-oriented research traditions involving

compatible as well as disparate theoretical and empirical activities, nomothetic and ipsative research designs, qualitative and quantitative data collection and processing procedures, and simple to complex constructions of methodology. His current professional activities involve supervising and training graduate-level research, developing several forms of research methodology for human inquiry, publishing, providing research workshops and seminars, and research consulting.

With his incorporation of cybernetic and systemic ideas into his pedagogy applied to the research process, he has contributed a perspective and approach to human praxis and inquiry that is intended to foster systemic change in individuals, collaborative research teams, and human organizations. An exemplary instance of his approach is his book *Systemic Change through Praxis and Inquiry* (2004). Drawing from several philosophical and methodological streams prominent in the continental United States, his work thrives on a transdisciplinary, pragmatic, and generalist approach to human inquiry. He is known for his devotion to advancing forms of human inquiry that cross paradigmatic boundaries to reveal "do-able" and productive mixed methodologies. He remains an active contributor to several professional associations and their affiliated publications in human-oriented research methodology.