



A HUSSERLIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE PHENOMENON OF TIME AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Uma perspectiva husserliana sobre o fenômeno do tempo e sua contribuição
em psicologia da saúde

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Una perspectiva husserliana sobre el fenómeno del tiempo y su aporte a la en
psicología de la salud

Abstract: This article introduces a phenomenological consideration of the concept of time, its perception, and its role in health psychology research. Our hypothesis is that this concept has changed during its history in the Western world, and these changes have impacted how contemporary research is conducted in health psychology. Methodology, this is a theoretical paper within phenomenological tradition in approach to Psychology research. This article is organized into three parts: (1) brief history of the concept of time and its perception in the West, (2) Husserl's phenomenological considerations of the concept of time, and (3) the impact of the concept of time on health psychology research looking for possibilities of application in the practice of psychological research. We note the intrinsic relationship between the perception of time and how time establishes a horizon for health psychology research. Conclusion, We note the intrinsic relationship between time perception and how the concept of time establishes a horizon for health psychology research. Possibilities, we can see the necessity to associate the reflection about time with the process of narrative construction and with psychopathology as well. In a special way, its reflection could help to understand the process of depression disease. **Keywords:** Phenomenology; Health Psychology; Time.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma consideração fenomenológica do conceito de tempo, sua percepção e seu papel na pesquisa em psicologia da saúde. Hipótese: o conceito mudou ao longo de sua história no mundo ocidental, e essas mudanças impactaram a forma como as pesquisas contemporâneas são conduzidas em psicologia da saúde. Metodologia, trata-se de um artigo teórico de tradição fenomenológica em aproximação com a pesquisa em Psicologia. Este artigo está organizado em três partes: (1) um breve histórico do conceito de tempo e sua percepção no Ocidente, (2) concepções de Husserl sobre o conceito de tempo e (3) o impacto do conceito de tempo na pesquisa em psicologia da saúde buscando possibilidades de aplicação na prática da pesquisa psicológica. Notamos a relação intrínseca entre a percepção do tempo e como o tempo estabelece um horizonte para a pesquisa em psicologia da saúde. Conclusão, podemos constatar que a perspectiva husserliana do tempo pode auxiliar a Psicologia, principalmente, a Psicologia fenomenológica a aprimorar a compreensão da experiência humana. Possibilidades, podemos ver a necessidade de associar a reflexão sobre o tempo com o processo de construção narrativa e com a psicopatologia. De modo especial, sua reflexão pode auxiliar na compreensão do processo da depressão.

Palavras-chave: Fenomenologia; Psicologia da Saúde; Tempo.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta una consideración fenomenológica del concepto de tiempo, su percepción y su papel en la investigación en psicología de la salud. Hipótesis: el concepto ha cambiado a lo largo de su historia en el mundo occidental, y estos cambios han impactado la forma en que se realiza la investigación contemporánea en psicología de la salud. Metodología, es un artículo teórico de tradición fenomenológica en aproximación con la investigación en Psicología. Este artículo está organizado en tres partes: (1) una breve historia del concepto de tiempo y su percepción en Occidente, (2) las concepciones de Husserl sobre el concepto de tiempo y (3) el impacto del concepto de tiempo en la investigación en la psicología de la salud buscando posibilidades de aplicación en la práctica de la investigación psicológica. Notamos la relación intrínseca entre la percepción del tiempo y cómo el tiempo establece un horizonte para la investigación en psicología de la salud. En conclusión, podemos ver que la perspectiva husserliana del tiempo puede ayudar a la Psicología, especialmente a la Psicología fenomenológica, a mejorar la comprensión de la experiencia humana. Posibilidades, podemos ver la necesidad de asociar la reflexión sobre el tiempo con el proceso de construcción narrativa y con la psicopatología. De manera especial, su reflexión puede ayudar a comprender el proceso de la enfermedad depresiva.

Palabras llave: Fenomenología; Salud psicológica; Tiempo.

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Introduction

This article employs Husserl's phenomenological perspective, mainly from *Lessons for a Phenomenology of the Time Consciousness [1893–1917]* (2004), and applies it to the concept of time, its perception, and its role in health psychology research. In his work, Husserl critically develops the idea that the experience of the world is formed from temporal experience (Holanda, 2016; Luz, 1995; Werneck, 2013) increased regarding the relationship between perception of the present moment and state of satisfaction with one's life (Miller et.al. 2019; Lennings, 2000; Murgas, 2022).

However, according to Holanda (2009), in health psychology, the question of the perception of time and its relationship with mental health is underexplored. Employing a phenomenological approach to examining the perception of time is essential when reflecting on health psychology research, since the phenomena of being "healthy" or "ill" are perceived in a temporal context.

A person is healthy now, was healthy in the past, or will be healthy in the future, all of which involve temporal perception. From a phenomenological perspective, we can consider time as a structure that allows for and influences the process of the perception of any phenomenon (Husserl, 2004, Kappor et. al. 2022).

It also enables human beings to experience the world (Husserl, 2006). This phenomenological theory has been widely used in health psychology research (Amatuzzi, 2009; Castro & Costa, 2017; Correia, 2006; Giorgi 2009; Holanda, 2016; Lim & Costa, 2016, Sousa, 2014, 2017; Zahavi, 2008).

Our hypothesis is that this concept has changed during its history in the Western world and that these changes have affected contemporary health psychology research. One way the phenomenon of time can affect health psychology research involves the perception of health as something that emerges within a context, inside a Lifeworld (Husserl, 2006).

Therefore, elucidating the concept of time can allow for deeper reflection on the components of health psychology, affirming Husserl's (2004) view that perception occurs in a temporal context. If we consider a mental health phenomenon as a mode of perceiving and relating to the world, then it follows that this occurs as a temporal phenomenon. This happens because there is a concrete and deep relationship between the concept of time and the constitution of the world experience, whether in the form of meaning, narrative and relationship with oneself. This can be observed in what Heidegger called *Jemeinigkeit* (Heidegger, 2015) which would be the fundamental characteristic of human existence insofar as it assumes a privileged role in the elaboration of the question of being.

To achieve the aims of this research, this article is structured in three parts: (1) from a Western perspective, we illustrate diverse meanings of time and how they affect the way individuals perceive and conceive of their relationship with the world and with culture (Hartog, 2003a); (2) we reflect on the concept of time using Husserlian phenomenology, highlighting perception and consciousness; and (3) we discuss how historical changes in the concept of time and Husserlian thought have affected health psychology research.

We believe this article contributes to an understanding of temporal reality beyond the chronological model, characterized by the discipline of time in days, hours, minutes and seconds. The time marked by the clock and calendar. In addition, it introduces the self's experience of time as having a direct influence on the perceptions of the world.

Finally, we also suggest that reflecting on the perception of time using Husserlian phenomenology can aid the field of health psychology, especially regarding perceptions of the world; specifically, it can help to advance experiential writing and themes, such as the production and promotion of health.

In this paper we understand health as a physical, mental, and social interaction between the individual and the environment, with the result being the individual's well-being (Medeiros, Bernardes, & Guareschi, 2005). Thus, it is logical to reflect on historical regimes of time and their relationship to the perception of time and health psychology research.

Historical Regimes of Time in the West

In the West, various concepts of time have been constructed and are intertwined, producing transformation over time. This process can be observed in Hartog's concept of "regimes of historicity." According to him, "Regimes do not merely trace time in a neutral way, but rather they organize the past as a sequence of structures. It is an academic framework of the experience (*Erfahrung*) of time ... [that] shapes our ways of speaking about and experiencing our own time" (Hartog, 2003a, p. 12).

For instance, the construction of Prague Castle (Czech Republic) lasted from the 9th century to the 20th century. One might wonder if the perceptions and experiences of time among those who began its construction differed significantly from those of the people who finished it.

A vassal from the 9th century probably believed he would never see the castle finished; however, a worker in the 20th century expected that he or she would. Therefore, regimes of historicity conform to our



perceptions of the past—a structured sequence of events—as well as the way we experience and talk about time in the present. In Greece, as early as 8 BC, the titan Cronus was presented as the devourer of his children. This represents one of the earliest forms of the perception and conceptualization of time in the history of Western thought (Jaeger, 2003).

In antiquity, around the 4th or 5th century BC, whether in Greece with Thucydides or in the Roman culture the idea of time and history arose as *Historia magistra*, a term coined by Cicero (Hartog, 2003a). In this book, historical time is confirmed by the testimonies and reports of those who acted in history (e.g., assemblies, rulers, heroes, gods).

According to Hartog (2011), history was organized as an account of examples intended to educate citizens and produce clarity for politicians. In this scenario, the most critical period was the past—the time of the stories—which could lead one to an essential trait for reflection. In other words, there were temporal and spatial markers that ontologically ended up regulating life.

Part of this concept of time still exists today, especially in science, where temporal markers produce sensibilities (i.e., ways of perceiving and dealing with experiences). For example, the way senior researchers conduct research is influenced by their experiences of time and space, which derive from their stories.

In the context of the ancient Western world, we can note that Aristotle (384–322 BC) was one of the first thinkers to present time as a non-ontological subject. Aristotle defined time as “the number of movements according to [what happened] before and after, and it is continuous, because it is a number of something continuous” (1995, p. 156). In this context, time began to be considered on the basis of one of its properties—it can be counted and measured.

Further, these regimes established the ability to measure what time was (i.e., the past), what it is (i.e., the present), and what it will be (i.e., the future). They also established patterns of continuity. The result was that time became a mathematical category; it could be referenced as a “thing” for “someone.” One example is the calendar, or the division of time like years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds.

A second trait that is strongly present in health psychology as a scientific discipline is that time includes a schedule that describes when something must be done. Time is a measurable and predictable variable, which creates predictability in the results of health psychology research. Terms such as “hypotheses” or “expected results” announce this reality.

Regarding research projects, it is possible to note that parts of the conclusions or hypotheses are already present, albeit as formal aspects of the elaboration of the research.

Another regime of the historicity of time was developed by Augustine (5th century AD), who was influenced by the regime of the *Historia magistra* (Franco Jr., 2000; Hartog, 2003a; Koselleck, 2006). In the *Confessions* (397–398/2001), Augustine asks, “What is time?” His answer is that, aside from the external reality of time as a measure of movement, time also comprises the capacity of the soul to extend, or *intentio anima*. In turn, *distentio* is the way a person apprehends the content of the world as sensations, impressions, and memory.

The Augustinian proposition presents an interesting characteristic for reflection on the perception of and concept of time: time not only measures the movement of beings but also contributes to the process of the perception and signification of the world and of itself, because it leads the subject to create an experience out of these realities.

Further, Ricoeur (2010) comments, “From Augustine, time becomes an ‘inconclusive rumination,’ whose only replica is the narrative activity” (p. 16). The concept of *distentio anima* allows us to think of a world that can be narrated as a succession of impressions in the soul. Consequently, the time of consciousness arises.

This consideration may help illuminate one of the expected results of health psychology research—namely, publication. Articles, book chapters, publications, and products can be understood as narratives of space-time experience organized and decoded within a common language and in accordance with a discursive horizon, which is understood as a representative model or an epistemological field.

It is because researchers gain world experience by being with others and interacting with them, that it is possible for them to build an organized impression of this experience in the narrative context. Considering this concept, we can observe that research does not arise just through a set of theories, instruments, intuitions, or agreements; rather, it is constituted from a world experience involving researchers, participants, and potential readers.

The vision of time within what Hartog (2003a) calls the “modern regime” is characterized by significant changes in relation to the old regime, magistracy history, and medieval regime of Christian times. According to Hartog, “In the modern regime, instead of several histories, history comes to be understood as a single process” (2003b, p. 13) involving the notion of “history as progress” (p. 21).

Unlike the classical regime, which turned to past feats, or even the medieval period, which dealt with Christianity, the modern regime is organized around a project of the future, mechanically and chronologically organized via thinkers such as Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. “Time was instrumentalized as a mere chronology,” Hartog says of this regime (2003b, p. 22). Consequently, a form of substantialism of time arises (Hansen, 1999).

In the modern historical regime of time, temporal units are thought of in the same way as spatial units; time is divided into parts just as one would divide space. This produces a mindset effect that addresses time



mostly under its chronological aspect, such as a clock or calendar. A portion of time is measured in an analogous manner to a portion of space.

With the advent of modernity and the transformation of productive models from manufacturing to industrialist, the ability to control chronological time and space means knowing how to control economic productive processes. Consequently, because time has become a dynamic structure for obtaining goods, it has been increasingly necessary to refine and use instruments and strategies to measure time. Thus, time has ceased to be an attribute and has become a criterion: “wasting time” means losing money, publications, or even one’s place in the world of researchers and research.

With the crises of the modern regime, a regime of the historicity of time arose in the West, which Hartog describes as “in the present and nothing beyond the present” (2003b, p. 25). It was within the context of crises of the project of modernity and of modern rationality that Husserl developed his phenomenological perspective. According to Fonte (2006), our reports and narratives reflect not only our past experiences but also our present experiences regarding the past.

Reflecting on the relationship between time and research in health psychology, we may intuit that the main conclusion here is that all research develops not in the present of the researcher’s history but, rather, as a future of the past: the future, because it is fundamentally organized under the artifice of anticipation—which, in research protocols, may come in the form of hypotheses, expected results, or problems—and the past, because every act of reflection and memory, as Husserl shows, results from the retention of content units logically organized into a continuum.

Husserlian Phenomenological Perception of Time

In Husserl’s work, the question of time-consciousness and its perception originated within the crises of the modern regime. He attempted to establish the means for understanding the phenomenon that fled the bonds of subjectivism or relativism—a method called “phenomenology.” Works such as “The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness” (2004), “The Manuscripts of Bernau [1917–1918]” (2010), and “The C-Manuscripts [1929–1934]” (2001) address this issue. Of these three works, we will focus on the first since it considers how the perception of time subjectivity structures world experience (Oliveira & Zilio, 2006).

The first work to deal strictly with time, *The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness* (Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins; Husserl, 2004) emerged from a period in which Husserl tried to move from a descriptive psychology toward a focus on acts of consciousness as intentional acts that suppose a correlation between a subject and an object, or the mode of reference between consciousness and content (Husserl, 2007).

In later works, such as *Logical Investigations and Ideas* this correlation is between noesis and noema, or “noetic-noematic correlation”, which is read in the lines of a pure consciousness, then of pure acts and pure objects. The point of departure of the first edition of *Logical Investigations* is descriptive psychology, and the assertion that empirical and sensuous consciousness is always embedded with time: psychological acts and spatial objects are always displayed within objective time.

Meanwhile, Husserl’s “*Logical Investigations*” (2007) concerns transcendental phenomenology, or pure consciousness, which is questioned by the essential and universal contents of consciousness, as discussed in works such as *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology* and for a *Phenomenological Philosophy* (Husserl, 1950; Lavigne, 2005).

In the aforementioned “*The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness*,” Husserl uses the categories of previous works to establish his own reflection on the perception of time. One example is the concept of “back to things themselves” (“*zuden Sachen selbst*”; Husserl, 1992, p. 10), which refers to acts or modes of consciousness that allow us to know an object—not in itself but as an object or mode of knowledge (Husserl, 1992, 2007).

The search for the absence of presuppositions, *Voraussetzungslosigkeit*, is understood as the ability to refer all intuitive data and knowledge to the horizon where they arise; here, “intuitions should be taken only in the sense that they were intuitively established” (Husserl, 1992, p. 29, 2007, p. 49).

From these reflections, Husserl conceived of units of time as immanent objects, or the perception of a phenomenon by a subject who perceives by means of an intentional movement, understood as intentionality in the act apprehending phenomenal content (i.e., the phenomenon of a real object). These units create impressions in the subject—always in the form of present-acts at the moment of perception—and are gradually stored by creating the mode of the course.

Writing about the ability to perceive and retain sound, Husserl explains the logical path of his theory of time consciousness as follows: We can make evident statements about the immanent object in itself: that it now lasts; that a certain part of the duration is drained; that the point of the duration of the sound picked up in the now (with its sound content, of course) goes back constantly to the past and that a little ever new of the duration is put in the now or is now; that the duration elapsed departs from the now-current point, which is without ceasing to fill in any way, moves to a past that is always “further apart” and the like (2004, p. 58).

The concept of temporal object, or immanent object, can help to clarify the process of understanding the elaboration of statements and information in health psychology. When Husserl proposes the immanent



object as the first unit of temporal perception, it includes the memories, instant empirical perceptions, and experience that ultimately influence the understanding of reality itself and how it is handled.

This situation also arises when a researcher interacts with his or her researched reality, which involves a series of theoretical elements and experiences that are fundamental to the reading of that reality. Here, there is a need to further reflect on Husserl's temporal categories in terms of how dialogue based on health psychology research can help to clarify concepts.

An immanent object, as the object of a consciousness that perceives itself and the world, needs an intentional consciousness capable of perceiving it, thus following the principle of intentionality understood as being directed to. For the subject, there is retentional consciousness, which stores content apprehended in the present in the form of memory (Husserl, 2004) or *duratio*, meaning what remains.

For Husserl (2004), the perception of phenomena always occurs in the present moment of consciousness and produces a continuum of impressions that gives rise to retentional content; that is, what is no longer a present impression but has been stored, thereby producing a forgetful ending sequence.

This sequence of impressions, which proceed and are organized from an original impression, is called the course mode. Husserl notes that "the course mode of an imminent temporal object [has its] beginning, a source point, so to speak. It is that course mode with which the immanent object begins to be. It is characterized as now" (2004, p. 60).

As they become more distant from the perception of now, impressions cease to be impressive content and become memory content, passing from an impressionable consciousness to a retentional consciousness. "Impressive consciousness becomes, in permanent current, an ever-new retentive consciousness" (Husserl, 2004, p. 62).

This raises a question: Does the content of consciousness accumulate only in the form of an impressive retentional consciousness? How, then, do we explain the phenomenon of reinterpretation? To this end, Husserl developed the theme of secondary retention or interactive recall. Here, "just as presentification's immediately add to perceptions, presentification may also occur in a self-sufficient manner, without aggregation to perceptions, and this will be the secondary memory" (2004, p. 67).

Secondary or interactive retention is what enables consciousness to make discoveries and intuitions. This is how consciousness produces inductive processes, which, together with deductive processes, comprise one of the two forms most used by science in the process of knowledge construction. As such, it is possible to apply Husserlian phenomenological thought to reflections on the processes of health psychology research.

Phenomenological Thinking about Time and Health Psychology Research

Based on The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness (Husserl, 2004), we can suggest that scientific research and writing begin with mimesis (i.e., memory), the fruit of the stored content of retentional impressions, which are reinterpreted in the act of scientific writing based on the author's present life.

The development of research and the future results are the fruit of this interaction between the participant(s)—whether an individual or a group—and the data stored by the researcher. This involves the sum of a series of retentions translated in the form of memory, information, knowledge, texts, databases, and so on. The experiences of the researcher and the participants provide the richest content for thinking about research practices themselves.

They are the constitutive marks left by the research experience, which gives the researcher and the participant the constitutive experience of being in the world as a researcher and a participant in a study. Such aspects are more salient than the validity of the method, instruments, and modalities of scientific practice.

Another author of phenomenology who can contribute to and elucidate our proposal is Alfred Shütz (1967; 2015, 2016) mainly through his concept of relevance, topical, interpretative, and motivational. Those compose experiential interaction and knowledge.

Therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, there is no research without interaction, mimesis, and reinterpretation of the content of life, which, in scientific writing, is translated in the form of a narrative of the world.

In health psychology, there are broadly two research modalities: quantitative research, characterized by using tools such as questionnaires and tests, and qualitative research, which includes narrative analysis and experience reports. Time perception is a key factor in both, albeit in distinct ways. In the qualitative perspective, time perception appears in the form of experience interpretation. In the quantitative approach, meanwhile, it arises as data interpretation.

Considering this in light of Husserl's time perception considerations, it is possible to conclude that the results of research are influenced and sometimes determined by the relationship between the content stored in the life of the subject and the phenomena stemming from the actual research, be it an individual, a community, or a certain reality. It means that secondary and sometimes neglected processes in the research process, such as worldview and values, must be highlighted or announced in advance, as an *epoché* exercise in which the phenomenon can manifest itself as a same.

Based on Husserl's reflections on time, we can see that the measurable time of the outer world, of the natural sciences, and time from the perspective presented in Lessons (2004), comprise an impressive reality that modifies the way a person perceives the world.



The time of consciousness is much more meaningful than the time measured by a clock; it is an existential mark that shapes the way a subject interacts with the world. Such a consideration may aid the process of reflecting on the capacity of health psychology research to describe a context in which the subject and the phenomenon interact without merging. This situation causes a continuous modification of the given and an enrichment of the research experience that is always updated in the living-present of those involved in it (Schütz, 1967).

Based on Husserlian phenomenology, it seems sensible to acknowledge that all research is the result of an intentional movement that can describe the perceived phenomenon and the experience the phenomenon produced, rather than the reality itself. On this, Husserl notes the following:

The apparition of the thing (the lived) is not the thing that appears (which presumably comes to us in its ipseity in flesh). We live the apparitions as belonging to the fabric of consciousness; things appear to us as belonging to the phenomenal world. The apparitions themselves do not appear, they are lived (1992, p. 360; 2007, p. 381).

The question of time, for Husserl, reveals an important reality for health psychology researchers—namely, that there is a subject who experiences the world. Considering this, areas such as health promotion/prevention research can be aided by asking who perceives the world (individual or community) and whether the person/group is healthy. This can enrich the notion of health as the result of a complex and ecosystemic interaction (Minayo, 2016) making the research process an act of continuous modification of the donor and the donated. This relationship leads the reflection back to the discussion about the horizons of *noesis* and *noema* within phenomenology as a method (Schütz, 2016).

Other examples include health care and public policies, which can be improved through reflections on time perception in the process of health construction, especially regarding the role of the subject who participates and develops in terms of quality of life (Bernardes & Marques, 2016; Costa & Bernardes, 2012).

After considering all these points the question that arises is: how this theory about inner time consciousness could help to understand the cases that health psychology researchers research?

A possible answer would be based on the consideration that all research takes place in the world of life as a construction of a narrative and a memory. In this way, research, linked and inserted in the world of life, can become a space of meaning and refounding of experiences based on the data of experience.

Final Remarks

By applying phenomenological reflections on time perception to health psychology, we can see that the form by which people perceive time is directly connected with their reality perception and world experience. This induces reflection on the need for the health psychology to reach a different horizon—namely, the perception of time as an element that allows researchers to perceive and produce a discourse about the world apprehended in the form of a phenomenon. This dimension ultimately influences, in an important way, the way research is produced and structured.

The path created within historicity regimes allows researchers to see that multiple approaches to the concept of time have determined how perceptions of and interactions with this concept have developed.

Relegating time to merely a physical-mathematical concept—a chronological dimension—produces a reductionism that fails to capture the entire dimension of experience and the relationship between time and world perception.

In health psychology research, the researcher receives and creates impressions that modify him or her as well as the researched reality. This is made possible by spatiotemporal interactions between the elements involved in the research process.

A further factor fundamentally marked by the temporal question is the very process of organizing research results, whether in the form of temporal anticipation already present in the research project or in the form of conclusions in the presentation of the results. Time perception is fundamentally structured as a present that has a memory and projects itself into its future possibilities.

Finally, we should note the theoretical-methodological limitations of this study. First, this article addressed only the earliest articulation of Husserlian phenomenology—specifically, the Lessons. This selection produced, as an effect, a reflection in abstract terms on the phenomenon of the perception and consciousness of time. Husserl's later investigations, such as Bernau Manuscripts (2001) and C Manuscripts (2010), were not explored here. However, they will be discussed in a future article.

In addition, we selected studies from the field of health psychology that critically reflect on the relationship between phenomenology and health psychology (i.e., Amatuzzi, 2009; Castro & Costa, 2017; Correia, 2006; Giorgi, 2009; Holanda, 2016; Lim & Costa, 2016, Sousa, 2014, 2017; Zahavi, 2008). Selecting other studies would broaden the scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, we believe the propositions established here resonate with reflections on perceptions of time and forms of knowledge production in health psychology.

Increasingly, health studies are examining phenomenological reflections in dialogue with other sciences, such as neuroscience and neurobiology (e.g., Marbach, 2007; Zahavi, 2014). This demonstrates that phenomenological reflection can be used as a powerful interlocutor to deepen questions in health psychology.



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