

## CHAPTER THREE

### ILLUMINATING THE DESCRIPTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF MEANINGS: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is carried out in order to discover knowledge about the world and the people who live and interact within it. Research is sanctioned as discoveries gained through the use of a method, which is a variety of diverse procedures that produce knowledge (Hughes, 1980). Every research methodology is inextricably embedded in particular fundamental philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world, the nature of humanity, the relationship between the two and the ways they may be known by the researchers using them (Giorgi, 1985; Hughes, 1980).

This Chapter will focus on (A) The diverse approaches to conducting psychological research, (B) The Phenomenological Approach to gain knowledge and understanding about the emergent needs post-grief experienced by AVI adults following their loss of sight, and (C) The technicalities of this particular research study where such aspects as the criteria for inclusion in the study and the method of gathering data will be discussed.

#### 3.2 THE DIVIDED NATURE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The variety of research methods in psychology are due in part to the fact that researchers are inspired by different philosophies of science, and that the many psychological disciplines focus on different aspects of the complex phenomena that constitute the subject matter of the human sciences (Giorgi, 1994). The divided nature of psychology is evident in the fact that it is practiced as both a natural and human science (Allender, 1987; Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1985; Hughes, 1980;

Viljoen, 1989). It is inevitable therefore that assertions about the nature of phenomena that constitute the subject matter of the psychological sciences have implications about the way in which the phenomena may be discovered or known (Hughes, 1980).

Ontology affirms what exists in the world, that is, the theory of being, which in turn, leads inevitably to an epistemology or theory of method whereby what exists may be known (Hughes, 1980; Roche, 1973; Viljoen, 1989). Research procedures cannot be separated from theory since they function within a particular set of fundamental assumptions and ideas about the nature of the world and human nature (Hughes, 1980). Thus, researchers' fundamental worldviews, or the philosophical underpinnings of their attitudes towards human phenomena, will ultimately guide the nature of the methodological approaches to be used in order for the phenomena to be known (de Koning, 1986; Giorgi, 1985; Hughes, 1980; Stones, 1986).

### **3.2.1 Psychology as a Natural Science: Empirical Methodology**

Psychology at its inception, and with its commitment to become a science independent from philosophy, implicitly also accepted the assumptions underlying the approach and methodology of the natural sciences (Giorgi, 1970, 1983a; Hughes, 1980). Psychology attempted, and still attempts, to gain the clarity, precision and systematization that is expected from a scientific perspective (Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1985; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1988).

This research tradition is based on the ontological claims of naturalism, which affirms that humanity is irretrievably part of nature and operates according to natural laws, exists autonomously and consists of interdependent causal relations (Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). These ontological claims inevitably lead to epistemological assumptions and premises that are drawn from empiricism and positivism (Groenewald, 1986; Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). Empiricism affirms that experience is the source of all knowledge, and that all knowledge ultimately

depends on a sensory interpretation of experience, that is, an interpretation that posits the independent existence of an external world made known by its action on the human senses (Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989).

Positivism affirms that the only valid route to knowledge is through the scientific method of the natural sciences and that this knowledge must have an empirical basis (Groenewald, 1986; Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). Psychologists using this methodology assume that data, that is, a phenomenon, that cannot be determined by measurement does not enter the psychological domain, remains pre-scientific and therefore, psychologically irrelevant (Giorgi, 1970, 1983b). This positivistic approach, in its search for irrefutable facts and causes, continues to utilize empirical methods such as, experimentation in psychological laboratory settings, or surveys which produce quantitative data and which allow the positivist researcher to statistically indicate relationships between operationally defined variables as a means of advancing the general knowledge of humanity (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1985; Hoffman, 1990; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1988). Positivism argues that, as in the case of the physical and natural world, where there is order, a system of laws, events and relationships, and where knowledge and facts can be gained through planned and controlled applications of standardised methods and techniques involving the principles of objectivity, verification and precise measurement, so too can reliable knowledge and facts be gained in the same way about the law-like structures of human nature (Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1970, 1983b; Groenewald, 1986; Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). Even though the object of study is another human being, the positivistic psychologists must treat this individual objectively in the same fashion that physicists or biologists treat their subject matter (Giorgi, 1970). Positivism's theoretically neutral observational language gives science an objective character and a neutral mode of expression, and is both ontologically and epistemologically fundamental, that is, statements made in this privileged language are directly verifiable as true or false by

simply looking at the facts (Hughes, 1980; Reason & Rowan, 1988). In addition, the language of quantitative operational definitions such as, dependent and independent variables, assume that individuals can be reduced to a set of variables which are equivalent across individuals and across situations (Reason & Rowan, 1988).

These research approaches of empiricism and positivism give ontological primacy to objects in the external, natural world and stress that these objects are real in themselves and do not depend on a mind for their existence (Hughes, 1980). Knowledge through observation is therefore not the result of interpretation or other forms of subjective mental operations, because mental states, or states of consciousness, can only be experienced or truly known by one person, namely, the person undergoing the experience (Hughes, 1980). The inner lives of individuals are therefore not accessible to observation, implying that such phenomena can not be dealt with objectively, that is, scientifically (Hughes, 1980). Consequently, these research traditions tend to ignore mental states by using an observational language dealing with outward behaviour only. Behaviourism for example, has adopted the premise that human behaviour, like other natural phenomena, is subject to natural laws. Psychological scientific data should therefore be based on overt and external observable behaviour only (Giorgi, 1970; Hughes, 1980). It is not so much the denying of the existence of mental states, but more of ignoring them as "irrelevant to the development of an adequate science of human behaviour" (Hughes, 1980, p. 39).

Psychology's rigid adherence to the principles of the natural sciences, with the need to measure or quantify, together with an exaggerated idea of what scientific rigour is, has led to narrowly circumscribed empirical studies and frequently to the exclusive use of quantitative or statistical measures (Child, 1973; de Koning, 1986; McKay, 1990; Stones, 1986). The research approaches of positivism or empiricism have long dominated psychological research, and even today, when the tradition is

expressed in many diverse ways, there still remains the tight traditional core of orthodoxy which has almost become accepted in mainstream psychological research as the only scientific way of obtaining dependable knowledge about the world and human nature (Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1970; McKay 1990).

### 3.2.2 Psychology as a Human Science: Qualitative Methodology

Many psychologists became disillusioned with the dehumanising approaches of the natural science methods in trying to understand and make sense of human nature. They expressed the feeling that many aspects of human phenomena as lived and experienced such as, anger, frustration, grief and caring, were either overlooked or severely distorted because the methods of the natural sciences were invented primarily to deal with phenomena of nature and not experienced phenomena (Giorgi, 1985; Hughes, 1980; Kruger, 1988; Maslow, 1988; Viljoen, 1989). Since all individuals constantly participate in, experience and express such phenomena in their everyday behaviour and interactions with other people, it became clear that there could be no psychology that did not include an adequate study of precisely these phenomena. It was further argued that psychologists who uphold the natural science virtues of objectivity, quantification and precision as essential in research, restrict the discipline by discouraging its extension to problems whose study can only be pursued by methods lacking in these virtues (Child, 1973). Self-esteem for example, is a concept difficult to objectify or measure with precision, and the many notions developed about it from experience will be difficult to verify as broad generalisations (Child, 1973). Self-esteem is usually given a narrow objective meaning as it is measured by a particular standardised questionnaire, but this meaning might be a "blurred shadow of the original concept" (Child, 1973, p. 7). Psychologists also argued that the traditional positivistic or empirical methods neither expressed nor captured the fullness and wholeness of individuals' everyday lives, which are often problematic and suffering lives, their actions and experiences, human interaction, and the richness of emergent meanings (Child,

1973; Combs, 1990; Diesing, 1988; Giorgi, 1983b). Psychology conceived as a natural science is unable, given its approach, to provide a "faithful understanding or disclosure of human phenomena as lived phenomena" (Wertz, 1985, p. 159).

Human life is essentially different from nature and this difference requires another methodology to that presupposed by a positivist conception (Hughes, 1980). Consequently, another psychological frame of reference emerged, namely, psychology as a subjective human science, which emphasises purely human processes such as, the higher processes of human consciousness (Combs, 1990; Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). This tradition has been carried forward in modern psychology in those ontologies such as, humanism, which claim that knowledge is grounded in the everyday commonsense world, and in the constructions and explanations members of that world use to describe their realities and actions (Jones, 1983). The humanistic approach in psychology accommodates a variety of epistemologies such as, phenomenology and existentialism, rather than a single organised system (Moore, 1989b; Viljoen, 1989). Some broad principles from which the humanists study human nature include among others: their attempt to understand and accurately describe whole individuals in their worlds rather than some selected and split off aspect of them, and to understand and describe the facts of the human situation as they are or as they happen, and not as somebody creates them artificially in an experimental situation or changes them in accordance with some predetermined theory (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Diesing, 1988; Jordaan & Jordaan, 1989; Kruger, 1988; Maslow, 1988; Moore, 1989b).

The humanistic epistemologies generally include the qualitative methods of description as a means of discovering and understanding human psychological phenomena as they are manifested. Their objective is to understand the phenomena by elucidating meanings rather than to explain them in terms of the laws of cause and effect (Giorgi, 1983b; Jones, 1983; Viljoen, 1989). Qualitative research techniques generate research data

which describe individuals' accounts of their lives, or specific segments of their lives, the ways in which they interpret and define the contexts in which their lives are experienced, and the meanings their lives have for them (Jones, 1983). Qualitative analysis of descriptions where concepts such as, pain, suffering and frustration as they are defined and experienced by real people in their everyday lives, can yield psychological insight equal to what quantitative approaches generate, although different in character (Giorgi, 1985).

### 3.2.3 Diverse Research and Knowledge Contexts

Scientific debates concerning knowledge often overlook the fact that there are many types of knowledge. Natural science operates at one type of knowledge in stressing quantities through measurement, which generates objective, numerical data through explanation and prediction gained by independent research observations. Humanistic research on the other hand, stresses knowledge as a search for meaning which generates subjective, qualitative and linguistic data through descriptions, revelation and disclosure gained by participant research observations (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Giorgi, 1992, 1994; Hughes, 1980; Kruger, 1988; Reason & Rowan, 1988; Stones, 1986).

According to Hughes (1980), there is a basic difference between fact, or the field of strict science, and value, which is beyond scientific methodology. This means therefore, that research could be viewed as having two contexts, namely, the context of justification and the context of discovery. The justification context includes the evaluation of inferences that lead to factual and consensual agreement about knowledge and the nature of the world, of which natural science research is an example (Child, 1973; Hughes, 1980; Smith, 1986). The discovery context includes those psychological factors and processes involved in discovering scientific ideas and include those phenomena not readily definable operationally, of which humanistic research is an example (Child, 1973; Giorgi, 1992; Hughes, 1980). Maslow

(1988) suggests that there are two types of knowledge, complementary to each other rather than mutually exclusive, namely, abstractness and suchness knowledge. Abstractness conceptual knowledge reduces phenomena to some unified explanation as in science, whereas, suchness concrete knowledge permits the experience of phenomena in their own right and in their own nature. Suchness knowledge could be likened to discovery research since what is studied is direct experience through understanding, whereas, abstractness knowledge could be likened to justification research since what is studied is abstract concepts through explanation and prediction (Maslow, 1988). Van Vuuren (1989) uses the terms descriptive perspective and explanatory perspective to differentiate between qualitative research (likened to the concept of discovery research) and quantitative research (likened to the concept of justification research) respectively.

The diverse contexts of research methods namely, nomothetic (generally used in quantitative research) and idiographic (generally used in qualitative research) allow for different kinds of representations of reality or knowledge (Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). Nomothetic methods are characteristic of the natural sciences and refer to research in psychological events and processes where general principles are applied to all people without attempting to accommodate individual differences, whereas, the idiographic method characteristic of humanism, describes psychological events and processes within the individual by understanding the concrete and unique case (Hughes, 1980; Viljoen, 1989). Essentially therefore, there are two contexts from which knowledge and understanding of human nature can be obtained, namely, by observing them externally as outside observers, of which behaviourism is an example, or, by observing them internally, through the "eyes of the person" of which humanism is an example (Combs, 1990, p. 449). In addition, psychological research may move in two directions towards simplicity and condensation as in quantitative research or towards comprehensiveness and inclusiveness as in qualitative



research (Giorgi, 1994; Maslow, 1988; McKay, 1990).

No knowledge is superior to any other since each type is unique in its contribution to, and understanding of what it means to be human (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). It would be naive and unrealistic to expect that a single theory will encompass all human psychological phenomena, and to expect that any one research strategy will provide satisfactory answers to all research challenges in psychology (Allender, 1987; McKay, 1990). In investigating challenges of a theoretical nature and to reach a more complete picture of human beings and their relationship to the world, both quantitative and qualitative research should be used, not as contradictory but as complimentary, if justice is to be done to the nature of the human person (Maslow, 1988; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1988). Van Vuuren (1989, p. 65) Concludes that qualitative and quantitative perspectives ought to be "viewed as two phases of science rather than as two ways of doing science." The ideal is that all means to knowledge should be used, but researchers tend to favour their own particular method (McKay, 1990). It is essential therefore that researchers, when embarking on research projects, are explicitly clear about why they want to conduct the inquiries, what knowledge they wish to acquire, and what methods will be used to generate this required knowledge (Allender, 1987; Elden, 1988). In this research study, an adapted phenomenological method embracing case studies and using depth follow-up interviews will be used to gain knowledge and understanding about the emergent needs post-grief experienced by AVI adults following their loss of sight. The researcher believes that the strict application of empirical methods to this area of adventitious VI would act against the sensitivity required in researching such a personal aspect of human life.

### 3.3 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Phenomenology rests on the philosophical premise that reality must be understood by uncovering what lies in people's consciousness, and that this reality as it appears in

consciousness is the only reality that is meaningful to human beings, and therefore, the only reality worth investigating and knowing (Hughes, 1980; Roche, 1973). Phenomenology affirms that knowledge of such reality can only come through consciousness of it, and the reality claims made by individuals through their consciousness must be studied (Giorgi, 1994). Phenomenology begins with an ontology of individuals first, that is, it starts from the primacy and respect for human beings, where knowledge is based on the everyday commonsense world and in the meanings members of that world use to describe their experiences (Diesing, 1988; Hughes, 1980; Jones, 1983; Kruger, 1988; Roche, 1973).

The underlying theme of phenomenology is to "go back to things themselves" (Husserl, 1970, p. 252). There has to be a return to the everyday world where people are living through situations (Berndtsson, 2000; Giorgi, 1985). Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday realism of ordinary experiences of the life-worlds of individuals, the worlds that are as given in immediate experience independent of, and prior to any scientific interpretation (Hughes, 1980; Reason & Rowan, 1988; Roche, 1973). Frankl (1967, p. 2), Elucidating the meaning of phenomenology states, "as I understand it, phenomenology speaks the language of man's pre-reflective self-understanding rather than interpreting a given phenomenon after preconceived patterns."

The knowledge aimed at through the phenomenological approach is the true fundamental meaning of experience and the essence of phenomena (Svensson, 1986). Phenomenology is the study of the phenomena of the world as experienced by conscious beings, with states of consciousness forming the subject matter, and is a method for studying such phenomena (Giorgi, 1983b, 1985).

### **3.3.1 Phenomenological Based Assumptions**

Every psychological investigation is based on a paradigm involving a set of assumptions about the nature of humanity and the reality being investigated. The main assumptions of

phenomenology include among others:

(A): *Humans are Conscious Beings*

The basic distinguishing feature of human beings is their ability to know that they are aware of things, that is, they can be conscious of being conscious (Roche, 1973). Human beings are aware of their sensations, and they are conscious of themselves as thinking and experiencing individuals, as well as being conscious of things and people around them (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). Consciousness is therefore individuals' ordinary mode of presence to the world and their self-awareness (Kruger, 1988). In addition, it is in the nature of individuals to be able to reveal the world to themselves and therefore consciousness must be seen as an act of revealing essences (Kruger, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Things of the world can become apparent or be revealed to individuals by not only seeing optically but also hearing or using the other senses (Kruger, 1988).

Consciousness is active and productive and the outcome of its activity is "presences" or most precisely, "reality as present in a certain mode" (Giorgi, 1983b, p. 218). Memory for example, is the presence of a thing that is physically absent but actually experienced before in the past, expectation is the presence of a thing not yet concretely encountered (Giorgi, 1983b). It is not necessary that things present themselves to individuals in the same amount of clarity all the time. A thing that has been noted but is now out of focus does not vanish entirely but goes into a backgroundness, and it is still there in the sense that it can be made present again (Kruger, 1988).

Being conscious means an intentional act through which individuals let the world appear to them (Kruger, 1988; Roche, 1973). Experience or consciousness has a point to it, it is intentional, and because of this, the world appears to individuals in a certain way (Paige, 1980). The intention, the point of it, is not somewhere out there in the objective world,

but rather in the activity itself. Thus, in order to understand how the world looks to people, and what is a reasonable act within their structure of experience, the logic of the way they experience the world must be considered (Paige, 1980). Intentionality of act indicates a voluntary taking up of a position or attitude toward an object (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Individuals are therefore involved in a continuous series of intentional acts of revealing and therefore relating to the world (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988).

Intentionality refers not only to the ways people act in terms of the goals and motives that they set themselves but also to consciousness, the ongoing "stream of referential acts that individuals will have (Roche, 1973, p. 33). Imagining, believing and desiring are some of the terms that describe the activities of conscious individuals which in turn, create a specific way of relating to objects (Roche 1973). Consciousness always intends an object which is always a meaning object (Giorgi, 1983b, 1994; Kruger, 1988; Roche, 1973). For example, in the activity of believing there is something that is believed, in the activity of needing there is something needed, in the activity of loving there is someone or something that is loved (Kruger, 1988).

(B): *Human Beings in the World*

Human beings are not mere objects taking up space in the world but are always out there in the world and are always in co-existence with fellow human beings and other things of the world (Kruger, 1988). Phenomenologists view human beings as being in dialogue with a meaningful world. A phenomenon is therefore always located in the dialectic relationship of individuals and their worlds and wider contexts (Kruger, 1988; Rowan & Reason, 1988).

The essence of human beings cannot be understood except in a sense of being related to various aspects of the totality of things that are in the world, which involves an interplay of

inner and outer worlds, including the individual and other individuals, societies, nature and culture (Capra, 1982; Denzin, 1983; Kruger, 1988). The various dimensions of being human are intertwined. Bodiness, spaciality, being with others, time and life history are "facts of one reality" and they are all present in individuals' experiences (Kruger, 1988, p. 63). Human beings are open to other individuals and things of the world. Sharing with other people means being able to look at the world with them in terms of common meaning structures (Kruger, 1988). Human beings live in a world constituted by shared meanings, consensually arrived at and mediated through givens like culture and language (Giorgi, 1985; Hoffman, 1985; McKay, 1990; Roche, 1973).

(C): *Humans are Contextual*

Heidegger's (1967) conception of human beings as beings-in-the-world, that is, individuals always being themselves within a certain situation, means that individuals are always in a certain context and live in relationship to that context. Life events must be understood according to the context, what phenomenologists call horizon, against which they are experienced (Berndtsson, 2000; Denzin, 1983). The lived experience includes the temporal, spatial, socio-cultural, interpersonal, bodily and ideational horizons which operate simultaneously to produce the lived experience (McKay, 1990, p. 14).

Understanding a phenomenon is therefore dependent on understanding the greater context in which it appears (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1989; Rowan & Reason, 1988). According to phenomenology, individuals have no existence apart from the world and the world has no existence apart from individuals, and a phenomenon is always located in the context of a dialectical relationship of individuals and their worlds (McKay, 1990; Reason & Rowan, 1988).

The inter-subjective context of individuals create a world of

culture and values on which they depend for survival and growth (Capra, 1985; McKay, 1990). Although people function within a framework of a particular culture which may prescribe conditions and consequences of and for action, in the final analysis, there own particular interpretation of life events, influenced by subjective feelings and values based on past experiences, expectations, goals, purposes and symbolic interpretations are what ultimately determines what individuals will do or think (Kruger, 1988; Rowan & Reason, 1988).

#### 3.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Phenomenological research is concerned with ordinary everyday phenomena which are dialogued with and questioned in order to illustrate how encompassing is the profile of human existence (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). Through acts of consciousness, the world is presented and explained so that the world, as it is experienced, is the focal point of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988). In phenomenology, researchers open themselves to a new consciousness in order to involve themselves in exploring those uncomfortable areas which makes humanity what it is (McKay, 1990). Maslow (1988, p. 86) states, "the psychologist knows that there are two hierarchies of esteem in science, not just one. One is the hierarchy of well organised knowledge, the other is the hierarchy of the questions one chooses to work with. It is the ones who choose to work with the crucial, unresolved human questions who have taken on their shoulders the fate of mankind."

Phenomenological research therefore begins with the concrete experiences of individuals in the here and now, independent of, and prior to any scientific interpretation (Hughes, 1980). Phenomenological researchers' aims and interests are to reveal the true fundamental meanings, or essences, of human experience, with the focus of such research therefore being the analysis of various individual perceptions of life and the world (Hughes, 1980; Svensson, 1986). The flow in phenomenological research

begins therefore with the comprehensive from which the basics are gleaned and then returns to the comprehensive, so that what is observed and researched makes sense to the researcher when the phenomenon is back in context (Maslow, 1988). Any study of concrete human phenomena requires that the approach, method and content be considered in relationship to one another (Giorgi, 1983a; Stones, 1986).

All psychology, including phenomenology, rests upon communication (Kruger, 1988; Wattlewick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). All communication affects behaviour, and all behaviour, not just speech, is communication. Although conceptual separation is possible between the two, they are nevertheless interdependent (Wattlewick et al., 1967). Phenomenological researchers understand people by making explicit what they communicate to them, in subjective language, about their experiences and behaviours (Hoffman, 1985; Kruger, 1988). People have the ability to reveal the world to themselves, and that is why phenomenological research is a process of disclosure through communication (Hughes, 1980; Kruger, 1988; Roche, 1973).

#### **3.4.1 Phenomenological and Natural Scientific Research**

The fundamental point of departure of phenomenological research from traditional natural scientific research is that priority is given to the phenomenon under investigation rather than being secondary to an already established methodological framework (Stones, 1986). Kruger (1988) states that the world has been deprived of meaning because of the long tradition of rationalistic and positivistic thinking which has degraded the thing (world) into mere object. The phenomenological approach does not consider the world as having objective, intrinsic meaning. Therefore, science, and in particular positivism, is viewed as a method for establishing the truth of propositions whereas, phenomenology is viewed as a method for revealing truth about being human (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). Phenomenological research in psychology does not look for measuring instruments

and techniques to gain knowledge about people, but rather tries to get people to describe and explicate their experiences in order to systematically and rigorously disclose the meaning structures of their lives and behaviours (Kruger, 1988). In addition, in phenomenology the discussion is about appearances or presences, and not existence (Giorgi, 1986). This is a consequence of the adoption of the phenomenological attitude as opposed to remaining in the natural attitude where things are presumed to be as they appear. In the phenomenological attitude, whatever is given is taken as a presence only, and existential claims are withheld (Giorgi, 1986).

As positivism and phenomenology differ in their ontologies, it would appear at face value, that the humanistic approaches in psychology reject scientific thought and that phenomenology and positivism are at opposite ends of the research pole (McKay, 1990). This is not the case, as qualitative researchers are not anti-science but claim that by discovering cause and effect sequences the orientation of positivistic researchers will not be able to explain everything about what it means to be human (Giorgi, 1985; McKay, 1990). As Maslow (1988, p. 83) states, "I believe mechanistic science (which in psychology takes the form of behaviorism) to be not incorrect but rather too narrow and limited." It becomes clear that there has to be acknowledgement that in psychology there is the need to have both quantity and quality because psychological phenomena possess both these attributes, and there is no reason to limit the techniques to just one of these procedures (Giorgi, 1985).

Phenomenology stands in a special relationship to empirical science (McKay, 1990). For example, the area of phenomenological research is consciousness of experience which may be described in both subjective, that is phenomenological first person language, and an objective, that is, positivistic third person language (Hughes, 1980; Maslow, 1988; McKay, 1990). Individuals are structures of consciousness and because they are inter-subjective structures, researchers can capture for a moment that



inter-subjective reality or essential shared meanings (Hughes, 1980; Kruger, 1988). For example, a chair has an essential meaning for people, namely, a structure with four legs and a seat, but the chair may in addition to its essential meaning have special added meanings for antique collectors. Although not as precise as the natural sciences, phenomenology does indeed deal with essential shared experiences and inter-subjective meanings. Phenomenology is therefore more precise than other humanistic approaches such as, existentialism, because the inter-subjective meaning of for example, not talking in a library, has become a social norm with an essential inter-subjective understanding and meaning (Giorgi, 1983b; Kruger, 1988). Phenomenology also permits the researcher to describe definite structures of experience and to conclude with the general essence of experience (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Kruger, 1988; Maslow, 1988). For example, by using the phenomenological approach, researchers are able to say on the whole or in general, how people for example, ought to behave in a library setting.

The difference in the two approaches is that phenomenology deals specifically with qualities rather than quantities and is based on shared inter-subjective experiences rather than verifiable measurements (Hughes, 1980; Kruger, 1988). The subjects in phenomenological research are never regarded as static personality structures, and by approaching one person at a time, a holistic rather than a reductive description of that person will be obtained (Roche, 1973; Rowan & Reason, 1988).

#### **3.4.2 Essential Steps in the Phenomenological Research Method**

Essentially, the phenomenological research method involves three interrelated steps, namely, description, reduction or bracketing, and the search for essences (Giorgi, 1994). The intentional nature of consciousness is understood while performing these steps because if consciousness intends an object, then the focus of inquiry and description should be on the object itself (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988).

### 3.4.2.1 *Description*

As phenomenology is concerned with the lived aspects of human phenomena, researchers have to first know how individuals actually experienced what has been lived (Berndtsson, 2000; Giorgi, 1985). This requirement means that a description of the lived experience becomes necessary. Phenomenology is thus descriptive in its search for the essential meanings of phenomena of the world as experienced by conscious individuals and in the way it evaluates these phenomena (Giorgi, 1983b). The phenomenon, given in experience and precisely as a person experiences it, should be so described (Giorgi, 1983b, 1994). The basic principle of phenomenology is that the researcher remains true and faithful to the phenomena, that is, fidelity to the phenomena, as they are happening in everyday life (Giorgi, 1983b; 1994; Kruger, 1988).

Description is the linguistic articulation of the intentional objects of experience, and the clarification of the meaning of the objects of experience, precisely as experienced (Giorgi, 1992; Mohanty, 1989). Phenomenologists describe the "reduced objects" and not the "simple objects as given," which shifts the emphasis to their meanings (Giorgi, 1983b, p. 131). Phenomenological research descriptions are, by necessity, open-ended in order to discover just how objects present themselves to experience by neither adding nor subtracting from them, which in turn, enables the objects to reveal themselves more insightfully than they do in everyday experience (Giorgi, 1992).

At least two kinds of descriptions are central to phenomenological research, namely, the initial description of an experience or event which is usually concrete, and the description of the phenomenon re-expressed in the psychological language of the researcher (Giorgi, 1994; Van Vuuren, 1989). Understanding a phenomenon therefore operates on two levels, namely, understanding through an initial grasp of the data, which in turn, forms the basis of understanding through comprehension of the phenomenon, which is made possible and supported by a

theoretical expectation (Van Vuuren, 1989). Intimate knowledge of the subject field connects both understandings, but the researchers distance themselves from the descriptive material in that they turn the intentionality from "the description directly to the ontically independent objects seeking to apprehend them in the light of this intention" (Van Vuuren, 1989, p. 73).

#### 3.4.2.2 *Reduction*

Phenomenological researchers must be present to the phenomenon under investigation in such a way that it can reveal itself to them precisely as that which it is (Giorgi, 1994). The process of going back to the source of the meaning of the experienced world is known as reduction (Giorgi, 1985, 1994; Paige, 1980). This process involves a bracketing or suspension, not denial, of all previous knowledge or theories about the phenomenon being researched in order to let it, the phenomenon, emerge (Giorgi, 1992, 1994; Paige, 1980).

Phenomenological reduction tries to reveal a realm of being with the focus on the world as revealed through a transcendental attitude (Husserl, 1962). For Husserl (1964), phenomenology takes experience at face value by suspending the explanatory power of anything that is not in the experience, and deals with the experience as lived structure. Reduction or bracketing in this context is a change of attitude, a suspension of the assertion that objects explain experiences, and an acceptance of the idea that experiences explain things. Phenomenology therefore places brackets around many of the common sense and psychological assumptions in order to see what may be revealed by its own particular insights (McKay, 1990). Phenomenologists attempt to understand the events of human experience and existence in a way that is free of personal presuppositions and preconceptions, and through the process of reduction, pre-judgements are abandoned so that nothing is taken as pre-given (Stones, 1988). The reduction is a means of rendering the researcher as non-influential as possible during the research process (neutral),

in order to come up with valuable (value) findings, that is, findings that are robust enough to endure with other investigations in other places (Giorgi, 1994).

By suspending their own beliefs and predispositions, by standing back to look at peoples' worlds, their life-histories their present life situations and their futures, phenomenologists try to find meaningful structures and try to reach certain conclusions regarding the themes which make sense of the things under investigation (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). In essence, phenomenology tries to describe, through its use of phenomenological reduction, the ultimate basis of experience by viewing consciousness as a realm of being which is, in principle, unique (Giorgi, 1983b). In this sense, the phenomenological method is intuitive because in applying the reductive attitude, phenomenologists expose not the experience of others, but the basis of their own pure experience, thereby enabling them to continually "see clearly through our own eyes" (Rowan & Reason, 1988, p.116). One of the merits of phenomenological research and in particular, the reduction phase, is that a "fresh and different way of experiencing a phenomenon is possible" which in turn, may be relevant for gaining new intuitions about the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 1994, p. 212).

#### 3.4.2.3 *Search for Essences*

After the description that is obtained within the attitude of the reduction, the researcher begins the process of free imaginative variation, whereby, aspects of the concrete phenomenon are varied until the essential or invariant characteristics reveal themselves (Giorgi, 1985, 1994). The researcher then discloses the essences or structures and their relationship to each other, that is, the structure of the phenomenon (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Giorgi, 1994). Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. xv) states that the essence is not the end of phenomenological analysis, but only a means of bringing to light all the actual "living relationships of experience." Thus, to be

phenomenological in phenomenological research means returning to the phenomena themselves, obtaining a description of them, submitting them to imaginative variation, and then gaining an "eidetic intuition" of their structures (Giorgi, 1985 p. 26).

### 3.4.3 Language as the Instrument for Meaning

Phenomenological research is concerned with how people construct their worlds, what concepts they use, what their language is and how they talk about and interpret their worlds. Individuals have a certain measure of self-understanding and are able to interpret their own lives. They can, most of the time, not only tell researchers what they experience, but also what the experience means to them and how they evaluate it (Kruger, 1988). They are able to tell the truth according to their own perspectives, their own "interpretations, rationalisations, fabrications, prejudices and exaggerations" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 9).

The phenomenologist researcher's task is to recapture the process of interpretation of these afore-mentioned issues and describe the meanings of individuals' experiences (Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). To recapture any individual's level of experience of a phenomenon, the consciousness of phenomenology enables the researcher to uncover words, expressions or themes in the language of immediate experience used by individuals and their society (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990).

The meanings and understanding that individuals have of their life-situations and life-worlds, their feelings, thoughts, ideas and experiences can be described and interpreted through the communicative medium of language (McKay, 1990). Language has that essential qualitative perspective to reveal or disclose the meanings of phenomena for individuals (Reber, 1985; Roche, 1973). The complexity of the meaning of the word language is evident for language is not merely speech but includes any system of expression or communication including, verbal language, gestural

communication, and facial expressions, or in other words, the entire body, which will give expression to what has not been said or cannot be expressed by individuals (Kruger, 1988; Reber, 1985; Wattlewack et al., 1967). Through language, people are able to describe what they perceive as reality and hence, any language form is relevant to understanding the individuality and uniqueness of individuals' reality (McKay, 1990; Reber, 1985).

Heidegger (1977) states that meanings are conveyed in everyday experience and that these meanings are structured in language. Language and experience are intertwined because language classifies experience in its own terms and along its own lines (Kruger, 1988). The words used by people construct a reality in the sense that the words impose concepts on both the material and the experiential world (Kruger, 1988).

#### 3.4.3.1 *Language, the Individual, Other Individuals and Society*

Descriptions of phenomena when expressed linguistically reflect the expressions of an inner private life (Roche, 1973). Language not only communicates the object alone, but also the person's character, mood and intentions (Hawkes, 1979; Kruger, 1988).

Linguistic descriptions of phenomena also reflect the expressions of a common outer world which people experience (Roche, 1973). Humans are interacting beings who reciprocally influence one another, which means, that people live as beings in the world and as relationship to that world, and are always in dialogue with each other (Hughes, 1980). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) the inter-subjective nature of speech and language is a basic bridge between self, the individual, and others.

Language is a culturally determined pattern of vocal gestures that people acquire by virtue of being raised in a particular society, place and time (Reber, 1985). Social systems are therefore embedded in cultural language, since in that language, human beings find themselves consensually giving names to objects

as well as generating objects (Kruger, 1983, 1988). Consequently, language is a guide to people's social reality because meaning is relative to, and valid in the particular contexts in which it occurs (Giorgi, 1986; Kruger, 1988). The fact that language has common elements such as, words and expressions, means that language, in whatever form, can be shared by more than one person and can therefore, form part of a phenomenological empirical study because it can be examined, compared and conclusions concerning it can be reached (Kruger, 1983, 1988).

#### 3.4.3.2 *Making Sense of Linguistic Descriptions of Phenomena*

Phenomena have meanings and in order to make sense or understand these meanings phenomenologist researchers need to make explicit what individuals describe or communicate about their experiences of any given phenomenon within its context or horizon (Kruger, 1983, 1988). The phenomenologist researcher however, needs to move beyond the immediate to the essential or essence of the meanings of the phenomena, and in this sense, phenomenology is hermeneutic (McKay, 1990).

Hermeneutic psychology, the general philosophy of human understanding and interpretation, tries to interpret the meanings of phenomena (Heidegger, 1970). From the hermeneutic perspective, understanding of anything is dependent on the understanding of the context in which the phenomenon under investigation appears (McKay, 1990). For Rowan and Reason (1988), understanding can be seen as a combining of two perspectives, that of the phenomenon itself, a psychological event or process, and that of the interpreters who are located in their own lives in a larger culture and in a historical point in time. To make sense of what people communicate about their experiences, researchers have to rely on their own experience of the world and that of their fellow human beings. The claim made by hermeneutics is that researchers can never totally transcend their own cultural positions, their viewpoints and pre-judgements which they bring to the understanding of a phenomenon (Rowan & Reason, 1988).

The task of hermeneutic interpretation is to critically examine the "fore-knowledge of the world and of the phenomena we encounter there, with the intention of coming to a deeper comprehension of these phenomena" (Rowan & Reason, 1988, p. 133). In essence, hermeneutic psychology is an "existential analysis of the forgotten, disguised and hidden nature of the fundamental structures of life, and as such, beneficial to phenomenologically orientated research" (McKay, 1990, p. 26).

### 3.5 RESEARCHER AS PARTICIPANT OBSERVER

Any research which relies on language and communication as its basis should follow the participant observer research approach (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; McKay, 1990). This research method is characterised by a period of intense interaction between the researcher and respondents. The method involves taking an empathetic viewpoint of those individuals being studied, understanding the situated character of interaction and viewing the social processes over time (Wertz, 1983).

The phenomenologist researcher as participant observer becomes immersed in the world of description and uses the descriptions provided by the respondents as a "point of access from which to make the subject's living of situations his own" (Wertz, 1983, p. 204). During the interview, the researcher cannot be a mere spectator but must experience with the respondent in order to study experiences (Wertz, 1985). The emphasis is with the explication of the respondents' worlds, but the dynamics of the researcher are explicitly part of the process (Massarik, 1988).

### 3.6 OBJECTIVITY, RELIABILITY, VALIDITY IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Traditional research has, and still does, hinge on the problems of validity, reliability and objectivity. It emphasises the importance of disciplined observation and value free inquiry with measurable evidence of consensus by other scientists as a means



of generating rigorous and objective knowledge (Giorgi, 1985; Kruger, 1988; Stones, 1988). The method of self-report for gaining access to the experience of an individual through self-expression has been viewed with suspicion because of its assumed subjectivity, and in consequence, it is seen as unreliable and lacking in scientific accuracy and rigor (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990; Stones, 1988).

The traditional attitude of objectivism makes the claim that subjectivity is negative, and assumes that rigor can only be achieved with the elimination of subjectivity (Giorgi, 1994). Phenomenologically, subjectivity cannot be eliminated because it aims to understand any object of consciousness in terms of the acts of the subject to whom the object appears, and its interest can be described as understanding the "objective in terms of subjectivity, rather than trying to understand the subjective as opposed to the objective" (Giorgi, 1983b, p. 135). In addition, phenomenology stresses the relationships between subjects and objects rather than each term singly, thus overcoming the object/subject dichotomy (Giorgi 1983b, 1994).

By combining self-report with a dialogical method, phenomenologist researchers can enter into the give and take world of each individual they study. True dialogue is a two-way communication between two individuals in a joint critical search for understanding (Giorgi, 1983b; McKay, 1990). Objectivity in this context means seeing what an experience is for another person, not what causes it, or why it exists, or how it can be defined and classified (Giorgi, 1983b; McKay, 1990). The objective focus is the attitudes, beliefs and feelings of individuals, as they exist for them at the moment they are experiencing them, and perceiving them whole as a unity (McKay, 1990).

Objectivity from the phenomenologist research perspective means that the researcher and the subjects' statements faithfully express the research phenomenon, resulting in an essential

description that can make a claim to general validity (Kruger, 1988). Credibility, or the criterion against which the truth value of a qualitative research endeavour is evaluated, is present when faithful descriptions of an experience are revealed so that the individuals having that experience, or reading about it, would immediately recognize it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of the phenomenological approach is further enhanced when the researcher's experience of situations or phenomena can be verified by other scientists thereby enabling the research to become valid because the facts in society are based upon inter-subjective consensual validation (Kruger, 1983).

Human research, by including the dialogical approach, generates insight and validity based on an interactive dialectical logic (Reason & Rowan, 1988). It is necessary to draw a distinction between an objective understanding and an interpretation which is inter-subjectively valid (Reason & Rowan, 1988). Inter-subjective validity implies that psychology is a shared undertaking, in the sense that an experience of the world by self and others is a shared consciousness (McKay, 1990). Adequacy in research implies that each term or concept in the model of human functioning is constructed so that the data of the research can be inter-subjectively understood by other researchers through the schemes of interpretation provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The "knowledge derived through phenomenological procedures should thus prove inter-subjectively valid" (Stones, 1988, p. 143).

The phenomenological approach insists that in order to be truly rigorous, the presence of the human element in the research process should be taken into account. The researchers should also specify the extent to which they are present to that which they are studying by making explicit the perspective from which they proceed (Kruger, 1988; Stones, 1988). With regard to generalisation, the phenomenologist researcher can choose either the idiographic (individual) or nomothetic (general) methods, or both methods can be used simultaneously (Giorgi, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Giorgi (1994) however argues that phenomenologists

should always begin concretely and go through the idiographic details until the proper essential meanings are procured from the mass of details. Just as the meaning chair can awaken the categories furniture or material object, these two descriptions could be described generally (nomothetically) while respecting context and unique details (Giorgi 1994). As phenomenology is geared towards revealing the truth of the human person both individually and collectively, the use of both idiographic and nomothetic research is valid. Thus, the nomothetic idiographic dichotomy does not have to be accepted in phenomenological research (Giorgi 1994; Wertz, 1985).

The data of phenomenological research cannot be quantified or analysed into fundamental elements as there will always be some degree of subjectivity (Kruger, 1988). The natural, or naive, attitude in phenomenological research assumes that the ordinary practical reasoning of everyday life in individuals' social and natural worlds are simply there, and as researchers are also human beings in the everyday world it is often difficult to repress inevitable prejudices and habits of thought which can, potentially, fore-close on the phenomenon and thereby obstruct the view of it (Giorgi, 1994; Kruger, 1988; McKay, 1990). In essence therefore, the validity of the phenomenological research approach is ultimately dependent on the integrity of both the subjects and the researcher. This does not mean that phenomenological research is a futile endeavour. Since researchers cannot transcend their historical positions and rid themselves of their pre-judgements completely, the task which faces phenomenologists is that of deciding how to distinguish between legitimate pre-judgements and those which cloud understanding (McKay, 1990; Rowan & Reason, 1988). It is inevitable therefore, that phenomenologist researchers, before researching a phenomenon, can in a sense, predict what the final description and understanding of the phenomenon will be in terms of a particular theory, since they have some presuppositions about what they hope to understand in the research study (McKay, 1990). From this position, phenomenological research is a

systematic and rigorous investigation of a phenomenon guided by what is already understood and known about a phenomenon.

The primary strength of new paradigm research, including phenomenological research, and its fundamental claim to being a valid process, lies in its emphasis on "personal encounters with experience and encounter with persons" (Reason & Rowan, 1988, p. 242). In addition, phenomenological research with its insistence upon observing as closely and as effectively as possible, and its careful, rigorous, systematic method of obtaining essential descriptions, can make a claim to general validity (Kruger, 1988).

### 3.7 AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

The process of research is, by its nature, dynamic, circular and is never conclusive. By exploring one area, additional problems that need resolving are encountered and therefore, "research begets research" (Leedy, 1989, p. 9). Research questions may arise from a specific theory and/or from research on that theory, or it may originate from previous research observations which make a researcher aware of unsolved problems in a particular field of study (McBurney, 1994).

This research study originated from previous research observations by Murray (1998) which made the researcher aware of the unexplored issues in the adventitious VI literature regarding the notion of AVI individuals' experience of grief as a linear or chronic process; the unexplored issues of needs, and in particular, the psychological and emotional needs, experienced by AVI individuals following their loss of sight, and the influence of the length of time of adventitious VI on the experiences of AVI adults. The major conclusion from the results of the study by Murray (1998) is that different lengths of time of VI, that is, AVI for under and over 6 years) are significantly related to psychological and emotional reactions of AVI adults.

The main aim in this research study was to develop a more in-depth body of knowledge than currently exists in the research literature on adventitious VI, and in particular, long-term adventitious VI. It was also hoped to achieve deeper understanding and insight into AVI adults' experience of the grief process and emergent needs post-grief and whether these experiences are influenced by the length of time of adventitious VI. Any new knowledge and insight into the complex world of adventitious VI can only enrich the lives of the AVI and all those who form part of their social networks.

### 3.8 RESEARCH STRATEGY OF THIS STUDY

The personal and social worlds of AVI individuals are frequently subject and not object worlds because AVI individuals are experiencing beings and a human reality, like loss of sight, is not easily reduced to object status (Berndtsson, 2000; McKay, 1990). Analysing the complex field of adventitious loss of sight requires a special consciousness in order to fathom its meaning and significance (McKay, 1990). What loss of sight means to AVI individuals, how they cope with the associated emotions related to grief, and what emergent needs are experienced therefore become meaningful questions.

When undertaking a research project, the researcher needs to be clear about the research problem and its related questions, what approach is to be used to study the problem and what method will be used to gain the appropriate information (Elden, 1988).

#### 3.8.1 **The Approach**

An adapted phenomenological research method using case studies and involving qualitative descriptive data obtained from follow-up depth interviews with AVI adults was used in this research study. Researching issues phenomenologically means trying to make sense of people's accounts about their lives, or about specific segments of their lives, and how they extract meaning out of the

situations in which they find themselves (Jones, 1983; van Huijgevoort, 2002).

In this research study, knowledge and understanding about two specific segments of AVI individuals' lives, namely, their experience of the grief process and the emergent needs experienced following their loss of sight were explored. The researcher decided that the best way to approach this study was to ask a number of the AVI to share their experiences of their loss of sight, their psychological and emotional reactions to the loss (and by implication, the experience of the grief process) and what needs they have experienced, and still experience, living with a chronic VI, and then to extract common themes, reflect on these and then arrive at an essential description and meaning of the experiences. In the context of this research study therefore, the AVI described their loss of sight and the emergent needs post-grief experienced following their loss of sight in their own unique ways, and the re-descriptions are their own particular themes for loss of sight. These descriptions allowed the researcher access to the AVI respondents' current cognitions and behaviours through their connotations and meanings. The focus was on the concrete descriptions given by each individual AVI respondent regarding their subjective experiences of the specific issues under investigation within their personal, familial, social and rehabilitation contexts.

The AVI, by allowing people to "look into and beyond our windows to the world" (Murray, 1995, p. 29), can reveal their own subjective thoughts, feelings and experiences about the loss of their sight and their own unique needs post-grief, and in these revelations enable themselves, and all members of their social networks, including rehabilitators, to confront and deal with the difficult and painful issues of loss of sight in a more meaningful way.

The phenomenological approach is most suited to research concerned with the realm of human experience, such as the human

experience of adventitious loss of sight. Phenomenological research respects the uniqueness of the individual, makes no attempt at dehumanization and respects the reality of, and validity of, human experience (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1988). Researching something sensitive such as the grief and needs experienced by the AVI requires a dialectic of closeness and distance (Kruger, 1983, 1988). Researchers need to approach the research phenomenon so close as to allow its dimensions to emerge, but they must also acquire enough distance to be able to share their insights with others and to have them validate these insights. A human scientific truth needs to be a trans-individual matter if it is to provide worthwhile insight and application (McKay, 1990).

### **3.8.2 The Research Problem and Related Questions**

The research problem relevant to this study centres around the unexplored issues regarding the grief experience of AVI individuals as a linear or chronic process; the unexplored issues of the psychological and emotional needs of the AVI; and the influence of the length of time of adventitious VI on the aforementioned segments of AVI individuals' lives.

In this research study, questions focused on the two specific areas, the experienced grief process and the experienced emergent needs. The matter of length of time of adventitious VI was overcome by interviewing AVI adults visually impaired within and beyond 6 years.

#### *The Grief Process*

The research will question whether the AVI respondents experience grief after their loss of sight as a linear or chronic process. Questions on the experience of grief will focus on the emotions and attitudes such as, anger, depression and acceptance. Focus will also be on the experienced emotions immediately after the loss of sight and which emotions continue to be experienced.

### *Emergent Needs*

The research will question what emergent needs are experienced by the AVI respondents following their loss of sight, and whether they have changed over time. Focus will be on whether these needs have been, and are continuing to be satisfied, highlighting the support from family, societal and the rehabilitation context, whether the same needs reoccur once they have been satisfied and if so, why. Focus will also be on whether there are similar and/or different needs between those who experience grief after loss of sight as a linear or chronic process, and whether the same needs are experienced by the AVI with different degrees of visual ability.

### *Perspective of Loss of Sight*

The research will question what perspectives the AVI respondents have of their loss of sight and how it influences their emotions and attitudes and their emergent needs.

### **3.8.3 Methodology for this Research Study**

The case study involving follow-up depth interviews was the method of enquiry used to capture and describe the uniqueness of the AVI respondents' encounter with the phenomena of the emergent needs post-grief experienced following their loss of sight. The reason for choosing this framework was that the data needed for this particular research study could be obtained directly from naturalistic observation interviews (Groenewald, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The in-depth knowledge gained through the case study method can create opportunities for innovations in the area of adventitious loss of sight by the AVI and their families, rehabilitators and society in general (McKay, 1990). In addition, the case study complements nomothetic studies in this area.

#### *3.8.3.1 Criteria for Inclusion in Study*

The following criteria were adopted for including respondents



in the present study:

All respondents had to have experience related to the phenomenon being researched. In this research study therefore, the respondents were individuals who had lost their sight in their adult life, in other words, AVI adults. Only those AVI over the age of 22 years were interviewed, as according to Gerdes (1988), adulthood begins at this age, with an acknowledgement that this is an entirely arbitrary split as life cannot be separated into distinct stages, as one stage flows into and overlaps the next. The congenitally visually impaired (life-long) were not included. Congenitally visually impaired adults have to a large extent been dependent on others their whole life, whereas, this dependency is perhaps a new experience for the AVI. This difference could influence the experienced needs and related emotions. For example, AVI adults who up until the time of their loss of sight were able to drive a motor car may, as a result of the VI, experience more frustrations because of their need to be dependent on others for transport than the congenitally visually impaired, who have always needed to be dependent on others for transport. All AVI respondents in the study therefore had to no longer be able to drive a motor car.

All respondents had to be verbally fluent in the medium of English and had to be able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and experiences in relation to the researched phenomena. They had also to be naive with respect to psychological theory. It is assumed that respondents being untrained in psychological thought will increase the probability of their verbalising or describing the data of their awareness without undue interference from implicit psychological assumptions (Stones, 1986). All the AVI respondents met these criteria and expressed a willingness to discuss matters freely and openly with the researcher.

Each AVI respondent had to be in the final stages of rehabilitation or an ex-rehabilitée. This criterion was necessary because the literature argues that once AVI individuals are

rehabilitated, that is, they are aware of and have accepted and adjusted to their VIS, there is then a return to their previous levels of functioning (Atkinson, 1990; Connor & Muldoon, 1973).

Another characteristic of the present study was that AVI respondents visually impaired for longer than 2 years had to be included in the study. The majority of literature and research on adventitious VI generally focuses on the period before and immediately after (up to two years) the onset of VI and the rehabilitation process (Atkinson, 1990; Conyers, 1992; Dodds, 1993a; Rosenbloom & Goodrich, 2000; Rowland, 1985). It was decided that both short-term (AVI for under 6 years) and long-term (AVI for over 6 years) adults had to be interviewed in order to investigate whether the different lengths of time of adventitious VI affect different grief processes and needs. The 6 year cut off period was based on the conclusion from research by Murray (1998) that different lengths of time of adventitious vi, that is, within and beyond a 6 year time frame, are significantly related to psychological and emotional reactions experienced by AVI adults.

#### 3.8.3.2 *Cases used in the Present Study*

Ten white South African AVI adults which included 7 females and 3 males were interviewed in this research study. In addition, respondents included those who were AVI within and beyond 6 years (5 in each group). The criterion that each AVI respondent had to be in the final stage of rehabilitation or an ex-rehabilitatee necessitated that the respondents be selected from an available register of present and past rehabilitated AVI individuals from Optima and associated VI organisations.

Optima College was used to gain particulars of rehabilitated AVI individuals as it is the main centre in South Africa that offers courses for the rehabilitation or independence training of AVI adults. In addition, Optima offers courses such as computer training and telephony (See Appendices B and C for

letter to Optima for permission to use the College for interviews and the subsequent reply).

Interviews were conducted in Gauteng and the Free State. Each AVI respondent was telephonically contacted to participate in the research. By speaking personally to the AVI respondents the researcher hoped to establish rapport before the start of the interviews. Three interviews with AVI individuals attending the telephony course were conducted at Optima. All other interviews were conducted in the AVI respondents' homes. In the light of the selection criteria, one AVI was excluded from the study because she was still able to drive a motor car to attend the rehabilitation course.

#### 3.8.3.3 *Characteristics of the Case Respondents*

Certain fundamental demographic characteristics of the AVI respondents such as age, marital status, length of time of adventitious VI, visual ability and employment status were included here for the purpose of providing a brief overview of the AVI respondents in this research study.

**Age and Marital Status:** The average age of the AVI respondents is 44 years, ranging from 26 to 56 years of age. Four AVI are single, 4 are divorced and 2 are married.

**Education Level:** At the time of the interviews, five have secondary school qualifications, including four with grade 12 and one with grade 11; one has a technical qualification; and four have tertiary qualifications, including degrees and diplomas. All of the respondents reached these educational levels before the onset of their VIS, and all the AVI respondents in this research study attended normal sighted schools.

**Occupation:** Occupation of the AVI respondents before the onset of VI and occupation at the time of the interview is shown in Table 3.1. It is clear that adventitious VI has had a negative

effect, with only two individuals employed at the time of the interviews. The increase in the number of telephonists and potential telephonists is not surprising as this profession fits the stereotyped employment deemed suitable for the AVI.

Table 3.1 Occupational status of the AVI respondents before the onset of VI and at the time of the interview

Occupation Before Onset	Occupation After Onset
Construction worker	Restaurant worker - Telephony student
Manager	Unemployed - Fixes brailers part-time
Market researcher	Unemployed - Housewife
Sales consultant	Unemployed - Studying
Salesman	Unemployed
Secretary	Unemployed - Telephony student
Teacher	Telephonist
Teacher	Unemployed - Telephony student

Duration of VI: The mean duration of adventitious VI for the respondents is 10,3 years, ranging from 1,5 to 24 years. The mean duration of impairment for the short-term AVI respondents is 3,4 years. No person impaired for less than one year was interviewed. The mean duration of impairment for the long-term AVI respondents is 17,2 years.

Visual Ability: The different degrees of perceived visual ability as described by the AVI respondents are: four WITH total blindness, three WITH functional blindness, and three WITH low vision {the descriptions of the different degrees of visual abilities are shown in Section 1.2.1.3: Visual Impairment p. 4}.

#### 3.8.4 Method of Data Collection

Face to face follow-up depth interviews were the method and instrument used to gather data from the AVI respondents. The depth interview is characterised by an intensive process on the part of the researcher to explore thoroughly and deeply the views and dynamics of the respondents (Jones, 1983; Massarik, 1988). In this context, there is a genuine human relationship between researcher and respondents, characterised by rapport, mutual trust and caring. The researcher is sincerely concerned with the respondent as a total person and goes beyond the search for limited information input (Massarik, 1988). In turn, the respondents usually reciprocate these feelings, value the researcher's motives and are willing to respond and disclose in depth, all areas of their lives, including, experiences, feelings and imageries (Massarik, 1988).

The time frame of these interviews is not limited and there is little by way of simplistic question or answer exchanges, but rather "free-form modes of communication" and opportunities for probing and clarification (Massarik, 1988, p. 203). This interview style recognises the inherent humanness of both researcher and respondents and the genuine relevance of the total interpersonal as well as non-human environment in which the process occurs. The resulting data excel in "conceptual richness and human relevance" (Massarik, 1988, p. 205).

##### 3.8.4.1 *The Interviewing Process*

The interview followed questions which were concerned with the key experiential areas pertinent to the research study (See Appendix A for suggested questions). The open-ended questions enabled the AVI respondents to reflect on their past, present and future with regard to their experiences of the phenomena under investigation (van Huijgevoort, 2002). Although the basic format of the interviews remained similar, answers often lead to other questions, so it would be fair to say that no two interviews were

identical and each retained an unique character of its own.

Each AVI respondent was interviewed twice. The follow-up interviews took place on average, 4,5 months after the initial interview. Follow-up interviews were done in order to investigate whether there had been any changes in the AVI respondents' experiences, and if so, what had happened during the time interval to initiate such changes. The duration of each interview was self-determining, and varied from approximately 1,5 to 2 hours. Once the respondents explicated all that they felt was related to their personal experiences of the phenomena being researched, the interviews ended (Giorgi, 1985).

The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed onto computer. It has been found that the spoken interview allows for spontaneous expressions and descriptions that are as near as possible to the respondents' lived experiences, and allows for dialogue during this phase of the research (Romanyshyn, 1975; Stones, 1988). As the researcher herself is totally blind, she was not able to pick up facial gestures but she was able, via the aid of the taped interviews, to pay particular attention to the respondents' changes in tone and volume of voice, silent gaps, pauses in the dialogue, delayed responses and other sounds such as body, hand or feet movements in order to understand more intensely the experienced worlds of the respondents (Papadopoulos & Scanlon, 2002; Velde, 2000).

The interviews were conducted in an informal and non-directive manner, and in an atmosphere of warmth, mutual respect and co-operation, or in other words, rapport (Massarik, 1988). The researcher guaranteed confidentiality and all respondents opted to remain anonymous, and therefore, all names used in the research study are fictitious. Having completed the interviews, the respondents were asked for feedback on their experience of the interview. The responses to this question were positive with respondents saying that they had found them enjoyable, enlightening and that certain questions had made them think about

aspects that they had not considered until the interview.

In line with the phenomenological method of reduction, the researcher bracketed all previous knowledge or theories about the phenomena being researched, and thereby attempted not to influence the respondents and not to ask questions that could be construed as leading them. The advantage of a non-directive interview is its flexibility, which allows the researcher to grasp more fully the respondent's experience than would be possible in a more rigid methodological technique (Stones, 1988).

### 3.8.5 The Phenomenological Explication

Several approaches to the process of explicating descriptive data have been outlined when conducting phenomenological psychological research, including the approaches of researchers such as, Giorgi (1985), Stones, (1986, 1988) and Wertz (1983, 1985). The method in this research study of the explication of descriptive data relating to the phenomenon of emergent needs post-grief experienced by AVI adults involving two essential phenomena, that is, the experience of grief and the emergent needs, followed the general outlines as delineated by the above mentioned researchers.

#### 3.8.5.1 *Multi-stage Process of Explication*

The method as followed in this research study involved four essential interrelated steps, each of which presupposed and refined the preceding one. The steps form the pertinent procedures which are congruent with the general principles of phenomenological research, and allowed the emergence of an essential description of the phenomena under investigation.

##### (A) *Data Constitution: The Initial Concrete Description*

The researcher asked each of the respondents to describe the phenomena under investigation, namely, their feelings and

emotions following their loss of sight, and by implication, their experience of the grief process, and their experienced emergent needs. What followed were raw concrete descriptions expressed in the first person language of each AVI respondent's experience with the phenomena in its lived-world context (Giorgi, 1985).

*(B) Individual Phenomenal Descriptions: Meaning Units*

This stage involved the transformation of the raw concrete data into individual phenomenal descriptions, that is, recognisable aspects in the form of meaning units of the respondents' experiences of the phenomena. These meaning units were essentially re-statements of their own phenomenal experiences with no psychological analysis or interpretation (Wertz, 1985).

The researcher followed the operations as specified by both Giorgi (1985) and Stones (1986, 1988) which they consider necessary to achieve the needed transformation:

1. The researcher read each interview many times with no special attitude, in order to familiarize herself and gain an intuitive and holistic grasp of the data. At this time, the researcher attempted to put herself in the respondents' shoes and to live through the experience from the inside so that she was not a mere spectator but was able to achieved an understanding of the meanings the respondents had expressed precisely as intended.

2. The researcher then demarcated meaning units (constituents) which emerged spontaneously from the interview data. A meaning unit may be defined as "a statement made by the subject which is self-definable and self-delimiting in the expression of a single, recognizable aspect of (the subject's) experience" (Cloonan, 1971, p. 117). The researcher was aware that each meaning unit exists in the context of the other interrelated meanings of the protocol. Regardless of how clearly meanings are conceptually differentiated from each other there is nevertheless, an inseparable relatedness of all these meaning units in their lived sense (Stones, 1988).

3. The researcher judged what meaning units were relevant and



revealing of the phenomena under study and discarded redundant statements. She then regrouped the relevant meaning units together according to their intertwining meanings and placed them in temporal order such that they accurately expressed the pattern of the original event.

4. As far as possible, the researcher redescribed the experience from the first person perspective more or less in the respondents' own language in order that the data could be expressed precisely as intended.

*(C) Individual (Idiographic) Psychological Structures of Meanings: The Essence of Experience*

Within the method of the reduction, the researcher reflected on the psychological insight contained in each of the individual meaning units, which were still expressed essentially in the concrete everyday language of the respondents. The intention of each meaning unit was transformed from the concrete language into language which expressed a psychological perspective of the phenomena (Giorgi, 1985; Stones, 1988). The transformations are necessary because the respondents' descriptions express in a cryptic way multiple realities. What is needed however, is to elucidate, in depth, the psychological aspects appropriate for the understanding of the phenomena (Giorgi 1985). The researcher thus obtained an individual or idiographic psychological structure of each meaning unit to reflect the essential themes of the AVI respondents' experience of losing sight. Wertz (1985, p.173) suggests that psychological insight appears as a "spontaneous upsurge of a largely intuitive character rather than any following of any explicit rules...Psychological insight is both a discovery and a creation."

The researcher turned her attention from the reality or unreality of the situations described by the respondents to their meanings and arrived at the situations precisely as experienced, or more generally, as meant, that is, the essence of experience. The study of individuals' participation in the "immanent

significations" of lived situations makes the research psychological (Wertz, 1985, p. 174).

The researcher used the following active operations of understanding as described by Wertz (1985) during the idiographic level of psychological analysis:

1. The activity of "penetration of implicit horizons" (Wertz, 1985, p. 174). As the description is not the ultimate object of reflection, despite its necessity, it (reflection) ultimately addresses the immanent significations that make up the respondents' lived reality. Once connected with the respondents' world through the description, the researcher reflected on things not mentioned in the description, but which were implicit in the respondents' situations.

2. The researcher also considered relations of meaning units because ideally, each meaning unit is inter-related. Some aspects, such as temporal, spatial, or social constituents (meaning units) of the phenomenon depend upon, or presuppose others in its overall structure.

3. The researcher looked for the unity and consistency of diverse experiences through the thematization of recurrent meanings. Discovering recurrent themes is the beginning of essential aspects of the case.

It was during this step that the researcher encountered various discrepancies, and certain themes appeared to contradict others, or appeared to be unrelated (Stones, 1988). The researcher proceeded with the belief that what is logically inexplicable may be real and valid and therefore were not ignored.

After reflecting upon all the descriptive data of each case, the researcher synthesised the insights obtained by taking into account all the expressed intentions derived from the meaning units, eliminated redundancies, and expressed the psychological structures of the individual case (Wertz, 1985). The phenomenological synthesis of a specific description of a situated structure communicates, through the psychological

perspective, the unique structure of a particular phenomenon within a particular context (Stones, 1988).

(D) *General (Nomothetic) Psychological Structures of Meanings*

The phenomenological synthesis indicated as a general description of a situated structure is based upon several specific descriptions each of a situated structure of essentially the same phenomenon (Stones, 1988). In this stage, the researcher moved from the psychology of individual grief and emergent needs to the psychology of grief and emergent needs of all the AVI respondents in order to achieve the general psychological structure. It involved understanding diverse individual cases as instances of something more general, and then articulating that generality (Wertz, 1985).

Within this nomothetic level of analysis the researcher used the following active operations of understanding as described by Wertz (1985) during the process:

1. The researcher sought general features of individual respondent's structures. Certain related meaning units articulated in the individual respondent's psychological structures are already true of other respondents' situations. The role of immanent meaning is an ideal one and as such, is not necessarily related only to one individual's experience or private reality. Further, an individual psychological structure can in principle, at least, pertain to many individuals.

2. The researcher compared each respondent's psychological structures to the others, and established "convergences and divergences" (Wertz, 1985, p. 190). The convergences or similarities are general statements which became a part of the general psychological structure of the phenomena whereas, the divergencies manifested typical or idiosyncratic structural features. Some meaning structure may however be found to be common to all, as it may be necessarily implicit. To be an ecumenical and valid insight, it is not necessary that the meaning structure must already be made explicit in previous

stages, but that it can be found in the other cases upon further reflection. This meant that the present procedure was not a mere cross-checking for correlations of actual statements, nor a content or factor analytic procedure, but rather a deeply reflective probing into individual psychological structures, in the light of other individual structures, in order to find common features that are sometimes highly implicit.

#### 3.8.5.2 *Explications Specific to this Research Study*

In this research study, the questions served to delineate important core areas of the phenomena under investigation, that is, the experience of feelings and emotions following loss of sight, and by implication, the experience of the grief process, and the experienced emergent needs. The descriptions of all the respondents to one specific area of the phenomena were addressed one at a time and the stages were followed for each and every core area delineated by the questions. After explicating each of the AVI respondent's descriptions of the experienced phenomena and arriving at an individual or idiographic psychological structure of each meaning unit and theme of the core experiential area of the phenomena under consideration, the researcher then discussed the differences and similarities among the respondents. The researcher then compared the two groups of AVI respondents, namely, those AVI within and beyond 6 years, for similarities or differences concerning the phenomena under investigation.

#### 3.8.5.3 *General Comments on the phenomenological explication*

The method used in this research study in explicating the descriptive data manifests merely one instance or variation of the phenomenological method in psychological research. There are alternative methods of explication, none of which are exclusive or exhaustive, and although no method can do everything, each particular one can achieve something worthwhile by means of it (Giorgi, 1985). The phenomenological psychological method makes explicit the essences of experienced phenomena and through the

use of the method of explication, no matter which one, researchers can proceed rigorously and systematically through each specified step knowing exactly what advance is being made.

### 3.9 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, the research methodology (or the envisaged overall plan of investigation into the research problem) to illuminate the descriptive understanding of meanings was discussed. In complying with the distinct characteristics of research methodology, this research study originated with questions related to unexplored problems in the field of adventitious VI and in particular, the grief experiences and emergent needs, particularly psychological and emotional needs, experienced by AVI individuals following their loss of sight. An adapted phenomenological method using case studies and involving depth follow-up interviews was used in this research study, as the researcher asserted that the strict application of empirical methods to the area of adventitious VI would act against the sensitivity required in researching such a personal aspect of human life.

All individuals, including the AVI, have a world of their own, in which all of life is related specifically and uniquely to each individual. In the next Chapter the researcher will consider the unique and personal ways in which AVI individuals have experienced the grief process, and what needs have and continue to be experienced as described through the eyes of the beholder.