



Editorial

by **Ron Valle and Cynthia L. Grace**
Guest Editors

Special Edition: Contemporary Phenomenological Research on Key Psychotherapeutic Issues

The broad thematic focus of this Special Edition on contemporary phenomenological research in the field of psychotherapy more specifically encompasses eight recent studies that examine potentially impactful human experiences of special clinical relevance. Collectively, the diverse issues explored invariably touch the core of our humanness and are, therefore, both essential to explore and yet often difficult to face, especially in a psychotherapeutic setting. More specifically, the human experiences addressed in the studies reported on in this edition include loss and grieving, self-empowerment, body image dissatisfaction, substance abuse, trauma and victimization, interrole conflict, homelessness and other clinically significant complications of co-existing disorders, psychiatric institutionalization and self-acceptance, and sexual orientation formation.

In terms of its applicability and possibilities as a research mode, existential-phenomenology would seem especially well-suited, firstly, to investigate, and thereby deepen our understanding of, the more subtle dimensions of experiences that are often relevant to the work of clinical psychologists (Valle & Mohs, 1998), and, secondly, to enhance the power and effectiveness of the practice of psychotherapy through this deeper understanding (Valle, 2016). These more subtle experiential dimensions are left untouched and unrevealed by mainstream behavioural experimental approaches, and have not specifically as yet been systematically focused on in the professional phenomenological literature in the way that, as demonstrated by the studies included in this edition, an existential-phenomenological approach opens up.

The methodology of the eight studies presented here

consists primarily of classic constituent analysis as inspired by the foundational work of van Kaam (1959, 1969) and the work of those subsequently involved in the shaping of phenomenological research in psychology in the Duquesne school of the 1970s and 1980s, especially Giorgi (1985, 2009), Colaizzi (1973, 1978), and von Eckartsberg (1986). In this context, the researchers each chose to investigate an issue that s/he identified with experientially, and that was, therefore, of sufficiently deep personal importance to sensitize them to the central role these same issues and related experiences play in shaping the lives of many people.

With this shared foundation, the intention of this Special Edition is that the papers included will, both individually and collectively, be relevant, meaningful, and accessible even to persons not otherwise drawn to academic research findings. The findings and thematic threads of each of these studies are nevertheless discussed in theoretical depth and with academic rigour in relation to previous research in the field.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the very process of doing phenomenological research is, in and of itself, psychotherapeutic. For it not only enables processing by the participants of the life experiences narrated, but invites a process of self-transformation in the person conducting the research in a number of ways – the process of bracketing, the self-inquiry required as one engages and distills the raw descriptions, and last, but certainly not least, the fact that, in this case, each of the experiences investigated *really matters* personally to the researcher involved. This last point may well be the cornerstone of the quite unique meaningfulness and coherence of this research collection.

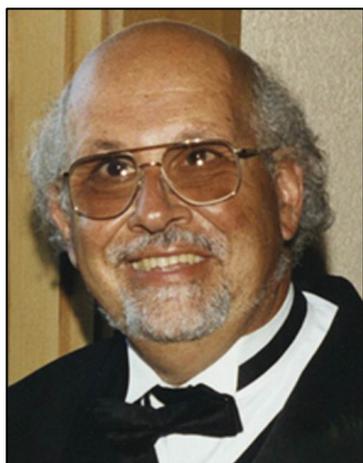
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About the Guest Editors



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Professor Ron Valle is currently a director of *Awakening: A Centre for Exploring Living and Dying* and the *Awakening Retreat Centre* in Brentwood, CA, where he has served on a voluntary basis since 1992. He has worked with those dying and grieving since 1982. A long-time practitioner and teacher of meditation, he developed an Integrated Therapy Programme for transforming stress and pain while serving as co-director of an outpatient university hospital pain clinic.

Professor, counsellor, supervisor, and author, Dr Valle has facilitated more than 80 workshops and symposia during his lengthy academic and professional career spanning almost 35 years. As a licensed psychologist, he specializes in clients with chronic pain and stress-related disorders, and has worked extensively with individuals and their families facing a life-threatening diagnosis.

Dr Valle has, over the course of his professional career, been closely associated as founder and/or director of several prestigious national centres including the *Centre for the Development of Consciousness and Personal Growth* and the *Holistic Centre of Pittsburgh*, both of which are based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He has served as an adjunct faculty member at various academies of higher learning including the *Graduate School of Consciousness Studies* at *JFK University*, the *Institute of Transpersonal Psychology*, *Saybrook Institute*, the *California Institute of Integral Studies*, *San Jose State University*, *Sacramento State University*, and *Argosy University*. He also served for five years as a member of the editorial board of *ReVision: A Journal of Knowledge and Consciousness*.

In addition to over 50 papers, Dr Valle has authored and edited several books, amongst them being *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology* (with Mark King, 1978, Oxford University Press); *The Metaphors of Consciousness* (with Rolf von Eckartsberg, 1981, 1989, Plenum Press); *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* (1989, with Steen Halling, Plenum Press); *Phenomenological Inquiry: Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions* (1998, Plenum Press); *Opening to Dying and Grieving: A Sacred Journey* (with Mary Mohs, 2006, Yes International Publishers), and, most recently, *The Changing Faces of Therapy: Evolving Perspectives in Clinical Practice and Assessment* (2016, Lulu Publishing & Argosy University).

Dr Cynthia Grace is a clinical psychologist whose practice specializes in providing psychosocial support services to people of all ages who are affected by acute and chronic medical illness, developmental disability and disease related trauma. She has been facilitating support groups, providing individual counselling, and conducting special workshops for the Cancer Support Community since 2009.

Prior to receiving her doctorate in clinical psychology, Cynthia Grace was employed as a full-time business professional in management and marketing for several major corporations. During that time she also served as a liaison and ambassador for a number of organizations, including the Family-Centred Care Team at the Stanford Medical Centre, the California Transplant Donor Network, and the National Kidney Foundation.

A mother, organ donor, and caregiver with 22 years of ongoing experience in the world of organ transplantation and physical and developmental disability, Dr Grace is also the co-director and acting vice-president of the *Awakening Retreat Centre* in Brentwood, CA. Under the umbrella of the centre, she focuses substantial energy on *Angels of Grace* (<http://angels-of-grace.com>), a subsidiary organization aimed at raising awareness of the need for organ donation, patient and caregiver advocacy, and compassionate medical care.

An advocate, caregiver, motivational speaker, and therapist, Dr Grace is devoted to creating communities where those on the journey of chronic medical illness or disability might connect with one another, discovering, as she did, that there is hope for meaning, renewal, growth, and transformation in spite of the many challenges that are encountered.