



Interpreting the Changed “Me” in the Mirror: Viewing Self after a Mastectomy

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Learning Objectives

- Describe key concepts in Ricoeur's phenomenology and hermeneutic theory of text interpretation and compare these concepts to the experience of viewing self in the mirror.
- Consider the need for practical sensitive nursing mirror interventions pre-operatively, during initial dressing changes, and post-operatively for women who have had a mastectomy.

Paul Ricoeur



- February 27, 1913 – May 20, 2005
- French philosopher
- Existential phenomenology
- Phenomenology & Hermeneutics

Definitions

- Phenomenology extracts “from lived experiences the essential meanings and structures of purpose, project, motive, wanting, trying, and so on” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 316).
- Hermeneutics “is...the work of thought which exists in finding the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning” (Ricoeur, 1974, p.13).

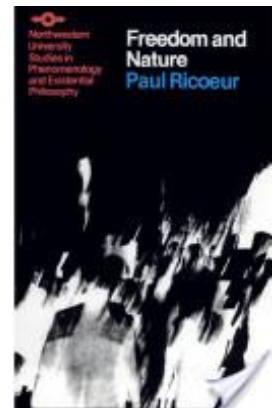


Books

- Ricoeur's texts which are the basis of this presentation are:
 - Ricoeur, P. (1966). ***Freedom and nature: The voluntary and the involuntary***. In E.V. Kohak (Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
 - Ricoeur, P. (1981). ***Hermeneutics and the human sciences***. In J.B. Thompson (Ed. & Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Freedom and Nature

- Man is both will and physical being.
- The will directs physical being *up to a point*.
- The purpose of this book is to describe in detail the fine line between the will (freedom) and physical (nature) being.



Freedom and Nature: Willful Acts

- *Willful acts* have three foundational components:
 - **Decision**

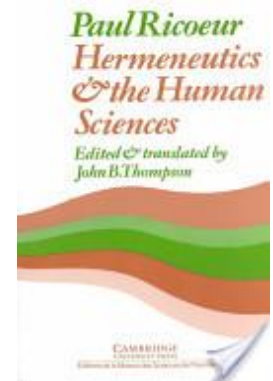
There is always decision. Even in a habitual act, there was at one time a decision to act.
 - **Action**

Action may be physical, thought, seeing, etc.
 - **Consent**

Each action is accompanied and/or followed by consent (i.e. I am glad that went well).

Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences: Distanciation

- **Distanciation**
 - When a person reads a text, initially there is distanciation of the words in the text to the reader.
 - The text is essentially strange, foreign and unfamiliar.





Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences: Appropriation

- **Appropriation**

- With time, the text becomes increasingly familiar.
- Appropriation of the text is akin to an increase in one's understanding of a text.

Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences: Explanation & Understanding

- **Explanation**

- An explanation is the structure of the text. One has a *sense* about what the text is.

- **Understanding**

- The phenomenological interpretation provides an understanding of the world the text *references*.



The Mirror Research Project

- Research Question

What is the experience of viewing self in the mirror after a mastectomy?



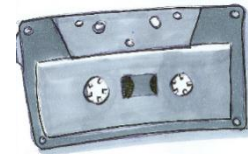
Participants

- 12 women ages: 32 – 76
- 8 Caucasian, 2 Hispanic, 2 American Black
 - ≥ 18 years of age who had a mastectomy
- Recruited by oncology nurse navigators in a large non-profit health care system



Data Collection/Analysis

- Conversational audio-taped interview
- The data was analyzed using:
 - Naïve reading
 - Structural approach (empirical science)
 - Phenomenological approach (human science)



Phenomenological Interpretation

- Four key meaning moments emerged in the interpretation of viewing self in the mirror:
 - I am
 - I decide
 - I see
 - I consent



I Am

- Genetics, life experiences and environment help to create a unique way of being-in-the-world.

I am self-conscious.

I am wise.

I am very blessed.

I am Scandinavian.

I Decide

- **Curiosity**

I think it is just a natural curiosity to look and see what's happening to you.

- **Medical Care**

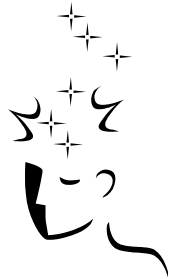
I thought that (bathroom) was the most logical place (to change the dressing).

- **Keeping up Appearances**

You make your self look better (with the mirror) by using prosthesis or whatever means there are for beauty.



I See: With my Mind's Eye



- **Apprehension**

I was going to have a mastectomy so I used to see myself in the mirror, and try to imagine how I would look.

- **Expectation**

This scar is uglier than I thought it would be. I thought it would be a little bit prettier.

- **Hope**

I used to imagine before I went to the mirror that my breast would still be there, that this has all been a dream.

I See: With my Eyes

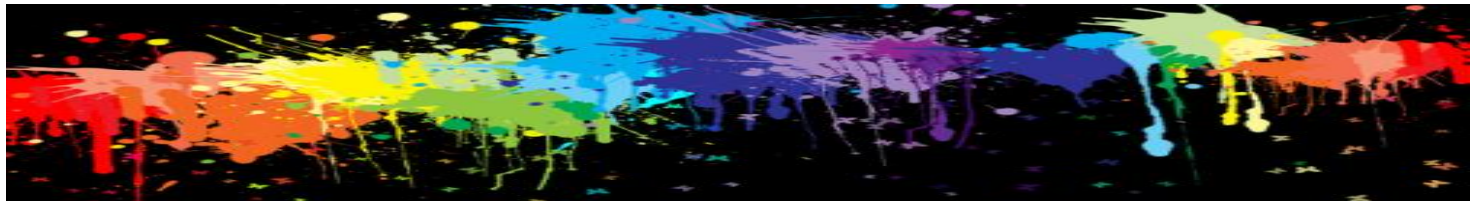
It depends on how your eyes are I guess because my eyes aren't good either.

Also I've got macular degeneration and I've already had glaucoma. ... One side (of the mirror) is magnified and the other one isn't. So I really can get a good look.



I See the Meaning: Understanding my Body

- All women understood part of their body to be unattractive, unsightly or repulsive.
- Many emotions accompanied this understanding: shock, surprise, disgust, unworthiness, anger/frustration, fear, sadness, relief & happiness.



I See the Meaning: Participant Statements

*(I was) looking in the mirror constantly. ...**It** was gross, **it** was so disgusting. I couldn't hardly face myself or look at **it** because **it** was so disgusting.*

*But I was so ecstatic that **it** (mastectomy incision) was closed! See the attitude change? I'm like look at this, **it's** stitched closed!*

I See the Meaning: Understanding “Me”

- **Distanciation**

You're seeing **that** every time you stand in front of the mirror.

It looks real ugly.

- **Appropriation**

My scar is beginning to fade.



I See the Meaning: Explanation

- **Medical**

I don't know how to explain what I am talking about. It is like they (doctors) took a lot of flesh off of me.

- **Theological**

You know that's the devil in there.



- **Societal**

You'd be surprised what men say about this, this surgery. They can't cope with it.

I Consent



- **Suffer**

You have your days where you could sit there and have a pity party.

- **Acceptance/Acquiesce**

I still do look in the mirror and wish I had more you know up there but may have to learn to accept it, the way it is.

- **Thrust Forward into the Future**

It is crazy, but what keeps me going is knowing that these ...old breasts are going to be replaced.

Mirror Study

- I am
- I decide
- I see
- I consent

Ricoeur

- N/A
- Decision
- Action
- Consent

Comparison to Freedom and Nature

Mirror Study

- Initial distancing of the mirror image (i.e. it, that).
- Appropriation of the mirror image to self (i.e. me, my).
- Explanation and understanding of the mirror image.

Ricoeur

- Initial distancing of the text.
- Appropriation of the text to self.
- Explanation and understanding of the text.

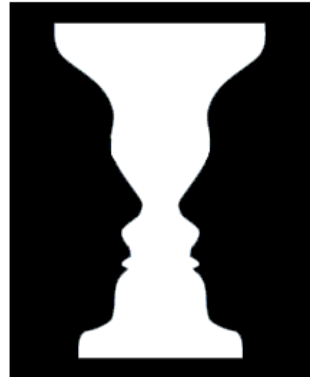
Comparison to Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences

Philosophical Discussion

- Ricoeur indicates each reader brings pre-suppositions to the text.
- In this study, the PI had studied several of Ricoeur's works.
- As such, it is not surprising to see an interpretation that echoes a fragment of his work.

Philosophical Discussion

- Ricoeur suggests that even if a text were to have several different readers (i.e. nurse, minister, psychologist) there would be a narrow horizon of potential interpretations.



Nursing Implications: Surgery

- Pre-op education with an accurate visual understanding of the incision site with focus on:
 - Alleviating inaccurate anticipatory expectations, fears, and hopes.
 - Offsetting emotions of shock, surprise, and/or anger.
- Post-op, consider using small hand held mirrors.

Nursing Implications: Accessibility

- Assessment of mirror accessibility
 - Hospital rooms, clinics and patient homes
 - Over bed table mirrors
 - Height of wall mirrors
 - Obstacles



Nursing Implications: Mirror Talk

- Mirror Talk:

I think you nurses should let women talk about this stuff (the mirror). Not that “how you doing today stuff” cause we are just going to say “fine thank you”....You know, you should say to women, “how you really doing, how you really feeling” and then give folks a chance to say what’s really on their minds.

- Mirror talk in person, couples and groups.

Research Needs

- Use of the mirror with mastectomy and other patients
- Effect of mirrors on facilitating appropriation of the changed “me”
- Effect of mirrors on spiritual and cultural care
- Ideal types of mirror, placement of mirrors, and best light for mirrors

Research Needs

- Body image after disfiguring surgeries and trauma is essentially an unexplored field.



- Currently we do not know how many questions there are and what those questions may be.

Questions and Comments



Email Wyonaf@comcast.net for a full listing of references