



PHENOMENOLOGY OF PRACTICE: RESEARCH IN NURSING OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

FENOMENOLOGIA DA PRÁTICA: INVESTIGAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM DA EXPERIÊNCIA VIVIDA
FENOMENOLOGÍA DE LA PRÁCTICA: INVESTIGACIÓN EN ENFERMERÍA DE LA EXPERIENCIA VIVIDA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to explain the latest methodological proposal of Max van Manen for the research of lived experience. **Method:** methodological article. Phenomenology of practice is part of a qualitative research method in which the focus is on professional daily practices. **Conclusion:** phenomenology as method involves philosophical, philological methods and human sciences methods. The epoché and reduction are central in phenomenological research. The general reduction, the reduction-proper and the vocative are ways that illuminate how we can access the lived experience. The understanding of human experience through this type of study may be an important contribution to the development of pathic dimension of nursing care. **Descriptors:** Qualitative Research; Methods; Nursing; Phenomenology.

RESUMO

Objetivo: explicitar a última proposta metodológica de Max van Manen para a pesquisa da experiência vivida. **Método:** artigo metodológico. A fenomenologia da prática insere-se num método de investigação qualitativa onde o foco são as práticas quotidianas profissionais. **Conclusão:** a fenomenologia enquanto método envolve métodos filosóficos, filológicos e métodos das ciências humanas. A epoché e redução são centrais na pesquisa fenomenológica. A redução geral, a redução propriamente dita e o vocativo são vias que iluminam o modo como podemos aceder à experiência vivida. A compreensão da experiência humana por meio deste tipo de estudos poderá ser um contributo importante para o desenvolvimento da dimensão pática do cuidar em enfermagem. **Descritores:** Pesquisa Qualitativa; Métodos; Enfermagem; Fenomenologia.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: explicitar la última propuesta metodológica de Max van Manen para la investigación de la experiencia vivida. **Método:** Artículo metodológico. La fenomenología de la práctica es parte de un método de investigación cualitativa donde el foco son las prácticas cotidianas profesionales. **Conclusión:** la fenomenología como método involucra métodos filosóficos, filológicos y métodos de las ciencias humanas. La epoché y reducción son centrales en la investigación fenomenológica. La reducción general, la reducción propriamente dicha y el vocativo son vías que iluminan el modo de cómo podemos acceder a la experiencia vivida. La comprensión de la experiencia humana por medio de éste tipo de estudios podrá ser un aporte importante para el desarrollo de la dimensión práctica del cuidar en enfermería. **Descriptores:** Investigación Cualitativa; Métodos; Enfermería; Fenomenología.

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INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology promotes access to the prereflective world as we experience. The prereflective is the original experience, that is, the immediate contact with the world before becoming conscious to the subject. Phenomenology as a research method deals with the study of human experience (phenomenon), as it is lived, not with what people think or theorize about what they lived.

The phenomenology of practice is rooted in pure philosophical phenomenology but is distinguished from it by having as purpose not the theoretical-philosophical study, sometimes of abstract nature, but the study of everyday practices, whether personal, professional or social. This movement arises as a necessity of "doing" phenomenology and not only of thinking in an academic way. Phenomenology designation of practice was established by Max van Manen, based on the original work developed by phenomenologists of Utrecht School, and in 2014 a book was dedicated to the subject - Phenomenology of practice: meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.

This article aims to explain his latest methodological proposal for the research of the lived experience since it has been widely used in phenomenological studies in nursing. The author does not recommend a specific method as it has been recommended by other authors, since, in his view, anyone would be reducing the phenomenological project. Van Manen advocates an agogic notion of "method", i.e., a method that is not stagnant but that wants to open or light a way for the researcher to make his own path in phenomenological research.

The phenomenology of practice is offered as a form of research that seeks to address the way we act and relate as people and professionals who are in the world.¹ It is not intended to produce prescriptive theory of practice but seeks to "open up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, between who we are and how we act, between thoughtfulness and tact".^{2:13} Phenomenology is a philosophical method of questioning, not of answering. So what is the use of a method of this nature for nursing? By raising issues we can access the possibility of understanding how we experience the world. In this way, cognitive and non-cognitive senses may be produced, existential perceptions that allow us to catch a glimpse of the meaning of a phenomenon for people whom we care for.

Thus when nursing develops studies in this area, formative relations are produced and these have positive implications for the practice of care.³

♦ Doing phenomenological research

The aim of phenomenology is to create an evocative text that alludes to the experience as it is lived by people, by using different sources that enable it to illuminate the meaning of the phenomenon under study. A phenomenologist wants to be a student of life experiences. For this, they observe the subtleties of everyday life in a careful way; they are interested readers of the various works of history, philosophy, ethics, classical or contemporary literature that relate to their phenomenon of interest; they are interested in different expressions of art, such as painting, cinema, poetry, sculpture, theater, dance and in what these expressions may unveil about the phenomenon. Phenomenological research does not encompass steps but becomes a way of being that van Manen nominates *attitude*.^{1,4}

A phenomenological research is not just a set of sequenced procedures, performed independently. It is unquestionable the need of performing some tasks in a specific order, such as the collection of experiences for further analysis. However, Van Manen, despite of presenting certain "steps" as the epoché, reduction, and the vocative, rejects that these are stagnant steps, because they do not occur in a predetermined order. The various procedures of the method occur simultaneously without being able to tell when one ends and another begins.

Epoché and reduction are basic terms of the phenomenological method introduced by Husserl. They are components that, although may be seen as having opposite senses, positive and negative, are complementary. Epoché, suspending the acquired knowledge, prints an order in the negative sense. Reduction, in turn, returning to how the phenomenon manifests itself, revealing its core, has a positive sense.^{1,5} Let us see how these terms are closely related.

♦ The epoché

The epoché is understood as an attitude of abstention of judgments or preconceptions, suspending the knowledge we possess about things (epoché, also known as bracketing, mathematical term used by Husserl, which translates the idea of putting something in brackets, suspending). This assignment is intended to clear the way for understanding the essence of the phenomenon. "All natural interests are put out of play".^{6:152} It is

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understood that the natural interest that Husserl spoke about had to do with what we take for granted in everyday gestures and therefore are no longer reflected on. Also for Merleau-Ponty, this natural attitude refers to things we are used to in day-to-day, moving with and between them, without thinking about them.⁷

Epoché or suspension presupposes opening ourselves to the experience and an attempt to suspend what we think or what we know about the phenomenon. Currently the epoché is then understood not as an annihilation of what we know, but as an assumption of presuppositions that when expressed, contribute to a less contaminated path of discovery. When the way is opened, we can aim the reduction.

◆ The reduction

The reduction is the movement of going back, back to how the phenomenon appears. It cannot be misled with the term reductionism that isolates the parts of the whole, quite the contrary. While in reductionism we try to code and isolate to simplify, the reduction, in phenomenology, intends to go to the original meaning, the primitive experience. Reduction derives from the Latin *reducere*, which means *lead back*, *what restores*, *what revives*.

Far from the connotation attributed today, the reduction is not a technical procedure, done in accordance with predetermined steps. Instead, it involves leaning to the original, or glimpses of early experience. However, this is only possible by maintaining an open mind and free of pre-judgments or preconceptions during the reflection period.

A complete reduction is not possible inasmuch as there is no thought that can comprise all thoughts⁷ and also because the meaning structures of experience cannot fully describe the experience of which were reduced.¹ In short, it is helpful to keep in mind "the underlying idea and purpose of the reduction: to gain access, via the epoché, and the vocative, to the world of pre-reflective experience-as-lived in order to mine its meanings".^{1:221} For this purpose it becomes necessary to adopt an open attitude to what is manifested by a particularly sensitive and careful thought. The phenomenological reflection is a radical reflection.⁷ It focuses on the experience and this becomes possible when we carefully try to understand the lived sense of pre-reflective experience, i.e., prior to consciousness.

Phenomenology as a method involves different philosophical, philological and

human science methods. We will see how, in the perspective of van Manen (2014), each of these resources offers an understanding of the phenomenon through research and construction of a phenomenological text.

◆ The philosophical method

The philosophical method assumes the movements of epoché and reduction, in an open attitude towards the phenomenon, across the entire research process, in order to free ourselves of the obstacles that limit the access to the pre-reflective experience. Max van Manen distinguishes the general reduction of the reduction proper, being the first a preparatory state for the second.¹

◆ General reduction

The general reduction is across the entire research process, with the main function to promote an open-minded atmosphere and spirit for the researcher to understand the phenomenon. In this sense it may be understood as a preparation for the reduction proper. Heuristic epoché-reduction, hermeneutic epoché-reduction, experiential epoché-reduction and methodological epoché-reduction are part of the general reduction.¹

◆ The heuristic epoché-reduction: "wonder"

The heuristic epoché-reduction consists of suspending the attitude of taken-for-granted in the everyday experience and then being open to the discovery of what passes for us and is not noticed or subject to reflection.¹ In a simpler way, we can say it is a particular disposition of the researcher to see the unusual in what is usual. "All question is a search. All search will go beforehand toward what is wanted".^{8:24} To this sense we can talk about a certain predisposition to be aware of the particularities of what, in everyday life, we usually do not question because, in a way, we accept them as natural, not questioning and assuming that they are inherent in the very experience of being in this world.

◆ The hermeneutic epoché-reduction: openness

The hermeneutics epoché-reduction seeks to suspend prior knowledge about things to an attitude of sincere openness to the phenomenon.¹ "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language".^{7:ix-x} However, suspending the knowledge we possess about things is always an incomplete task given that we do not manage to undress fully of what we

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have acquired, knowing that "the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of complete reduction".^{7:xv} To accomplish this important task, we show what our assumptions, knowledge and ideas really are about the phenomenon. Rather than ignore them, we become them explicit for being aware of them. It is therefore important to note that the approach to a phenomenon is always a possible understanding and not the absolute understanding of it.

♦ The Experiential epoché-reduction: concreteness

In experiential reduction, keeping loyal to epoché, we suspend knowledge, conceptual abstractions and seek to orient ourselves to the concrete lived experience, through the description of examples rich in detail.¹ Thus, it is important to report the earliest time of the experience in detail so that, through reflection, we can understand the lived of the pre-reflected the most accurate way possible. To understand the experience, the immediate notion of time is important, because "experience is a kind of immediate awareness that is not (yet) aware of itself".^{1:225}

♦ The methodological epoché-reduction: approach

The methodological reduction implicates suspending the knowledge on conventional techniques and seeking a creative approach to the phenomenon, which fits most appropriately to uncover it.¹ This requires that the investigators have certain skills in the sensitivity and creativity level throughout the investigative process. Finding the best way to make the reader get closer to the experience and look for alternative ways to communicate, are challenges for the researcher.

The question of the methodological reduction is: what could best illuminate the phenomenon?¹ We may equate different approaches as a short novel, a story, a sculpture, a photograph, a painting, a poem, unexpected conversations or other programmed conversations such as the interview, a film, a report, a memory, etc., and the goal is to build an iconic text that bring us closer to the essence of the phenomenon.

These different moments of epoché-reduction, wonder, openness, concreteness and the approach constitute an invitation to an open mind by suspending what we take for granted on day-to-day, the previous assumptions or expectations, the abstractions and explanatory theories and even the suspension of traditional investigative

techniques. These feature an indispensable phenomenological attitude that predisposes to the study of lived experience and to carrying out the reduction-proper.

♦ The reduction-proper

The reduction-proper is based on a "reflective phenomenological attitude that aims to address the uniqueness of a phenomenon as it shows or gives itself in its singularity".^{1:228} The reduction can thus be facilitated by different perspectives developed by various thinkers. These may be used alone or articulated, namely, eidetic reduction, ontological reduction, ethical reduction, radical reduction and the originary reduction.

♦ The eidetic reduction: eidos

The eidetic reduction consists of grasping the essential insights of the phenomenon through variation in imagination.¹ This type of reduction stems mainly from Husserl's work. The way to perform it is mainly through two routes: varying the "scenario" where the phenomenon occurs through different examples; or comparing the phenomenon with other phenomena related (commonly very similar). Reflection on the different related variations allows us to get to what the phenomenon has of unique and particular, bringing to light its borders. The goal is to reach invariant aspects, the essence of the phenomenon, the *eidos*. This invariance is that in the experience that remains unchanged, or what may be recognized in the same way by someone else. The fundamental question in the eidetic reduction is: what makes this experience unique and different concerning other related experiences?¹

Within the imaginative or eidetic variation, we can not only vary the context in which the phenomenon occurs but also compare it with others who are apparently related and with which may be difficult to distinguish. Then we will talk of a distinction of possible similarity.

♦ Ontological reduction: ways of being

The ontological reduction consists of explicating the different ways of being or being in the world.¹ This form of reduction comes from Heidegger's proposal who argued that this reduction should settle in the attempt to return to the world-as-lived, recognizing that, still, this effort will never achieve all knowledge about how we are in the world. This conclusion comes from Heidegger's awareness that the manifestations of things, events, are closely linked with the beings that experience them. We can thus notice his care on the assumption that there is a possibility of comprehension and that above

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reality is the possibility.⁸ We are always immersed in the world of things, by which what we capture are not isolated aspects but rather a sense of what we experience. Being-there, *Dasein*, is, thus, existing in the world in relation to what surrounds us.

◆ Ethical reduction: alterity

Ethical reduction looks for the meaning of the being but in relation with another, that is, another way of being, otherness.¹ This type of reduction is based on the work of Emmanuel Levinas for whom the other, in their vulnerability, is presented to me as somebody who claims for me. In this appeal, I reveal myself and I experience responsibility. For Levinas, the experience is primarily an ethical experience; it makes no sense to look for the origin of human experience if not in the relationship to the other. The individual alone is incomplete and one cannot think of oneself but in a partial way.

◆ Radical reduction: self-giveness

The radical reduction focuses on the way that a phenomenon gives itself as itself.¹ This form of reduction comes from Jean-Luc Marion who understands it as the third reduction, Husserl's (eidetic reduction) as the first form and Heidegger's (ontological reduction) as second form. For Marion, what is first manifested, gives itself, "the reduction (...) suspends the "absurd theories", the false realities of the natural attitude, the objective world, etc., in order to let lived experiences bring about as much as possible the appearing of what manifests itself as and through them".^{9:10} The emphasis, in this type of reduction, is in how it manifests itself, not in what it manifests. Manifesting means to make oneself known, self-giveness.

◆ Originary reduction: Inception

The originary reduction entails that the phenomenon is addressed at its origin.¹ This perspective comes from the latest works of Heidegger, that points to a special event, designating it as a flash of insight. This can happen when one effectively reaches an understanding of the origin of the phenomenon that not only brings a light on the experience, but on ourselves as humans. This event is marked as a moment of insight on the phenomenon, a revelation of the phenomenon itself, as if it, by its revelation, caught us by surprise. In this reduction the focus is "how a phenomenon originates and comes into being".^{1:236} It should be noted there are no techniques for this creative insight, this moment does not depend on the will of the researcher, it cannot be planned but it may erupt and be offered as fruit of

researcher's centering, interest and fascination with the phenomenon. This intuitive understanding can happen when least expected, it can reach us in a moment of writing, reflection, or after being tired in search of something to enlighten the research and decided to do another activity. The challenge for the researcher is then in a quest that put aside pre-conceptions and pre-established concepts and create a favorable environment, evocative of manifestation of the phenomenon.

◆ The philological method

The philological method, not being separated from the philosophical, is also a feature of the phenomenological method since it is through the text that we communicate the reflection that composes the essence of the experience. The writing is of particular importance in phenomenology inasmuch it allows us to bring light to the experience. For that, unlike a text with a closed and technical language, it will present an important vocative dimension that stands out as being an aesthetic imperative of phenomenological research.¹ It will not be so surprising that often a near poetic language is employed in an attempt to highlight the pathic dimension of the phenomenon, that is, in the broadest sense, a particular sensitivity of being-in-the-world.¹⁰ The phenomenological text seeks to be a faithful picture of the phenomenon, emulating it, while doing everything needed to imitate or match the phenomenon, claiming to be a sensitive language that calls and illuminates the phenomenon. Van Manen, from the study of several philosophers identifies different methods or vocative moments characteristic of a phenomenological text, namely: revocative, evocative, invocative, convocative and provocative.¹

◆ Revocative method: lived thoroughness

The revocative method seeks that the text brings to the reader the vivacity of the experience.¹ Leading back to the original word is a way of the undressing of the concepts or ideas built over time, revealing its true meaning. The objective is to "bring experience vividly into presence"^{1:241} through written language.

◆ Evocative method: nearness

The evocative method seeks to bring the proximity of the experience.¹ Through the evocative text, it is intended that the reader can be seduced by the experience, bringing to their memory an experience that still had not been aware that way. The evocative text calls us to hear the things that are before us but

for which we were not awake. The evocation causes a sense of wonder and understanding of the phenomenon, leading us to reflect. In this sense, “Buytendijk spoke of the “phenomenological nod” that occurs when recognizing the subtle and nuanced experiential meanings that only a phenomenological description can evoke through descriptive and evocative means”.^{1:188}

◆ Invocative method: intensification

The invocative method seeks to intensify the phenomenological text in order to bring to the reader the sensitive dimension of experience.¹ It seeks for a certain poetic quality in writing, using some expressive language resources that contribute to the richness of the text, not to embellish it, but to create a sense that would produce some effect, approaching the phenomenon of the reader and promoting its own reflection on experience. Poetic language becomes an “image” of the phenomenon. These images “touches us in the soul”^{1:261} of the reader giving them access to an intuitive understanding.

◆ Convocative method: pathic/ appeal

The convocative method explores the non-cognitive sense of the phenomenon in order to promote the reader's insight, that is, a significant moment when a sense is opened; a key aspect is enlighten.¹ This appeal performed by the text calls the reader to join in a common element of understanding. The non-cognitive dimension of the text is closely linked with the pathic sense. The term pathic, while adjective, comes from the Latin *patibilis* that in philosophical language means being provided with sensitivity, sensitive. A phenomenological text should produce some kind of non-cognitive knowledge, the pathic knowledge.^{1,9}

These aspects are hardly captured by traditional methods, by means of objective texts that seek to show the cause-effect relationships so that, therefore, in phenomenology we appeal to different devices, such as an illustrative episode (anecdote), an example, a fictionalized tale, a painting, a poem or even a song, in an attempt to translate this subjective dimension in the best way possible. The pathic dimension of life, always present in every gesture of existence, assails us and surprises us at every moment, maybe which is why it is so hard to bring to the language. But this is also the effort and the task that we are challenged to do in phenomenological research.

◆ Provocative method: epiphany

The provocative method seeks that the text has questioning qualities and a certain challenge in order to impact the reader.¹ The phenomenological text should have a challenging action to induce the reader to reflect and promote insights into the phenomenon. This understanding can emerge as an epiphany, in the sense that erupts in the consciousness, and the reader is surprised by an intuitive understanding of the meaning of the experience that illuminates their understanding.

In addition to the philosophical and philological methods, the phenomenological research also uses methods of the human sciences.

◆ Human Science methods

Phenomenology uses empirical methods for collecting data and reflective methods for the analysis of experiential material. Although leaning in the same instruments of another type of qualitative research (interviews, observation, participation), these methods are conducted and analyzed in a different way, because the purpose of the phenomenological study is different.

The purpose of data collection in phenomenology is to collect experiences reports, especially prereflective experiences. Thus we seek descriptions that report as much as possible the experience as it was lived at the time that happened.¹ It should be noted that in phenomenology it is intended to collect prereflective experiences. Any source of data collection, whether it is from literature, films or even a particular person, it has an ownership value of an experience that is conceded to us.

The focus is the experience, not the particular person who gives us the information, or their specific situation, or the context in which the work was performed.¹ Phenomenology is not centered on the factual accuracy of a story, but in its plausibility, that is, the possibility to be a human experience.¹

For the empirical data collection interviews, personal accounts counted or written, experiences of observation, reports in the literature or other artistic sources may be used. We stress that it is intended descriptions without interpretations. To this, it is asked to the participants or it is searched in other sources rich and detailed accounts, usually focused on a specific moment of the experience. The collection of this material will allow, through reflection, raising themes that will guide the reflection on the

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phenomenon under study for the creation of the phenomenological text.¹

Data processing is also special inasmuch as the process is primarily reflective. The thematic reflection will be held through linguistic reflection, etymological reflection, reflection in a collaborative group or even through hermeneutic reflective interviews.¹

From the beginning, the process develops within a phenomenological attitude which indicates that the epoché and reduction are an essential requirement in all research and is also present here at this stage. This attitude requires that the researcher leaves for data collection free of assumptions, preconceptions or expectations of what he/she will find. Rather, they must adopt a spirit of curiosity and openness as already mentioned when we addressed the philosophical methods, including heuristic epoché-reduction. The phenomenological text is fulfilled when it elucidates the reader about experiences that can be experienced.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenology of practice is part of a qualitative research method where the focus is on professional daily practices. The epoché and reduction are crucial in phenomenological research. The proposal of van Manen is eclectic since it brings together a set of perspectives of different thinkers but it is also open, because rejects closed standardized procedures that do not stimulate the radical reflection intended in a phenomenological study. The understanding of human experience through this type of study may be an important contribution to the development of the pathic dimension of nursing care.

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