

Phenomenological interviews as a research tool in nursing: a theoretical reflection

Entrevista fenomenológica como ferramenta de pesquisa em enfermagem: reflexão teórica

Entrevista fenomenológica como herramienta de investigación en enfermería: reflexión teórica

ABSTRACT

Objective: To reflect on the use of phenomenological interviews in the unveiling of the phenomenon in nursing research. **Methodology:** Reflective theoretical study in the light of Martin Heidegger's philosophical and methodological theoretical framework, proposed to analyze the contextual aspects of phenomenological interviews in nursing research. **Result:** In qualitative research, this methodological resource provides the being-with-the-other in an expanded way in the search for the singularity of each being, in order to clarify the phenomenon experienced. **Conclusion:** For nursing, phenomenological interviews aim at contributing to the understanding of the being in their relationships with the world, promoting greater visibility of the world and providing an important contribution to the unveiling of the phenomenon investigated in phenomenological approach research.

Descriptors: Nursing Research; Philosophy, Nursing; Interview; Qualitative Research.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Refletir acerca da utilização da entrevista fenomenológica no desvelamento do fenômeno em pesquisas da enfermagem. **Metodologia:** Estudo teórico reflexivo à luz do referencial teórico filosófico e metodológico de Martin Heidegger, proposto a analisar os aspectos contextuais da entrevista fenomenológica em pesquisas da enfermagem. **Resultado:** Este recurso metodológico, em pesquisa qualitativa, proporciona o estar-com-o-outro de forma ampliada na busca da singularidade de cada ser indo em direção a clarificação do fenômeno vivido. **Conclusão:** Para a enfermagem, a entrevista fenomenológica visa contribuir para a compreensão do ser em suas relações com o mundo, promovendo maior visibilidade deste e proporcionando importante contribuição para o desvelamento do fenômeno investigado nas pesquisas de abordagem fenomenológica.


Descritores: Pesquisa em Enfermagem; Filosofia em Enfermagem; Entrevista; Pesquisa Qualitativa.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Reflexionar sobre el uso de la entrevista fenomenológica para develar el fenómeno en la investigación en enfermería. **Metodología:** Estudio teórico reflexivo a la luz del marco teórico filosófico y metodológico de Martin Heidegger, propuesto para analizarlos aspectos contextuales de la entrevista fenomenológica en la investigación en enfermería. **Resultado:** Este recurso metodológico, en la investigación cualitativa, proporciona el ser conelotro de manera expandida en la búsqueda de la singularidad de cada ser, a fin de aclarar el fenómeno experimentado. **Conclusión:** Para la enfermería, la entrevista fenomenológica tiene como objetivo contribuir a la comprensión de estar en sus relaciones con el mundo, promover una mayor visibilidad del mundo y proporcionar una contribución importante a la revelación del fenómeno investigado en la investigación de enfoque fenomenológico.

Descritores: Investigación en Enfermería; Filosofía en Enfermería; Entrevista; Investigación Cualitativa.

Camila Messias Ramos¹

 [0000-0001-9156-8328](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9156-8328)

Zuleyce Maria Lessa Pacheco²

 [0000-0002-9409-8971](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9409-8971)

Guilherme Sacheto Oliveira³

 [0000-0003-2642-7320](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2642-7320)

Anna Maria de Oliveira Salimena¹

 [0000-0001-7799-665X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7799-665X)

Camila da Silva Marques¹

 [0000-0001-6342-4538](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6342-4538)

¹Hospital Regional Doutor João Penido, Juiz de Fora – MG, Brazil.

²Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora – MG, Brazil.

³Centro Universitário São José de Itaperuna, Itaperuna – MG, Brazil.

Corresponding author:

Camila Messias Ramos

E-mail:enfmla@yahoo.com.br

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INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is presented by Heidegger as a method of authentic thinking, an appeal to return to the things themselves, to reality itself, without traditional interpretive categories that seek an explanation for the phenomenon, which must manifest by itself. The central core of his philosophical work consists in elaborating the question of the “being”. For this philosopher, the concept of “being” presents itself as something indefinable that is self-evident. Thus, the “being” is not, but happens in its temporality horizon, in the facticity of its existence, and as something that is not static, we only have to show it starting from the ontological experience evoked⁽¹⁾.

The “being” of human existence that he designated as Dasein is the human being in happening, launched into the world of possibilities as an accessible being, relating to other intramundane beings, to beings-there and to itself⁽²⁾. It is in everyday life that the Dasein has its original, impersonal, authentic and inauthentic way of inhabiting, where it weaves its network of relationships based on its original structures of being-with and co-presence, in a way of being which shows itself as speech, curiosity and ambiguity. “Curiosity, which misses nothing, and speech, which understands everything”, confer the Dasein the guarantee of “a life full of life, supposedly authentic”⁽³⁾.

It is necessary to distance from the known concept of method, as a usual research technique, in order to understand a phenomenological study based on Heidegger's framework. In the hermeneutics he proposes, there is a way to clarify the multiple facets of the Dasein's “being”. It is through the understanding and interpretation of the meaning of the phenomena experienced that it is possible to place the “being” in the open, making it come-to-presence⁽¹⁾.

Using Phenomenology in qualitative research studies conducted by Nursing allows unveiling the life experience of the “being”, showing the facets of factual living. The question is returning to the being-there, the things themselves, to understand the phenomenon and, then, clarify it. The intention is not to establish judgments, previous stances, theories or explanations for the life experience of the “being”, but to show that it was veiled before⁽⁴⁾.

Clarification of the phenomenon using the methodological framework inspired in Heidegger comprises two moments to know: vague and median understanding, and hermeneutics. At the first moment, the deponents' statements (collected through the phenomenological interview) are heard with the intention of highlighting what the entity says about the “being”, with the search for meanings taking place. At the second moment, we head towards hermeneutics bringing to light the presence from the “being”, unveiling the sense of the life experience^(1,5).

Phenomenological interviews differ from other types of interviews as they do not present

themselves as instruments used to obtain information through questions and answers, but as a way to access the essence of the phenomenon going to the core of the life experiences. This type of interview has been valued in Nursing studies, which, as such, considers and legitimizes the complexity and diversity of human beings, contributing to a better understanding of the point of view of those who experience the phenomenon.

Given the above, the objective of the current study is to reflect on the use of phenomenological interviews in unveiling the phenomenon in Nursing research studies.

METHODS

This is a theoretical reflection study about the conduction of phenomenological interviews in Nursing research studies. Having Martin Heidegger's existential phenomenology as their theoretical, philosophical and methodological foundation, interviews present themselves as a valuable resource in the search for understanding the phenomenon, allowing the “being” to come into the presence, making clear what was previously concealed⁽¹⁾.

This reflection was based on three thematic axes: Phenomenology as a thought current in Nursing research, which presents itself as an instrument that allows conquering the “way of meeting the ‘being’ and its structures in the phenomena” going towards the things themselves⁽³⁾; Phenomenological interviews with Heidegger's Phenomenology as framework, presenting the way of conducting them in the unveiling of the phenomenon, allowing for the construction of the meaning expressed in the interviewees' statements; and The encounter in the phenomenological interview, highlighting the search for understanding the phenomenon during the encounter carried out in the interview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phenomenology as a thought current in Nursing research

It was in Germany, in the 20th century, that Phenomenology settled itself as a method and line of thought through Edmund Husserl, who is considered the precursor of contemporary phenomenology. Heidegger was Husserl's student and disciple and, despite following his master in his studies, he sought to overcome Western metaphysics by proposing a fundamental ontology through an existential analytic. In *Being and Time*, his most famous work, he presents the world with questions about the meaning of the “being” through the existential analysis of the Dasein's different ways of being^(1,6).

Characterization of the Dasein cannot be seen as detached from the world, there is no Dasein without a world, and there is no world without Dasein, because the being-man is inseparable from the world, it is a mundane being. For Heidegger, the world is not about the totality of things that exist, much less of a physical environment delimited in a geographical space, but of a significance horizon in

which the Dasein is launched and which allows for the encounter with other entities⁽¹⁾.

With Phenomenology, this philosopher brings up the possibility of openness where the foundations are related to what offers space for the "being" to be realized. The Dasein must be something before it becomes foundational, so that it can show itself as a foundational site of the "being". The essence of the life experience of this "being", which has openness through the mortal speaker, is a concern presented by Phenomenology^(3,7).

In Hermeneutics, there is a way to understand and interpret the meaning of the phenomena experienced and, as it offers the possibility of placing the "being" in the open, making it come-to-presence. Hermeneutics allows seeking to understand the being-there immersed in the network of everyday references, where everyday life is, above all, the Dasein's way of being, precisely when it moves in a highly developed and differentiated culture⁽¹⁾.

To conduct a research study, Phenomenology is shown as a possibility of methodological support, which departs from common sense, showing itself as a path for the meaning of the experience to be unveiled, providing subsidies for the understanding of the being-there immersed in its temporality horizon, living in the facticity of its existence. It enables a gateway to the "being", with an important contribution in the thinking and knowing of Nursing research.

Phenomenological interviews with Heidegger's Phenomenology as framework

The application of interviews in qualitative research is a methodological subsidy used to obtain diverse information aimed at answering the research question. This interaction has a different character from a conversation, as it is a data collection technique where speech allows the researcher to search for meanings through the statements, building inferences about the research. It requires scientific rigor and preparation from the researcher for its good applicability, conferring credibility and reliability to the results obtained⁽⁸⁾.

In a phenomenological interview, language is used as gateway to the "being", allowing the entity to speak about itself and letting the "being" come to the word. Language must not be thought as a tool to be used by man, but as what leads men to their very essence. Understanding of the Dasein, as a being-in-the-world, pronounces itself in the speech, and the words bring to light the meaning of this experience. The testimony is an answer of the being's silent response⁽¹⁾.

The description of the experience by the person who experiences the phenomenon is the path to its understanding. It is through human language that there is the possibility of taking the "being" to the word. Language is not only intended for communication, but also for revelation of a "being" that exists in itself and for the others, in its singularity and authenticity. At the same time, language is what constitutes the "being" and,

through its degeneration into chatter, what is forgotten about the "being"⁽¹⁾.

Communication in the phenomenological interview occurs not only through speech, but also through other forms of non-verbal communications, such as expressions, emotions, silences, pauses, looks, tears, laughs, gestures and other ways of behaving⁽⁹⁾. To record this moment, the field diary is used, which allows the researcher the opportunity to take down notes of these other ways of self-showing.

Considering that the interview moment is configured as a meeting between unknown people in which the researcher seeks to understand the experience, it is indispensable to establish a welcoming and peaceful environment, so that the tension that may arise from this moment is converted into trust and welcoming⁽¹⁰⁾, indispensable for the opening of the "being". Open dialog becomes necessary in order not to reduce the "being" to an object.

Phenomenological interviews have ontic and ontologic dimensions. The ontic dimension seeks the description; it refers to the facts present in the researcher, in the researched subject and in the environment, encompassing the elaboration and development of the data conception⁽¹¹⁾.

In the ontic dimension, for these meetings the researcher should not stick to interview conventional standards, where we then think about a quiet room with chairs. The place must be chosen by the participant in agreement with the researcher, and can be in a room selected for this purpose, at their residence or in an open public place, but which favors the privacy, free expression, openness and empathy necessary for the unveiling.

Definition of the research participants occurs from establishing the inclusion and exclusion criteria and their specificities. Their number is not predetermined, as the analytical movement only ends when the meanings expressed in the testimonies show sufficiency of essential structures to understand the investigated phenomenon.

The ontological dimension of the interview emerges with the establishment of the question of the other, giving voice to the entity-subject interviewed, based on empathy and intersubjectivity. By reducing assumptions, researchers decenter themselves, looking at the other, valuing and seeking to understand the feelings, behaviors, emotions, attitudes and opinions, what is present in their life-world^(1,11).

The experiences underwent and remembered during the interviews, expressed in the way of being in daily discourse, must be carefully listened to by the researcher, who must be free from prejudice and theoretical assumptions.

The proposal is to hold in suspension the existing ideas of things, so that they can show themselves according to the original experience. By holding in suspension what is known, the researcher describes the phenomenon under study free from preconceived ideas⁽¹²⁾.

In this context, there is no defined period of time to carry out the interviews⁽¹³⁾, which must be free to seek to understand the phenomenon situated, with each entity interviewed as authentic, unique and full of singularities. Preparation for this meeting is indispensable so that there is no interference or induction in the answers, which might impair conduction of the research. For better understanding and analysis, this moment can be audio-recorded for later transcription, maintaining reliability of the speeches, which facilitates understanding by searching for the phenomenon.

The guiding questions assist in conducting the interview by promoting means for the “being” to open up, for the respondents to show themselves. Other questions may arise during the phenomenological interview, based on the interviewer's interest in the content narrated by the interviewee, returning to something that seeks to elicit in the subject either resumption of the experiences or their deepening⁽¹⁴⁾.

As possible techniques for conducting the interview, the following can be used: the mirror technique through repetition of the word or phrase that was just said by the interviewee; the summary technique by performing partial syntheses whenever the intention is to close a topic; the complementation technique is used to clarify and deepen central issues of the narrative; the involuntary misunderstanding techniques where the interviewer purposely conveys to the interviewee the impression of not understanding what is being said; and the silent technique when, at times, the interviewee is faced with questions never thought of before, which require more time to think⁽¹⁵⁾.

Phenomenological interviews can be conducted in more than one meeting, although the literature asserts that the number should be limited to unveiling the phenomenon, and that there is no previous delimitation of the number of participants, but the unveiling of the phenomenon indicates the time to close them^(12,13).

The encounter in the phenomenological interview

Subjectivity can be understood as the ability to relate with others through dialog and approximation, in a reciprocal relationship. That approximation is a mutual responsibility and, in an interview, both the interviewee and the researcher must be predisposed and open.

In phenomenological research studies, interviews are configured through an existential and intersubjective encounter, in a moment of openness in the way of being in everyday discourse. This self-encounter brings to light feelings and perceptions experienced in the search for knowledge-understanding. This encounter seeks to legitimize resumption of the being's history, towards its origin, of the happening “being”, so as to understand its finitude⁽¹⁾. Listening, and not just hearing, is a daily exercise that must be improved by Nursing, which carries assumptions in its history (values, beliefs, meanings, concepts and objectives, among others)

and which, in the way of acting and being, can hinder the ability to just hear without intervening and judging⁽¹¹⁾. In phenomenological research, interviews need to be seen from this perspective, an opportunity to hear, without judging or categorizing.

Within this perspective, listening to the other can be seen as a way to take care through hearing. In a society where there are often so many concerns about physical well-being, it is forgotten that the simple fact of paying attention by listening becomes a therapeutic act that can ease the others' anxiety and distress when perceiving themselves as unique and singular. In detriment to other interview modalities, the phenomenological interview allows understanding human existence and clarifying the interviewee's life according to their way of being-in-the-world together with others, allowing the interviewer's understanding to be guided by the meanings and senses of each respondent's way of existence.

Empathy, which is a person's ability to put themselves in someone else's place, to feel what that person feels, as if they were experiencing the same situation as the person, must be put into practice in this self-encounter. It is the mental and affective representation of a person with the other's mood. When a person is willing to carry out a care encounter, recognizing the other as a being who experiences the phenomenon in a unique way, an opportunity for this care and transformation is built with the help of empathy⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁸⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For Nursing, phenomenological interviews aim at contributing to understanding men in their relationships with the world, promoting more visibility of the Dasein. This resource offers an important contribution to unveiling the phenomenon under study in the research. Good conduction of the interview allows conferring methodological rigor to the study, contributing to the process of building knowledge in Nursing, favoring its assistance-related practice and unique and authentic care.

As a limitation of this reflection, we emphasize the fact that there is no tutorial on how to properly conduct interviews in a phenomenological research study. This unique and crucial moment for the study requires that the researchers seek to understand the phenomenon situated, considering each entity in front of them as authentic and unique, as a being of possibilities. It becomes indispensable that researchers open up, exempting themselves from pre-judgments, creating an environment that allows the other to have free expression, allowing the “being” to come to the word.

Given the above, we believe that this reflection offers a major contribution to the practice of conducting phenomenological interviews in Nursing research, as it presents important points of this moment, which is the first step towards a comprehensive analysis of the participants. Knowing how to be with the other during the interview

confers methodological and scientific rigor to the study, enabling the development of an understanding free from judgments and categorizations that are not suitable for this type of research.

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Patrícia Pinto Braga
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