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## TITLE PAGE

**Title:** Conducting phenomenological research: Rationalising the methods and rigour of the Phenomenology of Practice.

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*"Una manera de hacer Europa"*

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To offer a complete outlook in a readable easy way of van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method to nurses interested in undertaking phenomenological research.

**Background:** Phenomenology, as research methodology, involves a certain degree of complexity. It is difficult to identify a single article or author which sets out the didactic guidelines that specifically guide research of this kind. In this context, the theoretical-practical view of Max van Manen's Phenomenology of Practice may be seen as a rigorous guide and directive on which researchers may find support to undertake phenomenological research.

**Design:** Discussion paper.

**Data sources:** This discussion paper is based on our own experiences and supported by literature and theory. Our central sources of data have been the books and writings of Max van Manen and his website "Phenomenologyonline".

**Implications for Nursing:** The principal methods of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method are addressed and explained providing an enriching overview of phenomenology of practice. A proposal is made for the way the suggestions made by van Manen might be organised for use with the methods involved in Phenomenology of Practice: Social sciences, philosophical and philological methods. Thereby, nurse researchers interested in conducting phenomenological research may find a global outlook and support to understand and conduct this type of inquiry which draws on the art.

**Conclusion:** The approach in this article may help nurse scholars and researchers reach an overall, encompassing perspective of the main methods and activities involved in doing phenomenological research. Nurses interested in doing phenomenology of practice are expected to commit with reflection and writing.

**Key words:** nurses, nursing, philosophy, qualitative methods, Van Manen, phenomenology, methodology

### Summary statement

#### Why is this research or review needed?

- Phenomenology is a complex research methodology frequently used by nurses to understand in depth phenomena of interest for nursing.
- It is difficult to find literature or identify an author which sets out didactic guidelines which can help and guide nurses to do phenomenological inquiry.
- Nothing has been published in a readable and easy way about how to combine the methodological suggestions made by van Manen with the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method.

### **What are the key findings?**

- Phenomenological research is fundamentally a reflective writing.
- The foundation of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method and the methods that make up it are explained in a readable and easy way for nurse researchers and professionals.
- This paper provides a global outlook of the methods involved in Phenomenology of Practice and how they can be implemented with a complete and integrated view.

### **How should the findings be used to influence policy/ practice/ research/ education?**

- A practical proposal is made of the way the methodological suggestions made by van Manen might be combined with the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method.
- This paper provides a possible reference to know how to apply and combine the methodological suggestions with the methods of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method with practical focus.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is widely accepted that conducting a qualitative study is neither simple, nor easy and this is particularly the case when the task intends to undertake phenomenology (Converse, 2012).

The complexity inherent in phenomenology, at least in part, lies in the fact that it is a philosophy, an approach and a methodology based on qualitative research (Burns & Grove, 2004; Dowling, 2007; Heinonen, 2015c; Mackey, 2005; Munhall, 1989; 2007; Oiler, 1982).

Furthermore, it must be taken into account very seriously that there exist a great variety of approaches and manners of conducting phenomenological research given the existence of diverse philosophical traditions in phenomenology and additionally, that these have undergone ongoing reinterpretations and clarifications (Annells, 1999; Carpenter, 2011;

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Omery, 1983). This reality transforms it into a heterogeneous research methodology, whose philosophical fundamentals and assumptions lay down the guidelines, in one way or another, for the entire research process (Johnston, Wallis, Oprescu & Gray, 2017; Mackey, 2005; Simpson, 2007). The result is that nurse researchers are presented with a complex research methodology where diverse options coexist and although they may show certain common aspects, they also have very distinct characteristics.

Our own research experience leads us to affirm that undertaking a phenomenological study in nursing is no easy task. Among other aspects, it is worth highlighting: (1) the need to acquire a minimal comprehension of the philosophical fundamentals of phenomenology and of the notions linked to the same, with examples such as: phenomenon, essence, intentionality, epoché-reduction, etc.; (2) the complexity posed by reading and understanding phenomenological literature, especially in the absence of philosophical phenomenological training; (3) the convenience of basing a vision on one of the different phenomenological strands of thought and taking a stance in favour of one or another, based on the similarities to the researcher's own view of the world, of his or her discipline and of the phenomenon which he or she intends to study; and (4) the difficulty, when considering a method (or author) in finding an accessible guide —or concrete, easy-to-understand guidelines— which might help shape and take the research forward, etc. For all the above, the purpose of this paper is to provide a complete and a global outlook of phenomenology of practice —analysing the methods involved and their purposes— to make easier the understanding of what entails doing research of this type.

## Background

In practice, it is no easy task to find a guide and template on which to base a phenomenological study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Taking this situation as our starting point, we have found in van Manen's *Phenomenology of Practice*, a pathway and guidelines on which to base our phenomenological research. This author has created a theoretical-practical vision of hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology and has given guidance on the way it might reasonably be applied in a way which can be understood (Jordán, 2008). As well as proposing a combination of methodological suggestions, van Manen, also presents methods which integrate the practical application of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method (van Manen, 2014). (See table S1 in the supplementary material I to understand some essential concepts of van Manen's phenomenological approach).

Although some authors have already undertaken an initial approach to describe the practical application of van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method (Ayala, 2008) or, also done so as regards the philosophical methods of epoché-reduction with its different varieties (Heinonen, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c), existing literature lacks articles with a synthetic, understandable, intelligible approach to the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method, as well as the way of orchestrating these into the methodological suggestions put forward by van Manen. In this sense, through this discussion paper, which has a mainly methodological orientation, we offer researchers a simple, yet in-depth way of relating to van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method, making its understanding easier and also, its practical application, with the goal of showing the way forward for those nurses who may intend to undertake a study of this type. To do this, to begin with we shall show that it is a method based on reflection on and writing about, the Lived Experience (LE). The second point will be to discuss the main methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method. Finally, we shall present the 'methodos' proposed by van Manen —the combination of methodological suggestions he puts forward— and we shall set out a

methodological schema which might help to guide research of this type. In other words, based on our own research experience and taking as reference, van Manen's Phenomenology of Practice, we shall attempt to show how to manage the complete set of methodological suggestions made by the author, regarding the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method.

We are aware of the difficulties posed by showing the entrails of phenomenological research, but we hope that this article will help nurse researchers interested in conducting a phenomenological study shape an overall vision of the main methods and activities implied by research of this type —at least if it is guided by van Manen's perspective.

#### **Data sources**

This discussion paper is based on our own experiences and supported by literature and theory. Our central sources of data have been the books and writings of Max van Manen as well as his website 'Phenomenologyonline'.

#### **DISCUSSION**

##### **1. Placing van Manen's Phenomenology of Practice in the main phenomenological approaches**

van Manen's personal inspiration for the practical orientation he gave to phenomenology and also for the name "Phenomenology of Practice", lies in the phenomenological manner that some academics in the professional disciplines —such as the pedagogue Langeveld, the medical doctor Buytendijk, the psychiatrist van den Berg, the pediatrician Beets and the psychologists Linschoten and Rümke— approached their own fields (van Manen, 2007; 2015). A distinctive feature of these academics —placed in the School of Utrecht or the Dutch School— is that they were inspired by the

phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, Minkowski, Merleau-Ponty to approach their own professions with innovative perspectives. That is, they were more interested in the professional and practical orientation of phenomenology than in the purely philosophical phenomenology. As van Manen states, they “seemed especially interested in ‘doing’ phenomenology in service of their professional disciplines or more generally for the purpose of understanding the practices of everyday life” (2007, p. 23; 2014, p. 197). Another singular feature of these scholars was that, in addition to use philosophical and phenomenological sources in their phenomenological inquiries, they also drew on literary and artistic sources since they considered that expressive art sources can be very useful for phenomenological explanations and also because they can go further than usual language (van Manen, 2014).

On the other hand, van Manen’s phenomenology of practice finds also its beginning in the writings of the major thinkers and scholars that worked on phenomenological philosophy and human sciences such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau Ponty, Levinas and so on (van Manen, 2014). In these sense, it can be said that van Manen’s approach combines the main features of descriptive or eidetic phenomenology of Husserl (for example, some concepts such as essence, epoché-reduction, etc., are of paramount importance) with other features of interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger (for example, van Manen asserts that every description entails an interpretation; also, for the author a phenomenological text is descriptive as it names something but also it is interpretative as it stands between interpreted meanings and the object to which interpretation points out (van Manen, 2015)). As van Manen himself states: “phenomenology is, in some sense, always descriptive and interpretive, linguistic and hermeneutic.” (2014, p. 26).

## **2. The hermeneutic phenomenological method of van Manen: a method rooted in the thoughtfulness and writing of the lived experience**

In general, phenomenology, defined as the science of phenomena (Heidegger, 1993; van Manen, 2015), is a philosophical attitude derived from research into essential questions within the realms of ontology and epistemology (Thorne, 1991). In a wider sense, it is a philosophy or ‘theory of the unique’, of the personal or individual, interested in what ‘is in essence’ irreplaceable. That is, phenomenology is the study of essences, of what ‘is’, without which it might not be what ‘is’, such that it always questions the true nature or meaning of a thing (van Manen, 1984; 2014; 2015; 2017b). Phenomenology always poses questions as to the true nature, or true meaning of something, of a ‘lived phenomenon’. Therefore, when a particular phenomenon is being studied, an attempt is made to determine which experiential structures make up said experience and thus, make that experience what it is and not another one (van Manen, 2015). “Phenomenological questions are meaning questions” (van Manen, 2014, p. 23; 2015); “What is this or that kind of experience like?” (van Manen, 1984, p. 37; 2015, p. 9; 2017b); “How do we live through an experience like this?” (van Manen, 2014, p. 31).

The fundamental aim of phenomenology in line with van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method is to create a phenomenological text which, taking a LE as its starting point, in a pre-reflexive manner by those involved, reflects its essence in said text. In a phenomenological sense, knowledge is generated in text form which, as well as describing and analysing said LE, is also capable of evoking its understanding in a very real sense (van Manen, 2011a). In this way, phenomenological research is rooted in the LE and returns to the same through the phenomenological text (van Manen, 2014; 2015).

Taking as its background context all of the above, when researchers decide to undertake a study of this type, questions are invariably raised as to how it will be carried out. The key to the practical dimension of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method is provided thus, by van Manen's definition:

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence. The term *method* refers to the way or attitude of approaching a phenomenon. Abstemious means that reflecting on experience aims to abstain from theoretical, polemical, suppositional and emotional intoxications. Hermeneutic means that reflecting on experience must aim for discursive language and sensitive interpretative devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication and description possible and intelligible. (2014, p. 26. Italics in original).

As the author states, phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection, an underlying attitude which must necessarily be adopted, in all cases, when phenomenological studies are carried out on a phenomenon or lived experience. Moreover, “phenomenology is primarily a philosophic *method for questioning* [to grasp the essential meaning of a certain phenomenon], not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions” (van Manen, 2014, p. 29. Italics in original).

Nevertheless, phenomenological research is not pure reflection in such that reflection and writing blend together (van Manen, 2014; 2015). This is what van Manen says regarding writing: “To write is to measure our thoughtfulness. Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more clearly with what we know. Writing teaches us what we know and in what way we know what we know” (2015, p. 127). That is, until we do not write, we do not really know what we knew because “writing gives appearance and body to thought. And as it does, we disembody what in another sense we already embody. (...) Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal” (van Manen, 2015, p. 127). Therefore, writing is its essential element, writing ‘is’ the method which helps ‘show’ the phenomenon for study, transforming invisible into visible, in the eyes of the reader

reading the research conducted (van Manen, 2015). Language therefore becomes of fundamental interest in this type of research because, as van Manen says— “responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing phenomenology” (2015, p. 132).

Taking into account that, from a Vanmanian perspective, ‘researching’ in phenomenology ‘is reflecting’ and reflecting ‘is writing’ (van Manen, 2014; 2015), in this type of research, methods are needed to gather LE and methods which help to reflect and write about the LE being described, appropriately, in a Phenomenological text.

To correctly gather LE we have ‘empirical methods’ stemming from ‘social sciences’ (interview, observation, etc.) As can be seen in the next section, it is fundamental that these methods acquire the same methodological significance which underlies the basic phenomenology project (van Manen, 2014).

As regards the methods which facilitate phenomenological reflection, two can be differentiated. On the one hand, we have the phenomenological ‘philosophical methods’ —epoché-reduction (‘reductio’), with all its possible varieties— which help to maintain a reflexive attitude and as result, to reflect in an abstemious manner throughout the whole research process. On the other, we have the ‘reflexive methods’ stemming from ‘social sciences’. Both these — the philosophical methods and the methods rooted in social sciences— facilitate phenomenological reflection. That is to say, they help reflect within the realm of the phenomenologically structural features of the phenomenon or of the LE which, in each case is the object of research, with the aim of seeking its essence or nature.

Regarding writing as an act of reflection, writing will allow us to show and make visible all that which constitutes the essence of the phenomenon which is being studied (van Manen, 2015). As has already been shown, in research guided by van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method, knowledge is produced in the shape of text (van Manen, 2011a). But this text does not merely

describe and analyse the phenomenon being researched, as it also evokes an immediate understanding of the most meaningful, essential points being studied, which would be impossible to transmit in any other way (van Manen, 2014). At its root —as revealed in van Manen's definition— it tries to reflect on the phenomenon by using a “discursive language and [full of] sensitive interpretative devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication and description possible and intelligible” (2014, p. 26). This is possible thanks to ‘philological methods’, which feature and give special relevance to the different ‘vocative’ dimensions —resembling a literary style which may be shaped using the language of the text. Table 1 shows, in a synthetic form, the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method, its main methodical activities and what its ultimate goal is: to gather the lived experience, reflect, write. Taking as its backdrop, van Manen's agogic approach, the next section will offer the chance to describe each one in greater depth.

### **3. The methods that make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method**

As has been written above, to ‘do phenomenological research’ is to ‘reflect’ on a phenomenon or, more precisely, on a LE near to oneself; and to reflect ‘is to write’ about the same (van Manen, 2014; 2015). There follows a review of the methods involved in the hermeneutic-phenomenological method and the role they play in this type of research.

#### **3.1. Social Sciences Methods (Human Sciences Methods)**

There are two fundamental reasons which justify the use of certain methods drawn from social sciences, when undertaking hermeneutic-phenomenological research. The first reason is that some of these methods —the empirical kind— might be useful in gathering experiential material in a more systematic manner, to do research. The second reason is that there are a series of methods —the reflexive ones— which might help categorise the meaning embedded in experiential material (van

Manen, 2014). As van Manen puts into context it is common to refer to 'human science phenomenology' when these methods are adopted to do phenomenological research. This is a way of understanding that methods imported from social sciences —empirical and reflexive methods— might be of significant help to create a kind of phenomenology from practice in professional contexts, as long as the phenomenological attitude is maintained thanks to the mediation of philosophical methods. In spite of the peculiarities inherent to empirical and reflexive methods, when used in phenomenological research, we shall provide a brief review of these methods in general, assuming that researchers are normally familiar with the same.

***Empirical methods or activities: Gathering the lived experience***

When a researcher sets out on research of this kind, he or she needs to portray the phenomenon or LE to be studied, in the best way possible. To do this, phenomenology has imported certain methodic activities, above all from the social sciences, which allow access to and the chance to gather, experiential material (interview, observation, etc.). Nevertheless, in phenomenology, these activities differ greatly from the way they are used in other kinds of research and whose origins are the social sciences: for example, ethnographic studies, narratives and so on. In other words, although a hermeneutic-phenomenological study uses empirical methods, one should not overlook the fact that its primary goal is to gather pre-reflexive, experiential material, to represent it in an alternative manner immediately afterwards, from the phenomenological perspective (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, it is fundamental to take into account that these activities must, at all times, assume the background philosophy which impregnates the hermeneutic-phenomenological method.

Table 1 shows the most common ways of gathering LE in a phenomenological study.

### ***Reflective methods or activities: Seeing the meanings in texts***

Reflexive methods are particular ways of analysing or carrying out phenomenological reflection, always taking into account that they must be applied in harmony with the reduction process. That is to say, reflective methods used have to be conjugated and integrated into the philosophical methods of epoché-reduction (van Manen, 2014). It is important to point out that the meanings of the terms 'theme' and 'thematic analysis' in phenomenology differ—in their goal and in the phenomenological attitude which is to be adopted to undertake them—from those in other, more common types of qualitative research, for example grounded theory, ethnography or content analysis (van Manen, 2014; 2015). Table 1 shows the main reflective methods and activities originating from the social sciences.

### **3.2. Philosophical methods: Epoché-reduction**

Reduction is considered to be the principal 'method' in phenomenology (Adams & van Manen, 2017; van Manen, 2014). The fundamental goal of reduction is to create direct, primitive contact with the world as we experience it, leaving aside the way we conceptualise it. Reduction intends to eliminate what we 'take for granted', trying to leave to one side those barriers, assumptions, suppositions and so on, which prevent us or make us unable to access phenomena as they truly appear to us and the way they appear. "The reduction is a complex reflective attentiveness that must be practiced for phenomenological understanding to occur" (van Manen, 2011b; 2014, p. 221). Consequently, reduction, as well as being a research method, implies and displays a phenomenological attitude, a style of thinking, which must be adopted by anybody wishing to undertake research of this type (van Manen, 2011b; 2014). At its root, we might say that reduction helps us maintain a radical opening onto the world and to reflect in a truly attentive manner, which allows us to focus on and thus

understand, the singularity of the phenomenon which we have taken as subject of our study (van Manen, 2011b; 2014).

Reduction consists of two methodological movements, epoché and reduction. In this article we have adopted the eclectic view of reduction, from van Manen's most recent book (2014), since it takes into account the different levels of epoché ('bracketing' or suspension of beliefs) and of reduction (reflexivity), which are differentiated in philosophical literature due to their heuristic value and methodological utility (van Manen, 2014). Thus, van Manen differentiates certain methodological moments of epoché-reduction —considered to be the general preparatory elements to make possible valid reduction— and whose fundamental characteristic lies in its emphasis in the epoché, inviting one to an opening on to the experience, exactly as it is lived. These moments refer to heuristic, hermeneutic, experiential, methodological epoché-reduction. Although in the research process these “methods” are generally carried out in harmony, they may also be taken separately, but always remembering to maintain the vision of integrity of the whole phenomenological research project (van Manen, 2014).

On the other hand, van Manen discusses reductions. These reductions help the researcher take on the reflexive phenomenological attitude which allows him or her to approach the unique nature of the phenomenon, as shown in its own singularity. Although the author mentions five reductions in his book, it might be said that the phenomenological vision of van Manen focusses on two fundamentally, eidetic reduction and ontologic reduction (van Manen, 2014), which are those we shall consider, for that very reason. In Table 2 there is a brief description of the elements or moments of epoché-reduction, as an invitation to openness, as well as to the diverse varieties of reduction.

### 3.3 Philological methods: the vocative

“The aim of the vocatio is to let things ‘speak’ or be ‘heard’ by bringing them into nearness through the vocative power of language” (van Manen, 2011m). The vocative dimension is at the forefront of phenomenological writing since, during this reflexive process, we not only commit ourselves to the analysis in hand, but we also try to express those aspects of the meaning of a phenomenon which are not cognitive, but rather, ineffable and pathic (van Manen, 2014). It is precisely here, in the expression of these implicit meanings, of ‘felt sensations’, that vocative methods acquire great relevance (van Manen, 2011m; 2014).

“The voking features of a text have to do with the recognition that a text can ‘speak’ to us, that we may experience an emotional and ethical responsiveness, that we may know ourselves addressed” (van Manen, 2011m; 2014, p. 240). Thus, it might be said that there is a relation between the text and the vocative effect which it might have on the reader and on the writer.

The voking act provides the possibility to ‘know one’s self’, not in the narrow sense of narcissistic self-examination but in the sense of discovering existential possibilities, what it is to be human, what lies at the heart of our being and personal identity. The ‘call’ signifies that we need other selves, others, the Other, through whom and with whom we seek understanding. (van Manen, 2011m)

For van Manen, the more vocative a text is, the more strongly implanted is the meaning in the same. It will therefore be more difficult to paraphrase and summarise the text, together with the meaning within and the way it is felt when reading it (van Manen, 2011m; 2014). There are several vocative methods —understood as dimensions in writing and not as methods in an instrumental sense— by means of which, the meanings of phenomenological language may be expressed. It is worth pointing out that these vocative media manage to bond the meanings in the text in a more robust manner

that might be the case with ordinary narrative prose (van Manen, 2011m; 2014). In table 3 there is a brief explanation of each of them.

Nevertheless, since people have different ways of living their experiences, care must be taken with what is transmitted since it is possible that it does not relate fully to the personal situation of each individual. It is important to keep in mind that phenomenology is only able to provide plausible understanding as a function of the understanding of the phenomenon which is being studied, because it can only focus on the understanding of 'possible' human experiences (van Manen, 2014).

#### **4. The *methodos* of a hermeneutic phenomenological research**

Even though van Manen himself recognises the well-known claim that “the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method!” (Gadamer, 1975; Rorty 1979, in van Manen, 2015, p. 30) he is convinced and he defends the fact that there exists a 'methodos', a way of considering the methodological aspects of phenomenology —or a pathway to follow— which is based on tradition, on the combination of knowledge or ideas, in the lives of thinkers and authors who, if taken as figures of reference, give us both a source and a methodological basis (van Manen, 2014; 2015).

Taking the above into account, van Manen presents (1984; 2015) a combination of methodological suggestions which may help to conduct a hermeneutic-phenomenological research: (1) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and (6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. These recommendations should not be understood as activities to be 'executed' as if considering a protocol —following the process step-

by-step— but rather as methodological aspects to be taken into account when hermeneutic-phenomenological research is undertaken. van Manen (1984; 2015) has described what each of these activities consists of, what is implied in each, giving, moreover, several practical suggestions which help guide a study of this type. Based on our research experience and taking as reference van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method, Table 4 provides a methodological outline which may help as a reference to those nurse researchers interested in undertaking a phenomenological study. In the outline, research activities and practical suggestions are shown, as proposed by the author, together with the methods which make up the hermeneutic-phenomenological method (van Manen, 1984; 2014; 2015).

## **5. Implications for nursing**

Nurse researchers who decide to embark on a phenomenological study generally put time and effort into seeking and studying material which helps them understand the methodology and methods involved (Caelli, 2001). Nevertheless, some people do not normally consider it necessary because they are unaware of the complexity, or of the errors which might be committed (Khankeh, Ranjbar, Khorasani-Zavareh, Zargham-Boroujeni, & Johansson, 2015). The lack of know-how, experience or skill in carrying out this kind of research may cause difficulties in the generation of true knowledge and the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Khankeh et al., 2015), which has serious implications for the results and the ethics of the research. For this reason, nurse researchers need to consider that orchestrating appropriately the methods of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method —social sciences, philosophical and philological methods— is of paramount importance as it has an impact on the type and quality of knowledge that is generated: the phenomenological text. In this sense, philological methods probably are the least known and developed methods.

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Worthy of being mentioned in van Manen's approach is that he advocates the use of different artistic resources —literature, poetry, cinema or fine arts— as a source for experiential material (for example, see how Jordán Sierra & Méndez Cestero (2017) make use of movies in their phenomenological research) and as a device to enrich the description of the LE through the phenomenological text. As such, artistic sources together with philological methods allow returning to the lived experience through phenomenological text not only reflecting the essence (describing and analysing the essence of a phenomena or a given lived experience) but also, vividly evoking its understanding (van Manen, 1997; 2014). With regard to the latter, this approach has valuable implications for a profession like nursing since it can lead to a more complete understanding of the experiences of patients, nurses, families, etc.

Another aspect worth commenting, which make phenomenological research a real challenge for nurse researchers, is the requirement that any individual method of researching a given phenomenon must be constantly reinvented and may not be reduced to a set of general research strategies or techniques (Caelli, 2001; van Manen, 2014). That is to say, in the study of each phenomenon the researcher has to see which is the best way — within his or her possibilities— of studying said phenomenon and articulating the different activities and methods in a pertinent, plausible manner. Therefore, as van Manen states, “the serious student of phenomenology should be cautious and shy away from simplistic schemes, superficial programs, step-by-step procedures and cookery book recipes that certainly will not result in meaningful insights” (2017a, p. 5).

It must be kept in mind that to evaluate a study in phenomenological research, certain criteria need to be applied which assume the fundamental assumptions of this methodology. On the contrary, nurse researchers will find it difficult to defend their work because they will have to overcome language issues and some criteria which are not appropriate for evaluating the quality, nor the rigour, of their research process (van Manen, 2014). Following on from this, it is worth mentioning that Norlyk & Harder (2010) found disparities and inconsistencies in the different phenomenological

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studies which they analysed regarding the comprehension and use that researchers made of notions such as essence, reduction, saturation, sample and so on. In consequence of all the above is important for nurse researchers to keep in mind that some fundamental notions in phenomenology —such as “precision”, “accuracy”, “rigour”, “objectivity”, “subjectivity”, “credibility”, “generalisation”, “sample”, “saturation” or “bias” — differ from the way they are understood in other qualitative methodologies. To delve into how to determine the best understanding of this terms in phenomenology see supplementary material II.

## CONCLUSION

Conducting phenomenological research becomes a true challenge, not only due to the difficulty posed by understanding complex philosophy or the variety of methodological options in existence (Caelli, 2001; Carpenter, 2011; Omery, 1983), but also as some authors point out due to the lack of clarity which exists in phenomenological literature on how to implement and articulate methods in studies of this type (Caelli, 2001; Norlyk & Harder, 2010; Paley, 2017). This has led to cases of phenomenological research where there is a lack of description of the analysis —that it is, meaning attribution— (Paley, 2017), or no mention is made of the concept epoché-reduction, which lies at the very heart of phenomenology (Heinonen, 2015c; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). This is why we consider it important for researchers to make an effort to try and better understand and differentiate the diverse approaches to undertaking phenomenological studies. We also find relevant for researchers to describe and explain how they implement the principles behind the phenomenological philosophy of their study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010).

Any researcher with an interest in undertaking phenomenological research might find, in the proposed outline, an initial idea of how to possibly organise their research activities with methods and methodological activities. But always bearing in mind what Adams & van Manen (2017) noted:

“Phenomenological research is never a prescribed procedural or step-by-step form of inquiry.

Rather, the methods employed need to be commensurate with the phenomena being studied and pursued with an appreciation for the original literature” (p. 781).

As has been seen in this article, from the Vanmanian point of view, ‘researching’ in phenomenology ‘is reflecting’ and reflecting ‘is writing’. Moreover, the basis of van Manen's phenomenology “takes seriously a notion that is very self-evident and yet seldom acknowledged: hermeneutic-phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process” (van Manen, 2015, p. 7; 2014, p. 389). Nevertheless, it is striking that phenomenological research studies —at least those directed by van Manen— do not generally reflect the importance of writing, nor its function in these studies. In this way, the philological methods or the diverse vocative dimensions of writing are generally vastly overlooked in these studies.

The nurse researcher who decides to undertake phenomenological research really does notice the complexity inherent to said methodology when he or she tries to put it into practice in more depth. Although as van Manen states “a real understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by ‘actively doing it’” (2015, p. 8), we hope that this article constitutes significant help in achieving a clearer overall view and of the inner workings of research of this type. We understand that this publication, with a more methodic style, may help bring closer, in a simple, manageable form, the complexity which encompasses phenomenological research, at least if it is conducted in line with van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method.

## Author Contributions:

All authors have agreed on the final version and meet at least one of the following criteria

(recommended by the ICMJE\*):

- 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content.

\* <http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/>

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**Table 1.** The methods, the aim of methods and the main methodic activities involved in a phenomenological research

Phenomenological research methods	Aim	Main methodic activities
<b>Social/ Human Sciences Methods</b> <i>(Empirical methods)</i>  <i>(Reflective methods)</i>	Gather lived experience descriptions  Reflect-write	-Interview: <i>Phenomenological</i> <i>Hermeneutic</i> -Phenomenological observation -Protocol writing (lived-experience descriptions) -Observing lived experiences -Borrowing from fiction ( <i>e.g. novels, short stories, movies</i> ), biographies, diaries, journals, art, phenomenological literature  -Thematic analysis: <i>Macrothematic analysis (holistic reading approach).</i> <i>Microthematic analysis (selective reading approach; detailed reading approach)</i> -Conceptual analysis -Insight cultivators
<b>Philosophical methods</b> <i>(epoché-reduction)</i>	Reflect-write	-Epoché reduction: invitations to openness <i>Heuristic (wonder)</i> <i>Hermeneutic (openness)</i> <i>Experiential (concreteness)</i> <i>Methodological (approach)</i> -Reduction proper: <i>Eidetic (eidos or whatness)</i> <i>Ontologic (ways of being)</i> <i>Ethical (alterity)*</i> <i>Originary (originary meaning)*</i>
<b>Philological methods</b> <i>(vocative)</i>	Reflect-write	-Revocative method -Evocative method ( <i>nearness</i> ) E.g.: Anecdote as phenomenological example; metaphors, etc. -Invocative method ( <i>intensification</i> ) E.g: Poetic language; Textual tone and aspect seeing -Convocative method ( <i>pathic</i> ) -Provocative method ( <i>epiphany</i> )

**Table 2.** Philosophical methods: The epoché-reduction and the reduction proper

Philosophical methods	
<b>Epoché-Reduction: Invitations to openness</b>	
Heuristic ( <i>wonder</i> )	This reduction is conducted by bracketing what is taken for granted and what aims is to awaken a deep sense of awe caused by the phenomenon we are focussing on (van Manen, 2011g; 2014). This so-basic level of phenomenological reduction consists in the attitude of awe which allows us to see the unusual in the usual, or the extraordinary in the ordinary. From this moment on, it is as if there were some kind of "cleansing" process of the worries in our mind and a questioning process emerges directed at us and directed by us. This attitude—which must be kept up throughout the entire research process— should lead us to question the meaning of certain aspects of the LE (van Manen, 2011g; 2014).
Hermeneutic ( <i>openness</i> )	It “consists of the epoché of bracketing all interpretation and explicating reflectively whatever assumptions seem to need attention in writing the research text” (van Manen, 2011f; 2014, p. 224). Through this method, the researcher tries to achieve a genuine, radical opening into the phenomenon, which allows him or her to overcome private, subjective feelings, preferences, inclinations or expectations and to avoid arriving at premature, unilateral or false understanding of the phenomenon, which would prevent them relating to the same, exactly as it is lived. As van Manen explains, the researchers need to be conscious of the inclination to let themselves be led on by their own presuppositions, theories, bias and so on, as regards their own motivation for the research and nature of the question. It supposes that the researcher takes a stance of critical consciousness regarding assumptions, which might prevent it from being as open as possible to the meaning and significance of the phenomenon under study. In the practical sense, it consists of a reflexive examination of pre-understandings, assumptions, interests and so on, which we may have—and which may influence our reflexive point of view—and express or reflect them in a text. Moreover, it requires research into different dimensions of the meaning of some lived human experiences from their different sources and levels of meaning. All this forms part of phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 2011f; 2014).
Experiential ( <i>concreteness</i> )	This consists of bracketing all theory or theoretical meaning, all real or unreal beliefs, with the goal of explaining the concrete nature or meaning of life. The experiential reduction suspends abstractions in favour of concrete experiential factualness. That is to say, it involves leaving aside theoretical or scientific understandings and thematic concepts which cover the phenomenon being studied and which stop it from being seen from a non-abstractive point of view. To do this, one has to ask oneself the following question: How is this phenomenon really experienced? It is a fundamental question, because phenomenological research must be continually directed towards experience just as it is lived (van Manen, 2011j; 2014).
Methodological ( <i>approach</i> )	This consists of bracketing all the usual conventional research techniques, with the goal of "seeking or inventing" a way of focussing, which might fit in, in the most appropriate way with the phenomenon being studied. In essence, it requires flexible rationality which allows for the "invention" of a direction to investigate the phenomenon in an original, creative, academic manner. Phenomenological methodology is a true challenge, given that any individual research style must necessarily be "invented" again and it cannot be reduced to a set of general research strategies or techniques. Flexible narrative rationale must be used, which might present phenomenological meanings in a recognisable textual way. So that “the reduction is not an end in itself—rather, the reduction is a means to an end: to be able to return to the world as lived in an enriched and deepened fashion” (van Manen, 2014, p. 227).

**Table 2.** Philosophical methods: The epoché-reduction and the reduction proper

Philosophical methods	
<b>-Reduction proper: Meaning giving sources of meaning</b>	
Eidetic ( <i>eidos</i> or <i>whatness</i> )	<p>The aim of eidetic reduction is to take in certain essential ideas from the meaning of a phenomenon. Those philosophers who follow Husserl's phenomenology consider that eidetic reduction —although not universally accepted feature of phenomenological research— is the central core of phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 2011d; 2014).</p> <p>The goal of this type of reduction is to describe what is shown as being itself in experience or in consciousness and how something is shown as itself. The way which intends to lead to the possible invariants or the <i>eidos</i> of the phenomenon. That is to say, the invariations which make "something" what it is, in such a way that, without the same, it could not be what it "is".</p> <p><i>Eidos</i> does not refer to the immutable universalities or generalities on the nature of human life. In fact, the effect would be to fall into the fallacy of essentialism. For this reason, we must remember that phenomenological research is concerned with "possible" human experiences and not with experiences which are presupposed to be empirically or culturally universal or shared with all human beings, independently of time, culture, gender or other factors. Moreover, we consider it important to take into account that the determination of the meaning of a phenomenon is always approximative, tentative, incomplete and inclined to question assumptions being go over and over the LE (van Manen, 2011d; 2014).</p> <p>By means of this reduction, as explained by van Manen, patterns of meaning seem to be starting to emerge, together with some thematic meanings which are the raw materials for phenomenological writing. On a practical level, eidetic reduction is carried out by means of the imaginative variation method —those thematic meanings in LE which seem essential are subjected to questioning as to whether their removal means that said experience continues to be the same, or whether, on the other hand, it loses its essential meaning— or by comparing empirical examples too (van Manen, 2011d; 2014).</p>
Ontologic ( <i>ways of being</i> )	<p>“The method of the ontological reduction consists of explicating the mode or ways of being that belong to or are proper to something” (van Manen, 2014, p, 231). The ontic meaning of something is the way it is in the world of that something or that somebody. This reduction is based on Heidegger's thought, which focusses on the ontological meaning (the way of being), instead of focussing on the ontic meaning (the "what" of the being). Heidegger considered that all forms of being in the world are ways of understanding the world as the beings's event. In this way, understanding a phenomenon aims to understand the manner of being of an ontological being (the meaning) of a phenomenon. Although there is no methodic procedure to perform this reduction, a researcher may have as his or her goal and aspire to cultivate their research by following Heidegger's thought, which is to say, the "way of being" of the being. Notwithstanding, the way in which the researcher might carry out this reduction is by examining those possible recommendations which might arise for human actions or social policies, with the aim of making possible the realisation of the "way of being" of the being (van Manen, 2011i; 2014).</p>

**Table 3.** Philological methods. The *vocative*

Philological methods	
Revocative method	It aims to bring into the present the LE, in such a way that the reader might recognise, in a ‘non-reflexive’ way, these experiential possibilities in human life. One way of bringing the reader closer to the LE is by use of anecdotes or descriptions drawn from the LE (van Manen, 2011i; 2014).
Evocative method ( <i>nearness</i> )	Tries to establish a certain perceptive direction towards the meaning of what has been lived, when writing, in order to bring to life the phenomenon being researched, bringing it into the present, closer and within touching distance (van Manen, 2011e; 2014). This method, to some extent, attempts to make the text speak to the reader in such a way that he or she feels that the text has been written with him or her in mind and that it is directly speaking to them. Furthermore, it aims to let the reverberant meaning of the text seduce the reader into continuing to immerse themselves in the same (van Manen, 2014). In this way, the reader feels that the text is speaking to them. This quality is what will propel the reader towards the feeling that they feel contact with something and makes them see it a revelatory in the experiential sense. In the end, the aim here is to bring things closer and into contact. Anecdotes —used as phenomenological ‘examples’—, metaphors, or even poetic licence —such as alliteration— help to achieve this effect (van Manen, 2011e; 2014).
Invocative method ( <i>intensification</i> )	Tries to bring to the fore the philological aspects of the text, giving greater intensity to the words as regards their meaning, and sensual feeling, in such a way that the text possesses acoustic richness and imagined audible qualities and in this way, the text becomes, to an extent, poetic language with an inner quality. By means of intensification, alliteration, assonance and rhythm, the power of language is used to bring about a kind of invigorating effect in the reader. In the end, it tries to make us more sensitive to the ways in which words and expressions take on more intense meanings when desired or when the intention is to highlight unique, very significant details, from the LE (van Manen, 2011h; 2014).
Convocative method ( <i>pathic</i> )	‘Aims for the text to possess the (em)pathic power to appeal —so that its life meaning speaks to, and makes a demand on, the reader’ (van Manen, 2014, p. 267). It is common for a qualitative text to end up transmitting or revealing fundamental knowledge which might not be expressed by means of a conceptual or intellectual statement or sentence. By means of this dimension, writing tries to convey pathic knowledge —not cognitive— which is not transmitted explicitly, but rather, implicitly. As soon as the reader feels that the text ‘is speaking’, validating his or her experience, is when the pathic sense of the text is felt. With the reading of a text, a moment of relevance arises and gives meaning which responds to the desire for significance, which we, as people, have and which is normally the object of searching and personal reflection (van Manen, 2014). By means of the text’s convocative power, the reader is able to remember that part of humanity shared with others. In essence, it tries to create conversational space where the reader can encounter others. Resorting to experiential stories may help in the transmission of pathic knowledge (van Manen, 2014).
Provocative method ( <i>epiphany</i> )	It “articulates the kind of ethical predicaments that are suggested in the phenomenon that is being studied, and what are the active normative responses (advice, policies, tactful practices, and so on). (...) A strong vocative text tends to provoke actions. It is action sensitive, opening up the realm of the ethical” (van Manen, 2011k; 2014, p. 281)

**Table 4.** Methodological outline for doing phenomenological research and writing

Research activity	Underlying aim	Possible procedural methods/ activities
1) Turning to the nature of lived experience (van Manen, 1984; 2015).	Turn to a phenomenon which seriously interests the researcher and commits him to the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elucidate the nature of the lived experience —“what is ‘lived experience’ ” (van Manen, 2015, p. 35) and orient towards it.</li> <li>- What human experience is susceptible to become the centre of a phenomenological research?</li> <li>- Identify what has a profound interest for us and determine if it is an authentic phenomenon, that is, an experience that human being live.</li> <li>- Formulate the phenomenological question: What is the nature of this lived experience?</li> <li>- Explicating assumptions and preunderstandings (philosophical methods: epoché-reduction: invitations to openness).</li> </ul>
2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it (van Manen, 1984; 2015).	Gather experiential material that can contribute somewhat —after doing the phenomenological reflection— in relation to the essential nature of the lived experience to which the researcher is oriented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gather experiential material (generating ‘data’):</li> <li>- Using personal experience.</li> <li>- Tracing etymological sources.</li> <li>- Searching idiomatic phrases.</li> <li>- Obtaining experiential descriptions from others (empirical methods of social sciences methods).</li> <li>- Locating experiential descriptions in literature, art, etc.</li> <li>- Consulting phenomenological literature.</li> <li>- Philosophical methods: Epoché-reduction: invitations to openness.</li> </ul>
3) Reflecting [and writing] on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon (van Manen, 1984; 2015).	Grasp the essential meaning of the phenomenon that is being investigated. Analyse reflectively thoughtfully those aspects that seem to be experiential structures or themes, and uncover and determine if they have phenomenological power —those themes that allow us doing phenomenological descriptions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection: Uncovering thematic aspects in lifeworld descriptions:</li> <li>- Conducting thematic analysis (reflective methods of social sciences methods).</li> <li>- Composing linguistic transformations.</li> <li>- Gleaning thematic descriptions from artistic sources.</li> <li>- Interpretation through conversation (hermeneutic interview).</li> <li>- Collaborative analysis: The research seminar/ group.</li> <li>- Lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection: lived space (spatiality); lived body (corporeality); lived time (temporality); lived human relation (relationality or communality).</li> <li>- Philosophical methods.</li> <li>- Determining incidental and essential themes: philosophical methods (eidetic reduction by means of method of free imaginative variation).</li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Methodological outline for conducting phenomenological research and writing (continuation)

Research activity	Underlying aim	Possible procedural activities/ methods
4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1984; 2015).	Write a phenomenological text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hermeneutic phenomenological writing:</li> <li>- Attend the silence and the spoken language: “borrow” the words of a thoughtful poet, a philosopher, an author of fiction, etc. since this other person is able, or has been able, to describe an experience in a manner that is beyond the ability of the researcher.</li> <li>- Artistic material: poetry, novels, paintings, music, cinematography.</li> <li>- Anecdotes and varying examples.</li> <li>- Philological methods (vocative methods).</li> </ul>
5) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon (van Manen, 2015).	Be sensitive to the ultimate purpose of the research and to our role as researchers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain an attitude of deep and abiding interest in the phenomenon.</li> <li>- Maintain the glaze of the researcher in relation to the discipline-profession belongs to: the position of the researcher in regard to his profession.</li> <li>- Seek an oriented and strong interpretation with the orientation of the researcher to the profession he belongs to as a resource to produce —greater and better— knowledge.</li> <li>- Philosophical methods (hermeneutic epoché-reduction; ontologic reduction).</li> <li>- Writing an oriented, strong and rich text where the voice of the professional is heard.</li> </ul>
6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 2015)	“Construct a text which in its dialogical structure and argumentative organization aims at a certain effect (...) constantly measur[ing] the overall design of the text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure” (van Manen, 2015, p. 33).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Think the form or structure of the text: thematically, existentials, etc.</li> <li>- Philosophical methods: methodological epoché-reduction.</li> </ul>