

### Humanistic, phenomenological and existential psychotherapy: Qualitative systematic literature review

*A psicoterapia humanista, fenomenológica e existencial: Revisão sistemática qualitativa da literatura*


*La psicoterapia humanista, fenomenológica y existencial: Revisión sistemática cualitativa de la literatura*

*Psychothérapie humaniste, phénoménologique et existentielle : Revue systématique qualitative de la littérature*

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#### Abstract

A systematic qualitative review of the literature was carried out on how therapists linked to Humanistic, Phenomenological, and Existential Psychotherapies have applied the phenomenological method in psychotherapy, aiming to investigate how they proceed, methodologically, in this clinical-psychotherapeutic practice. Articles were selected in Portuguese, complete and referring to the period from 2011 to 2021, based on searches in the LILACS, PePSIC, and SciELO-Brasil databases. The following keywords were used: phenomenological method AND psychotherapy OR clinical. The corpus consisted of 45 articles, which were analyzed quantitatively (distribution of published articles; performance of Brazilian journals; ranking of psychologists with the highest publication rate); institutional affiliations of the authors and co-authors) and qualitatively according to the dimensions: (I) methodological design used, (II) data analysis, (III) phenomenological method in therapeutic practice. The results indicate a higher production of articles in 2020, a concentration of publications in a humanistic journal, a predominance of authors and universities from Ceará, and a predominance of empirical productions. The semi-structured interview was the most widely used instrument for data collection. In data analysis, the proposal by Giorgi and Sousa (2010) was widely used, with the existential-hermeneutic phenomenological being the most cited analysis method in the research, which was based on different authors. The methodological-phenomenological concepts, established since Husserl's inaugural Phenomenology, appear in the articles in a different way from that explored in the philosophical Phenomenology, being attributed different meanings such as (professional) posture, attitude of understanding taken by the psychologist, highlighting his/her mode of intervention. Furthermore, the authors treat the ideas of epoché, reduction, and phenomenological reduction as synonyms, with a general meaning of attitude/posture.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, existential-phenomenology, phenomenological method, humanistic psychotherapy.

#### Resumo

*Realizou-se uma revisão sistemática qualitativa da literatura sobre como os terapeutas vinculados às psicoterapias humanistas, fenomenológicas e existenciais têm aplicado o método fenomenológico na psicoterapia, visando averiguar como procedem, metodologicamente, nessa prática clínico-psicoterapêutica. Selecionaram-se artigos em português, completos e referentes ao período de 2011 a 2021, a partir de buscas nas bases de dados LILACS, PePSIC e SciELO-Brasil. Como palavras-chave, abordaram-se as seguintes: método fenomenológico AND*

psicoterapia OR clínica. O corpus foi constituído por 45 artigos, os quais foram analisados quanti (distribuição de artigos publicados; desempenho dos periódicos brasileiros; ranque dos psicólogos com maior índice de publicação; filiações institucionais dos autores e coautores) e qualitativamente em função das dimensões: (I) desenho metodológico empregado, (II) análise de dados, (III) método fenomenológico no fazer terapêutico. Os resultados apontam: maior produção de artigos em 2020; concentração de publicações em um periódico de orientação humanista; predominância de autores e universidades cearenses; e predominância de produções empíricas. A entrevista semiestruturada apresentou-se como instrumento mais utilizado para coleta de dados. Na análise de dados muito se recorreu ao proposto por Giorgi e Sousa, sendo o fenomenológico existencial-hermenêutico o método de análise mais citado nas pesquisas, que se baseou em diferentes autores. Os conceitos metodológico-fenomenológicos, estabelecidos desde a fenomenologia inaugural de husserl, aparecem nos artigos de forma diferente daquela explorada na fenomenologia filosófica, sendo atribuídos significados diversos como: postura (profissional), atitude de compreensão tomada pelo psicólogo, evidenciando seu modo de intervenção. Ainda, os autores tratam como sinônimos as ideias de epoché, redução, redução fenomenológica, com um significado geral de atitude/postura.

**palavras-chave:** fenomenologia, fenomenologia-existencial, método fenomenológico, psicoterapia humanista.

### Resumen

Fue realizada una revisión sistemática cualitativa de la literatura sobre cómo los terapeutas relacionados a las Psicoterapias Humanistas, Fenomenológicas y Existenciales aplican el método fenomenológico en la psicoterapia, buscando averiguar cómo proceden, metodológicamente, en esta práctica clínico-psicoterapéutica. Fueron seleccionados artículos en portugués, completos y referentes al periodo de 2011 hasta 2021, a partir de búsquedas en las bases de datos LILACS, PePSIC e SciELO-Brasil. Como palabras clave, fueron enfocadas las siguientes: método fenomenológico AND psicoterapia OR clínica. El corpus fue constituido por 45 artículos, los cuales fueron analizados cuantitativamente (reparto de artículos publicados; rendimiento de los periódicos brasileños; clasificación de los psicólogos con mayor índice de publicación; afiliaciones institucionales de los autores y coautores) y cualitativamente en función de las dimensiones: (I) diseño metodológico empleado, (II) análisis de datos, (III) método fenomenológico en el hacer terapéutico. Los resultados indicaron: mayor producción de artículos en 2020; concentración de publicaciones en un periódico de orientación humanista; predominancia de autores y universidades cearenses, y predominancia de producciones empíricas. La entrevista semiestruturada se presentó como instrumento más utilizado para recogida de datos. En el análisis de datos los propuestos por Giorgi y Sousa (2010) fueron muy utilizados, siendo el fenomenológico existencial-hermeneúutico el método de análisis más citado en las investigaciones, basado en diferentes autores. Los conceptos metodológico-fenomenológicos, establecidos desde la Fenomenología inaugural de Husserl, aparecen en los artículos de forma diferente de aquella explorada en la fenomenología filosófica, siendo atribuidos diversos significados como: conducta (profesional), actitud de comprensión tomada por el psicólogo, evidenciando su modo de intervención. Aún, los autores tratan como sinónimo las ideas de epoché, reducción fenomenológica, con un significado general de actitud/ conducta.

**Palabras clave:** fenomenología; fenomenología-existencial; método fenomenológico; psicoterapia humanista.

### Résumé

Une revue systématique qualitative de la littérature a été menée sur la manière dont les thérapeutes pratiquant les psychothérapies humanistes, phénoménologiques et existentielles appliquent la méthode phénoménologique en psychothérapie, afin de déterminer leur approche méthodologique, dans cette pratique clinique et psychothérapeutique. Des articles en portugais, complets et couvrant la période de 2011 à 2021, ont été sélectionnés à partir de recherches dans les bases de données LILACS, PePSIC et SciELO-Brasil. Les mots-clés suivants ont été abordés : méthode phénoménologique AND psychothérapie OR clinique. Le corpus se composait de 45 articles, analysés quantitativement (répartition des articles publiés, performance des revues brésiliennes, rang des psychologues ayant le taux de publication le plus élevé, affiliations institutionnelles des auteurs et coauteurs) et qualitativement selon les dimensions suivantes : (I) conception méthodologique employée, (II) analyse des données, (III) méthode phénoménologique dans la pratique thérapeutique. Les résultats indiquent une plus grande production d'articles en 2020, une concentration des publications dans une revue d'orientation humaniste, ainsi qu'une prédominance des auteurs et des universités du Ceará, et des productions empiriques. L'entretien semi-structuré a été présenté comme l'instrument le plus utilisé pour la collecte de données. Dans l'analyse des données, on a largement recours à celle proposée par Giorgi et Sousa (2010), dont la phénoménologie existentielle herméneutique est la méthode d'analyse la plus citée dans les recherches, qui s'appuie sur différents auteurs. Les concepts méthodologiques et phénoménologiques, issus de la phénoménologie inaugurale de Husserl, apparaissent dans les articles sous une forme différente de celle explorée en phénoménologie philosophique, se voyant attribuer des significations variées, telles que : posture (professionnelle) et attitude de compréhension adopté par le psychologue, mettant en évidence son mode d'intervention. Pourtant, les auteurs traitent comme synonymes les notions d'épochè, de réduction et de réduction phénoménologique, les associant à un sens général d'attitude/posture.

**Mots-clés:** phénoménologie, phénoménologie existentielle, méthode phénoménologique, psychothérapie humaniste.

The third force movement in the US, humanistic psychology, emerged and developed mainly as a psychotherapeutic practice, made up of theoretical and clinical conceptions. Many of these humanistic psychologies emerged as a result of criticism of the hegemonic model of natural science and clinical medicine, thus justifying their psychotherapeutic approaches and building their theoretical foundations on the philosophy of phenomenology and the existentialist movement. As we know, the phenomenology developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) consists of a philosophy whose radical project is to return to transcendental subjectivity and the life-world (a priori of correlation), seeking to methodologically recover, in philosophical research, the origin of all experiences, criticizing the predominance of naturalism over the psyche (Husserl, 1954/2012), highlighting problems in the epistemological constitution of psychologism and scientific psychology as fundamental psychology, and having as its fundamental principle “returning to the things themselves” (Goto et al., 2018).

Initially applied to clinical practice by psychiatrists such as Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966), philosophical phenomenology began to influence the foundation of “phenomenological psychopathology”, opening the possibility of constructing concepts based on the description of how psychic phenomena present themselves to conscious experience. In addition, his theoretical contributions served as a theoretical-methodological basis for the foundation of some of the approaches, especially those from the United States, such as humanistic psychologies, which came to be identified as “phenomenological” and others as “existential” (Besora, 1986; Krüger, 2014; Goto, 2015).

In view of this brief historical record and the consolidation of the so-called “Humanist, Phenomenological and Existential Approaches”, it should be noted that questions have currently been raised about the relationship between these approaches and their schools and philosophical phenomenology. As Goto (2015) and Orengo et al. (2020a and 2020b) point out, although historical, the relationship between phenomenology and humanistic psychology is still poorly understood in epistemological and clinical terms, since, in their theories, these philosophies seem to have been appropriated in a general way, not as a rigorous method or psychological-phenomenological foundation. Instead, they were taken as a “vision of the world and of being human”, promoting certain confusions and conceptual misunderstandings that are still present today among psychologists, as recent studies show (Krüger, 2014; Orengo et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Thus, when we talk about the “Practices of Phenomenological, Humanistic and Existential Psychotherapies”, we intend to treat them as a psychotherapy with established practices of a specific theory. However, on the other hand, what is found is a general denomination that includes various psychotherapeutic practices with different foundations, some of which are closer to phenomenology and existentialism, and others that are more distant because they use other methods, including naturalistic and empirical ones.

Regarding phenomenology, it’s worth pointing out that, in its development, it was more than a philosophical “school”, but rather a “phenomenological movement”, as Spiegelberg (1982) called it. A movement because, according to Spiegelberg (1982), the idea of phenomenology, since its appearance with Edmund Husserl, has undergone certain modifications with Husserl himself and with other phenomenologists. In this sense, phenomenology is the history of phenomenology and the account of its “heresies”, as Ricoeur (2009) put it. However, as Spiegelberg (1982) points out, all these modifications (or heresies) are “phenomenological” because they have “a common starting point, but need not have a definite and predictable common destination”, being “compatible with the character of a movement that its components branch out in different directions” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 2). Or, as Paul Ricoeur put it: “Husserl is not the whole of phenomenology, although he is in a way its node” (Ricoeur, 2009, p. 7).

Given these positions, the aim here was to understand how phenomenology, especially the “phenomenological method”, has been appropriated, understood and disseminated among authors in psychotherapy to date. In this way, the aim was to identify, based on published studies (articles), how authors linked to “Humanistic, Phenomenological and Existential Psychotherapies” have conceived of the phenomenological method and used it in psychotherapeutic practice, in order to ascertain the modalities and tendencies, as well as to identify proximities to or distances from the Husserlian method.

## Method

The qualitative systematic literature review (QSLR) was adopted as a method that generally includes the following steps: delimiting the research question, choosing data sources and keywords, searching and storing the results, and selecting articles (according to inclusion and exclusion criteria). Once the data from these articles had been extracted, they were synthesized and interpreted (Akobeng, 2005). This method is committed to answering a specific question and seeks to overcome bias through a rigorous method (Rother, 2007; Batista & Kumada, 2021).

## Procedures

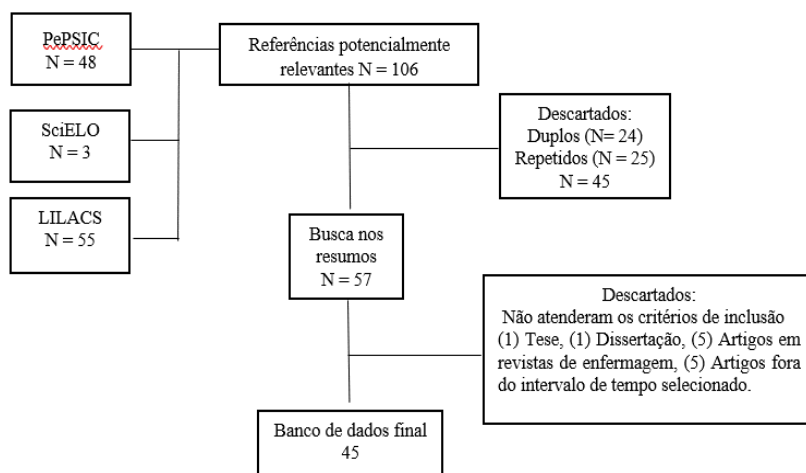
The following question was posed: how have the practices of phenomenological, humanistic and existential psychotherapies dealt with the phenomenological method in psychotherapy? A systematic review was then conducted

using the electronic databases of the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the Portal of Electronic Journals in Psychology (PePSIC) and the Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS). The survey was carried out between December 12, 2021 and June 30, 2022, which was the period of data collection and tabulation. The SciELO database was used because it is considered to be the largest provider of indexed open access journals in the world. PePSIC is a source linked to the Virtual Health Library which only publishes journals and articles in psychology. LILACS, as far as it is concerned, because it is a specialized database in the health area, with scientific and technical literature, with free and open access. Thus, these three libraries meet the needs of the research, as they are broad and representative in the circulation of scientific articles related to psychology in Brazil.

The databases were searched using the string (method AND phenomenological) AND (psychotherapy OR clinical), with the selected indexes: title, abstract, subject and subject descriptor. The initial selection resulted in 106 potentially relevant references, as shown in Figure 1. The articles were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: a) they dealt with a topic or research with a phenomenological orientation in psychotherapy or addressed the phenomenological method in their theoretical research and/or in psychotherapy; b) they were complete articles of a theoretical or empirical nature; c) they were in Portuguese; d) they were indexed in psychology journals.

**Figure 1:**

*Search strategy*



In this search, 106 articles were found, four of which were in SciELO, 48 in PePSIC and 55 in LILACS. The articles were analyzed according to the following exclusion criteria: a) publications in foreign journals were excluded, as we were looking for Brazilian production; b) articles published before 2011 were not included, as we opted for 10 years of production in the area, and those produced from 2022 onwards were excluded, as they are still organizing the current year’s volumes, not providing an overview of what was produced during the year. Thus, the time frame for the collection was set at 2011 to 2021.

Duplicate (N = 24) and repeated (N = 25) articles were excluded, as well as one dissertation, one thesis, four articles indexed in nursing journals, two of which were reflection articles. In addition, five articles were discarded because they were not within the selected time range. The data from these articles was then extracted into a spreadsheet, according to the year of publication, title of the study, name of the authors and co-authors, affiliation of the first author, journal of publication and type of study (theoretical or empirical). Figure 1 shows the flowchart describing the article selection plan that resulted in the final bibliographic sample (Akobeng, 2005) (see Figure 1).

The final bank of articles (N = 45) served as a source for the research objective, and the articles were categorized according to distribution: time; performance of Brazilian journals; ranking of psychologists with the highest production index; institutional affiliations of authors and co-authors. In a second step, an in-depth qualitative analysis was carried out, involving the identification of the following dimensions of analysis: (I) methodological design employed, (II) data analysis, and (III) phenomenological method in therapeutic practice.

## Results and Discussion

The results were organized in relation to the distribution of articles on the phenomenological method in the practices of Phenomenological, Humanistic and Existential Psychotherapies in Brazil, published between 2011 and 2021. The year

2020 has the highest number of publications ( $N = 9$ ; 20.0%), corresponding to the most productive year. When considering the possible reasons for this high productivity, it can be seen that the journal *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia* published a Dossier entitled: *Psicologia e Fenomenologia*. The *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica* (Journal of the Gestalt Approach), on the other hand, as a special edition, given the large production in 2020, presented an editorial with themes on the meanings of psychotherapy and supervision in phenomenological clinics, among others.

Another significant finding refers to the performance of Brazilian journals in publishing articles on psychotherapy and the phenomenological method. The *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica* concentrates almost half of the publications, with a total of 20 articles published (44.44%). In second place is the *Journal Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), which has a percentage almost four times lower, ranking second (13.33%). As is well known, the *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica* has an editorial orientation focused on the publication of articles with a humanistic, phenomenological and existential orientation in the field of psychology, which may demonstrate the authors' preference for publishing in this journal, thus affecting visibility to the public of other psychological approaches.

The journals *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia* and *Rede do Instituto e Gestalt-Terapia* (IGT na Rede), on the other hand, have the same number of articles published, but at the same time they are not restricted to publications related to phenomenology, focusing on unpublished articles in the field of psychology. The first journal of the Institute of Psychology of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) features work by authors such as Ana Maria Lopez Calvo de Feijoo, who also coordinates the extension project Laboratory of Phenomenology and Studies in Existential Psychology (LAFEPE). Finally, the IGT Journal on the Institute's Network and Gestalt Therapy and Family Care deals with themes, in particular, focused on the Gestalt framework, dealing with different philosophical, theoretical and practical expressions of Gestalt therapy.

With regard to the publication of the authors ( $N=92$ ) in the journals analyzed, there is a ranking with four authors with the highest publication rate, the others having produced one or two articles each. Georges Daniel Janja Bloc Boris (UNIFOR) stands out with four publications, and is in first place. This author focuses his studies on the group theme and is also one of the translators of the work of Fritz Perls (1893-1970) in Brazil (Castelo-Branco & Farias, 2020). The following are three authors, with three publications each: Ana Maria Lopez Calvo de Feijoo (UFRJ), a representative of Existential Psychology and Daseinsanalyse in Brazil, who is at the forefront of several institutional movements (IFEN and Existential Psychology Congresses), working with clinical psychology issues such as mourning, suicide, etc. Adriano Holanda (UFPR), editor-in-chief of *Phenomenological Studies - Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica*, coordinator of the Laboratory of Phenomenology and Subjectivity (LabFeno), who has applied the phenomenological-empirical method to understand various types of experiences, such as empirical phenomena and those of psychotherapy, turning to a field of applied psychology (Holanda, 1997). Lastly, Joanneliese de Lucas Freitas (UFPR), who has worked with "Phenomenological Psychology" and dedicated herself to the study of "Critical Phenomenology", presenting articulations applied to clinical themes, such as mourning and suicide. Furthermore, although Virginia Moreira appears in fifth place in publications, according to DeCastro and Gomes (2011, as cited in Castelo-Branco & Cirino, 2017, p. 05) "she is pointed out as a leading researcher in the production of articles that make use of the empirical phenomenological method". Finally, according to Castelo-Branco and Farias (2020), these authors can be seen as figures of production, as they expand and renew the field of PCA and GT, not just trying to make the subject of phenomenology in psychotherapy explicit.

A survey of the universities to which the 92 authors are affiliated was also conducted, as well as an investigation into the institutional affiliation of each author and the co-authors of the articles. Although other institutions also appeared, it was decided to present here only those that published three or more articles on psychotherapy and the phenomenological method, whose application of the method is related to qualitative research in psychology. The University of Fortaleza (UNIFOR) had the largest number of affiliated authors, followed by the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), both representing 32.58% of the national production. UNIFOR, in another systematic review, was indicated as a leading institution in humanistic productions, with the highest national productivity of articles on Rogers' humanistic psychology (Castelo-Branco & Cirino, 2017). This fact is justified by the existence of a line of research, in the master's and doctoral programs, that incorporates psychopathology and humanistic and phenomenological psychotherapy, also influenced by professors such as Virginia Moreira and Georges Boris. These professors worked for many years at UNIFOR, as well as helping to train other researchers, such as Lucas Guimarães Bloc (UNIFOR) – coordinator of the "Laboratory of Phenomenological Humanist Psychopathology and Psychotherapy" (Apheto) at the University of Fortaleza (UNIFOR) –, and Thabata Castelo Branco (USP-RP/UNIFOR). This group developed a variant of Giorgi's (1997/2008) empirical phenomenological method based on M-Ponty (1908-1961), entitled "critical phenomenological method", and is widely used in clinical research, from a qualitative perspective. This method brings ethnography closer to phenomenology based on the concept of *Lebenswelt*, contributing to the methodological discussion of case studies. The Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) has important representatives in these national productions, such as Adriano Holanda and Joanneliese de Lucas Freitas, in addition to the Laboratory of Phenomenology and Subjectivity (LabFeno), where phenomenological psychopathology and empirical studies in existential psychotherapy are studied, among other clinical themes in general, such as health promotion. With

this, it is worth noting that these institutions launch trends in phenomenological-empirical studies, and their authors can be seen as exponents of this production. These institutions present a more original perspective than the Americans, focusing on the work of M-Ponty, trying to understand the phenomenological method within an existential phenomenological clinic, seeking an empirical foundation for certain understandings within existential phenomenological psychotherapy.

In the second stage of analysis, an in-depth reading of the content of each article was carried out, and, in order to respond to the proposed objective, the following dimensions of analysis were followed: (I) methodological design employed, (II) data analysis, and (III) phenomenological method as a therapeutic resource.

(I) Regarding the results related to the first dimension of analysis, there was a hegemony of empirical articles (N = 29; 64.44%), in relation to theoretical articles (N = 16; 35.55%). The articles with the highest incidence are empirical research carried out in the field of psychotherapy, which analyze specific themes present in clinical psychology. All empirical articles used the “phenomenological method” as a data collection instrument, mainly in semi-directed/semi-structured interviews, called: phenomenological interviews; non-directive-active interview; open interview; narrative interview; open phenomenological interview, guiding questions (triggering question/question, guiding question, question that mobilizes the experience), and sociodemographic questionnaires.

It is noted that, initially, there is no consensus on the nomenclature adopted (Bloc et al., 2017), since the term “phenomenology” has been used in a general and broad way, both as a method and as a “way or style” of thinking. This point highlights a certain divergence from the phenomenological method that has a defined and rigorous methodological design, since phenomenology, stated Husserl, “(...) does not only have to develop the method of obtaining new species of things for new species of knowledge, it has to provide the most perfect clarity about the meaning and validity of this method, which enables it to reject all serious objections” (Husserl, 1913/2006, p. 144). The selected articles revisit the phenomenological method, including the Husserlian method, based on direct and/or indirect citations, applying them to the way of conducting specific research. This aspect appears, for example, in the way of welcoming the research participant, which establishes putting “their a priori and specific questions on hold to make specialized listening possible” (Carvalho et al., 2015, p. 8). Or, even, that “phenomenology seeks to clarify the phenomenon (...)”. To do this, it is necessary that, when faced with a report, ideas and preconceptions are placed in parentheses, that is, pre-judgments are suspended so that the phenomenon itself, as a pre-reflective nature, can be given. The so-called phenomenological reduction is then carried out (Menezes et al., 2014, p. 267).

Another important point is related to empirical research that presents epistemological modifications produced mainly by the American psychologist Amedeo Giorgi (Feijóo & Goto, 2016). In this sense, the assertion made by Amatuzzi (2009) is confirmed, stating that the qualitative approach with a phenomenological-empirical focus is widely used in humanist and existential lines of research. Thus, as highlighted by DeCastro and Gomes (2011), the empirical nature of phenomenological research is presented through the use of data from interviews, observations, etc. It is also observed that qualitative research basically seeks to understand certain phenomena in terms of the (hermeneutic) meanings attributed by the participants, aiming to give voice and highlight their points of view. Therefore, it is noteworthy that no article used the method proposed by Husserl. In contrast, what became evident were the methodological references of authors who propose modifications to the original phenomenological method, adapted to empirical research. It is important to emphasize that Phenomenology privileges, as Husserl states, in a unique way, “the eidetic sphere of phenomenologically purified consciousness itself” (Husserl, 1913/2006, p. 136) and this means that phenomenological analysis is in an “eidetic orientation”, whose relationship with reality, like the entire physical and psychic world, is taken out of the loop.

Among the total number of studies found, 14 raised possibilities for a dialogue between Gestalt Therapy and its assumptions/concepts, focusing both on clinical practice and theoretical issues, seeking to substantiate their practices through the application of concepts such as: awareness, here-and-now, contact and contact functions and their relationship with phenomenology in a very broad sense. It is worth noting that among the 14 works that included GT, eight were theoretical studies, while six were empirical.

As for the remaining theoretical studies, they dealt with quite different themes, but all focused on clarifying phenomenological and/or existential thinking and/or on how to conceive and act in clinical psychological practice, reflecting on its limits and possibilities. The most explored concepts and forms of action include the importance of suspension on the part of the psychologist, in addition to an ethical and attentive stance towards the patient and the meaning of what is presented during the session.

Thus, the theoretical articles were divided between those that focused on Gestalt Therapy and others with a more existential-phenomenological nature, evidencing a tendency among Brazilian authors, who end up adhering to the American model. In other words, the philosophical bases of phenomenology and existentialism using original sources (such as Husserl, Heidegger, M-Ponty, Sartre, among others). This highlights a humanist, local and Brazilian manifestation that is different precisely because it emphasizes the philosophical aspects of phenomenology (Castelo-Branco, 2020).

Regarding the second dimension (II), that is, how the phenomenological method was presented and conceived as a guide for methodical thinking in data analysis, among the total number of empirical and theoretical studies, 11 used the

methodology proposed by Giorgi (1997/2008), and Giorgi and Sousa (2010), presenting the four steps of this analysis. Of these articles, three do not mention other instruments. In another eight studies there is an association with other qualitative methods (phenomenological and non-phenomenological/objective), with different authors as references (Amatuzzi, 2010; Andrade & Holanda, 2010; DeCastro & Gomes, 2011; Forghieri 1993; Gomes, 1997; Martins & Bicudo, 2005 Merleau-Ponty 1964/2009). In contrast, the phenomenological method developed by Amatuzzi (2010) appeared in five studies, and other instruments for data collection were also added: Mucchielli's (1991) non-directive interview; phenomenological interview with a mobilizing question (Ranieri & Barreira, 2010); structured interview to obtain sociodemographic data and use of the meaning version based on Merleau-Ponty's and Martin Buber's phenomenology of language; use of active non-directive interviews with a triggering question; and finally; use of the meaning version and presentation of a four-step phenomenological analysis (no specific method was named).

Among the total number of articles selected, 24 used the existential-hermeneutic phenomenological method for analysis, from different authors; however, of these, 15 did not present instruments for data collection. Authors such as Heidegger (1927/2012), Merleau-Ponty (1964/2009), Forghieri (1993), Moreira (2009), Van Manen (1990), Feijoo and Mattar (2014) were cited. In this same phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective, but with an empirical bias, nine studies were identified that presented instruments for data collection, combining the phenomenological method of different authors with interviews and group dynamics for data collection. As for the other studies, each one was supported by different phenomenological methods of analysis, such as: a) Sanders' phenomenological method, b) Breakwell et al's interpretative phenomenological analysis (2010), c) the phenomenological method proposed by Clark Moustakas (1994), d) the phenomenological method of Trindade, Menandro and Gianórdoli-Nascimento (2007), e) the phenomenological method of semiotic orientation. These, in general, show a similar structure to each other, since they divide the phenomenological method into four parts/phases.

As is known, the phenomenological-empirical analysis method of Giorgi (1997/2008) and Giorgi and Sousa (2010) seeks to promote a psychology inspired by Husserlian phenomenology, considering a scientific practice based on the qualitative description of the phenomena studied, but focusing on experience (Amatuzzi, 2009). In an integrative literature review (Moreira & Souza, 2016), there was a shortage of productions published in scientific journals about the empirical phenomenological method proposed by Giorgi, which may indicate an increase in publications with this method since 2016. The second most proposed method is the phenomenological-hermeneutic-existential perspective, which was based on different philosophers and interpreters.

It is clear that the method has been presented in different ways, but "in general, the specific literature in this area refers to the method in the singular" (Moreira, 2004, p. 447), since the phenomenological method undergoes variations, according to the philosophical thought that supports it. Furthermore, the criticism pointed out by May (1976, p. 27) is reminiscent: "the danger of fierce eclecticism in these phenomenological and existential approaches to therapy, when they are used without the rigorous clinical study and thought that precede any specialty".

Furthermore, Giorgi's phenomenological-empirical method is a more hermeneutic empirical method than that suggested by Husserl as psychological phenomenology, since it consolidates experiences through their meanings. In this sense, although the researcher breaks with the natural attitude, he/she attributes meaning to what was reported by the subjects, making the reduction partial (Feijóo & Goto, 2016; Goto et al., 2019). Regarding "phenomenological reductions", Giorgi's method performs an incomplete reduction, that is, an operationalization adapted from the phenomenological method to the empirical one, since it does not, in fact, reach the essential structure of a psychological experience, the objective of an investigation in psychology. Thus, the proposed method even reaches the meaning of a lived experience. In general, the various adapted and modified descriptions of the phenomenological method for research in psychology do not resort to the methodology exposed by Husserl directly; these can be divided into three categories, such as: I) authors-interpreters, who adapted or modified the phenomenological method presented by Husserl for empirical research, such as Amedeo Giorgi and Daniel Sousa; II) Brazilian authors, who follow in their own way the authors-interpreters of Husserl's method, such as Mauro M. Amatuzzi, William B. Gomes, Adriano Furtado Holanda, Celina Andrade, Thiago Gomes de Castro, Cristiano Barreira; and III) authors-interpreters who adapted or modified hermeneutic-existential phenomenology for empirical research, such as Max van Manem, Clark Moustakas, Glynis M. Breakwell, Sean Hammond, Chris Fife-Schaw, Jonathan A. Smith and, in the Brazilian context, Yolanda C. Forghieri, Virginia Moreira, Ana Maria Feijoo, Cristiane Mattar, Zeidi Araujo Trindade and Ingrid Faria Gianordoli-Nascimento. Although this dimension is not aligned with the main objective of this research, when searching for data, examples were found in which the phenomenological method appears as a research method in psychotherapeutic content.

Furthermore, no conceptualization or even an application of the phenomenological method as proposed by Husserl for psychology was identified. In other words, there are no original versions of the phenomenological-psychological method from other proposals, such as hermeneutic phenomenologies, but there are, on the other hand, methodological proposals with modifications for the empirical. In fact, this is a striking characteristic of Brazilian research (Orengo et al., 2020a, 2020b). Finally, Husserl, when analyzing the issue of the fundamental method in psychology, states that "to reach the pure and proper theme of the required 'descriptive psychology', a method exercised in an entirely conscious way is necessary,

which – in this context, as a method of psychology – I call phenomenological-psychological reduction”, that is, only “via the method characteristic of the epoché can we reach it purely” (Husserl, 1954/2012, p. 191). Finally, in relation to the third dimension (III), it was possible to identify that most of the authors worked with “phenomenological” ideas and concepts attributed to psychotherapeutic practice, even without discussing their demarcations and foundations of principles. In this dimension, excerpts about the phenomenological method in therapeutic practice were identified, and concepts and ideas were found, such as: epoché, natural attitude, phenomenological reduction and phenomenological suspension. Before that, it is important to clarify that the phenomenological method seeks to promote a change in orientation/attitude (*Einstellung*) and, thus, achieve another understanding of the phenomena. It is understood, then, that its proposal is to modify the natural thesis that situates the understanding of the phenomenon, entering the phenomenological sphere, raising “reflexively to scientific consciousness” a phenomenological orientation/attitude (*phänomenologische Einstellung*). For this undertaking, Husserl uses the artifice of the epoché, which consists of radically modifying this orientation, “putting in parentheses” the natural thesis. In this way, this analytical-reflexive method requires the modification of the natural meaning of phenomena, specifically with the recourse to the *epoché*.

Thus, it would be up to the psychologist to seek, through the psychological *epoché*, purely psychic, thus modifying his permanence in the natural thesis, freeing him to know the subjective psychic. Here, then, pure/phenomenological psychology is established, which enables a path of direct knowledge of psychic life and which includes the knowledge of man as authentic to his being and psychic life, in order, consequently, to know the world (Husserl, 1954/2012). However, this phenomenological psychology also differs from phenomenology, not in method, but in purpose, because the psychologist, as Husserl establishes, is responsible for the knowledge of psychic interiority and not the transcendental. In this way, and so to speak, he is interested in “man and the human communities that occur in the world”, as well as psychic life and its properties, only in what really occurs in the world. Thus, the first stage of the epoché would be enough for the psychologist, since he or she could not leave humans and their references to their realities (real), at the same time that “the psychologist cannot let what they take to be real prevail” (Husserl, 1954/2012, p. 212).

With this, it is worth noting that 14 studies had as their objective the proposal of psychotherapeutic intervention/or to reflect on this practice with the phenomenological method. In summary, the articles presented the psychotherapeutic practice, under the Gestalt approach, both in groups and individually, as well as the ethics of care involved in this practice. With this, the conditions for this practice are also presented, such as the need for the psychotherapist to perform the phenomenological suspension, suspending his or her a priori to make listening possible, in order to reach the phenomenon itself, through phenomenological reduction. The importance of adopting a “phenomenological stance” in relation to various themes related to clinical psychology, the training of psychologists and the encounter between psychologists and their patients has been repeatedly presented. Proposals from authors such as Heidegger and Sartre have also been presented, contributing with foundations for clinical practices in the following areas: existential-phenomenological approach; phenomenological-existential interventional psychodiagnosis as a clinical action of the psychologist; presentation of clinical cases for understanding and intervention; review and reflection on concepts such as unconditional positive regard as epoché and how the actualizing tendency manifests itself in clinical practice. The study by Oliveira and Borba (2019, p. 168) drew special attention for showing that phenomenology “allows the professional psychologist to lean towards clarifying the foundations of their practices”, stating that “Phenomenology designates a method and an intellectual attitude: the specifically philosophical intellectual attitude” (Husserl, 1907/2000 as cited in Oliveira & Borba, 2019).

Thus, the phenomenological method was introduced to the practice of the psychologist, as well as for the analysis of clinical cases. However, and despite the fact that only specific studies are highlighted, mentions of psychotherapeutic practice can be found in all articles, even if briefly. Based on these results, it can be inferred that the term “phenomenological method” takes the form of an adjective, conceiving it as a (professional) stance, an attitude of understanding taken by the psychologist, evidencing his/her mode of intervention. As seen, the phenomenological epoché does not consist of a stance/attitude of the person, but a change of orientation that neutralizes the natural thesis and its theories, through “uncommitted” analysis, that is, without natural or theoretical commitments. However, this requires a descriptive-reflective analytical exercise that “parenthesizes” (the act or effect of placing in parentheses) each statement and judgment that is at stake. When considering the phenomenological descriptive-reflective method, in the therapeutic process, a therapeutic relationship can no longer be guaranteed, as the psychologist would be focusing, solely and exclusively, on the interiority of his psychic life, given the purpose of the *epoché*.

In fact, the phenomenological method, originally developed by Husserl, influenced the creation of “clinical methods”, which had repercussions in different formats of application and understanding. However, as seen in the articles found, the reference to the phenomenological method is different from the original proposal by Husserl (1913/2006), being still not very rigorous and with little/no clarification of the design of its methodological resources, mainly when showing the applicability of the method as a resource and attitude of the psychologist in psychotherapy. Furthermore, every affirmation and explanation of the clinical attitude as “phenomenological”, based on the phenomenological method (epoché and reductions), seems to ignore that, with this resource, in addition to the “placement in parentheses” of the natural thesis of

its theories and concepts, it is also necessary, in the verification of every established judgment, to seek its possible validity. It is understood that only in this way can the psychologist become a “disinterested observer” and find his experiences truly unobstructed, taken without any theory and without any value. In this sense, the phenomenologist who seeks to know and clarify the “phenomenon” originally, only does so by neutralizing the natural thesis and its theories, that is, by carrying out the epoché – with the identification and verification of each judgment, value, etc. –, reflexively exercising, so to speak, the “placement in parentheses”. It is also worth highlighting that these are essential characteristics of the “phenomenological method”, that is, the “phenomenological knot” in which they are present in every phenomenological movement (Spiegelberg, 1982; Ricoeur, 2009). In view of this, we did not observe, in the articles found, a clear and rigorous exposition of the phenomenological method, its adopted procedures and development in the application in psychotherapeutic practice; only generic statements and without specific explanation of their development, without citing or describing the step by step. In other words, it is about the way in which the phenomenological method was used and “applied” in this specific practice. They were reduced to just outlining jargon and broad explanations of the method, such as, for example, “suspending one’s a priori and own questions” (Carvalho et al., 2015, p. 8) or that “ideas and preconceptions are placed in parentheses, that is, pre-judgments are suspended so that the phenomenon itself” (Menezes et al., 2014, p. 267) is presented without detailing how these resources are used in psychotherapeutic practice.

Furthermore, in the articles on the phenomenological method, which is analytical and reflective, according to Husserl (1913/2006), there seems to be confusion between the attitude, or professional stance, and the therapist’s intention. Perhaps this is why the authors end up resorting to clinical concepts present in certain approaches, concepts conventionally considered phenomenological and existential. Here, too, there is no methodical concern on the part of the authors to verify whether or not these theoretical concepts, within the approaches cited, were phenomenologically conquered. Thus, these works result in what is often done in psychology, that is, the direct and uncritical acceptance of theoretical (epistemological and ontological) and methodological models from other sciences and, especially, from philosophy (Rey, 2013), to understand the psychic phenomenon and, consequently, the forms of intervention. Therefore, it is important to clarify that the relationship with the phenomenological method in the field of psychotherapy should perhaps be, at this point, more of an implication than an application. In other words, it is an attempt to avoid confusing the psychologist’s scientific positions (descriptive-reflective analysis) with his or her psychotherapeutic attitudes and techniques with the clarification of the main concepts found in this field. In this way, “phenomenology designates a method and an intellectual attitude: the specifically philosophical intellectual attitude” (Husserl, 1907/2000, p.46). Furthermore, considering the application of the phenomenological method during the psychotherapeutic process, since this method is, par excellence, descriptive and reflective, requiring analytical rigor, as Husserl’s elaboration shows, there would end up being a neutralization of the therapist as a therapist, that is, the quality of an attentive and interested “listener” could not be maintained. This is because the phenomenological orientation/attitude, composed of epoché and reductions, concerns a careful self-reflection (Goto, 2015), not being established in empirical reality; although Husserl’s analyses brought elements aimed at understanding psychology as a science of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, elements that will be present in a phenomenologically oriented clinic (Goto, 2015).

There are, in fact, many challenges when thinking about philosophical ideals for psychology, since some criticisms arise about them being just an adaptation of the principles of philosophy for certain purposes in the field of psychology. However, experienced in clinical practice, these principles go beyond concepts and merely technical resources, characterizing themselves as a distinct attitude towards the “showing” of phenomena (Oliveira & Borba, 2019). Thus, it seems that it is not coherent to apply the phenomenological method in the practice of psychotherapy, directly as a psychotherapeutic resource, given its elaboration and development as a method of investigation and validation of phenomena (concepts), a particularly introspective, rational and reflective task. An example of this is the very idea of phenomenology, which, according to Husserl, has as its vital element “fiction”, “as well as all eidetic sciences”, and “fiction is the source from which the knowledge of ‘eternal truths’ draws its nourishment” (Husserl, 1913/2006, p. 154). If phenomenology acts in the field of “fiction”, just as the geometer or mathematician, who produces his analyses in the field of imagination, it can be seen that it is up to the psychologist/psychotherapist to appropriate the phenomenological method as investigation and research, but not as a therapeutic instrument, since they have different foundations of principles. Paraphrasing Husserl (1913/2006), it can be stated that, no matter how great the methodological importance that psychotherapy may claim in the case of phenomenology, no matter how many essential “foundations” it makes available to the former, Phenomenology is as little psychology/psychotherapy as geometry is a natural science.

Thus, although the phenomenological method is presented as a therapeutic “posture” towards the client, as seen, it goes beyond this simplification that confuses the fundamental principles of both areas, making it impossible to apply it as a method or therapeutic resource. Rollo May (1976) states that it is impossible to employ the Husserlian phenomenological method during psychotherapy, and that such an understanding results from a “misinterpretation of the existential point of view” (May, 1976, p. 25), that is, that, when faced with another, it is possible to abstain from all concepts and preconceptions, but that it is possible to “make one’s own constructs sufficiently flexible, so that one can listen in terms of the patient’s constructs and hear in their language” (May, 1976, p. 26). This idea is much more in line with the result of phenomenological

analysis than with its supposed therapeutic use, since the result of a phenomenological analysis (epistemological sense) can modify the ethical condition of the psychologist/psychotherapist himself who, when seeking to question his practice and its foundations, is confronted with ethics before himself and with others (May, 1977).

Finally, it is concluded that the phenomenological method presented in psychotherapeutic practices is often presented superficially, relying on the idea that the “phenomenological attitude” is consistent with the therapist’s professional stance and is a therapeutic resource. This idea is presented and understood by several authors through philosophical-phenomenological concepts that are confused by contingent demarcations of domains and terminology, failing to expose their true foundations of principles, making it difficult to understand and understand the depth of the proposal, something that has already been empirically verified in studies (Orengo et al., 2020a, 2020b). Perhaps, more than being a therapeutic method, the phenomenological method in psychotherapy can be established as a method that seeks validation and evidence of its concepts, based on the “description of the original unveiling of the senses in the psychological clinic” and “[...] an attitude that is revealed through an experiential and open character” (Oliveira & Borba, 2019, p.163). In this sense, all psychotherapeutic investigation, in the epistemological field, can result in a more “phenomenological” stance, which implies, then, not being a method, but an ethical stance towards the other.

### **Final Considerations**

A systematic qualitative review of the literature was carried out on how the phenomenological method has been appearing in the practices of Phenomenological, Humanistic and Existential psychotherapies, highlighting its modalities and trends in relation to the practice of psychotherapy. However, although it is not the main objective of this research, it highlights how these practices have been appearing in qualitative research in psychology. The results indicate: greater production of articles in 2020; concentration of publications in the *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica*, concentrating almost half of the publications; predominance of authors and universities from Ceará; predominance of empirical productions, as well as the most used instrument for data collection, the semi-structured interview; recurrent use of the empirical phenomenological method of analysis, proposed by Amedeo Giorgi. The use of other methods is also considered, since they were based on different authors, in addition to the descriptions of the phenomenological method, which vary according to the author proposed for analysis. These methods can be divided into three categories: I) authors-interpreters who adapted or modified the phenomenological method presented by Husserl for empirical research; II) Brazilian authors who follow the authors-interpreters in their own way; and III) authors-interpreters who adapted or modified the hermeneutic-existential phenomenology for empirical research. Thus, a striking characteristic appears in Brazilian research, which had already been evidenced in other research (Orengo et al., 2020a, 2020b), in which the phenomenological method presents several adaptations in Brazil.

Furthermore, there is no consensus on the nomenclature and understanding of the methodological design, which highlights a divergence from the phenomenological method proposed by Husserl, which has a well-defined and rigorous methodological design. Also, no article used the phenomenological method proposed by Husserl itself. Thus, the phenomenological method, in relation to qualitative research in psychology, has been re-read by different authors and has often been used as an instrument for data collection, such as the phenomenological interview. However, it is worth noting that other instruments are also used, such as questionnaires and interview scripts, resulting in a mixed methodology. Furthermore, it is stated that the reduction carried out by the research is partial, as it does not reach the psychic experiences, clarifying only the sense and meanings of the experiences, as well as the philosophical concepts proposed by Husserl, such as: epoché, natural attitude, phenomenological reduction and phenomenological suspension are presented in a way that may seem superficial in view of the complexity of the philosophical method proposed by Husserl. As a consequence or cause of this, there is the criticism pointed out by May (1976, p. 53): “(...) the concepts in existential psychology are suitable for use in the service of intellectualist detachment (...)”, but they end up covering a multitude of terms, which seem to be the most non-existent, because they provide an appearance of dealing with human reality, when they may not be doing so. In this sense, they may sound superficial when phenomenological concepts are reduced to attitudes and postures, used without the rigorous clinical study and thought that precede them, which must be taken care of, so as not to turn the therapeutic relationship into a relationship of application of concepts. Furthermore, according to Husserl, it would be up to the psychologist to know the psychic interiority, being interested in “man and the human communities that occur in the world”, and, thus, the first stage of the epoché would be enough for the psychologist, consisting of a change of orientation that neutralizes the natural thesis and its theories. To this end, a descriptive-reflective analytical exercise is required that “parenthesizes” the statements and judgments at stake.

Therefore, if one considers establishing such an activity in the therapeutic process, one can no longer guarantee a therapeutic relationship, since the psychologist would be focusing solely and exclusively on the interiority of his/her psychic life, given that the epoché concerns a careful self-reflection (Goto, 2015), and is not established in empirical reality, as Husserlian elaboration shows. In this sense, there would be a neutralization of the therapist, making it impossible for him/her to maintain the quality of an attentive and interested “listener”.

As limitations found in this systematic review, it is worth noting that not all current journals with a humanistic and phenomenological focus were cited, such as *Revista Memorandum*. *Revista NUFEN*, also extremely relevant in the subject, had only one article represented. In this sense, even if “phenomenological method” AND “psychotherapy OR clinical” were searched as keywords in all fields, it is possible that studies were not found, since this information is not always explicitly stated in the text and in the summary.

The number of articles analyzed was relatively low, but it is still possible to consider the Brazilian panorama in psychology. Finally, the proposed review, in addition to expanding the understanding of the phenomenological method and its contribution to psychotherapeutic practice, reflected on the use of this method in Brazilian research, reaffirming the importance of encouraging discussions and critical reflections on Phenomenology and its contributions to the field of psychology and psychotherapy. Finally, Husserlian principles, when experienced in clinical practice, go beyond merely technical resources, characterizing themselves as an attitude capable of modifying the ethical condition of the psychologist himself. In this sense, it does not seem coherent to apply the phenomenological method directly in the practice of psychotherapy as a psychotherapeutic resource, given its development as a method of investigation and validation of phenomena, which is an introspective, rational and reflective task.

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