

The social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz and its contribution for the nursing

A FENOMENOLOGIA SOCIAL DE ALFRED SCHÜTZ E SUA CONTRIBUIÇÃO PARA A ENFERMAGEM

LA FENOMENOLOGÍA DE ALFRED SCHÜTZ Y SU CONTRIBUCIÓN PARA ENFERMERÍA

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ABSTRACT

Nursing care can be considered a social action that is set in the everyday world, where intersubjective relations are established and must be valued by the nurse in the different contexts in which it acts. It is a theoretical study which aimed to highlight the main concepts of the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz's and its contribution to Nursing as a knowledge and professional practice field. The following questions guided this study: what is the understanding of caring in Nursing from the perspective of the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz's? How to apply Alfred Schütz's theoretical concepts in the action of caring in Nursing? The theoretical concepts of the social phenomenology and their interface with Nursing were delimited. By incorporating the concepts of the theory of social action developed by Alfred Schütz into Nursing, this study allows nurses to value and apply the aspects highlighted by this theoretical framework within healthcare, education and scientific research.

DESCRIPTORS

Nursing care
Philosophy
Sociology
Nursing research
Qualitative research

RESUMO

O cuidado de enfermagem pode ser considerado uma ação social que tem como cenário o mundo cotidiano, onde são estabelecidas relações intersubjetivas que devem ser valorizadas pelo enfermeiro nos diversos contextos em que atua. Estudo teórico que teve como objetivo destacar as principais concepções da fenomenologia social de Alfred Schütz e sua contribuição para a Enfermagem como área de conhecimento e prática profissional. As seguintes questões nortearam este estudo: qual a compreensão do cuidar em Enfermagem sob a ótica da fenomenologia social de Alfred Schütz? Como aplicar as concepções teóricas de Alfred Schütz na ação de cuidar em Enfermagem? Foram demarcadas tais concepções e a interface destas com a Enfermagem. Ao incorporar à Enfermagem conceitos da teoria da ação social elaborados por Alfred Schütz, este estudo permite ao enfermeiro valorizar e aplicar os aspectos apontados por este referencial teórico no âmbito assistencial, no ensino e na investigação científica.

DESCRITORES

Cuidados de enfermagem
Filosofia
Sociologia
Pesquisa em enfermagem
Pesquisa qualitativa

RESUMEN

El cuidado de enfermería puede ser considerado una acción social que tiene como escenario el mundo cotidiano, donde son establecidas relaciones intersubjetivas que deben ser valoradas por el enfermero en los diferentes contextos en que actúa. Estudio teórico que tuvo como objetivo poner de relieve las principales concepciones teóricas de la fenomenología social de Alfred Schütz y su contribución para Enfermería como un área de conocimiento y práctica profesional. Las siguientes preguntas orientaron este estudio: ¿Cuál es la comprensión del cuidado en Enfermería, desde la perspectiva de la fenomenología social de Alfred Schütz? ¿Cómo aplicar los conceptos teóricos de Alfred Schütz, en la acción del cuidado en Enfermería? Fueron demarcadas las concepciones teóricas y la relación de las mismas con Enfermería. Al incorporar a Enfermería conceptos de la teoría de acción social elaborados por Alfred Schütz, permite al enfermero valorar y aplicar los aspectos nombrados por este referencial teórico en el ámbito asistencial, en la docencia y en la investigación científica.

DESCRIPTORES

Atención de enfermería
Filosofía
Sociología
Investigación en enfermería
Investigación cualitativa

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenological perspective is an alternative research that contributes to an effective look on experiences related to health-disease process in human beings, especially those experienced in different assistance and healthcare settings⁽¹⁾. This comprehensive investigative approach has been used in Nursing research. It is important to notice that, as a field of knowledge and professional practice, Nursing consists fundamentally in the relationship between human beings whose understanding is an important indicator of healthcare⁽²⁾.

A bibliometric study on Brazilian dissertations and theses which had used phenomenological approach in Nursing found that most theoretical and philosophical references that supported analysis were based on the conceptions of Heidegger (50.4%), Alfred Schütz (21.7%) and Merleau-Ponty (20%) between 1981-2002⁽³⁾.

In the present study, emphasis is given to the theoretical framework of social phenomenology, specifically on social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, which is based on understanding the action of individuals in the social world, having as reference the relationships among subjects in everyday experiences⁽⁴⁾.

Schütz proposes the conduction of a philosophical investigation on the nature of the action, basically using the studies of Edmund Husserl to work on the concept of meaning. That is analyzed in the everyday and not in the realm of transcendental phenomenological reduction. It refers to the understanding of people's actions in the world of life, as subjects themselves or within the intersubjective relationship, mediated by the eidetic description, i.e., by an invariant structure, a priori unique, of a society of living minds aware of the world where they are⁽⁵⁾.

Taking care of others presupposes considering the playing field of Nursing as one of interactions among subjects, recognizing it as a complex environment and space of human activities that require understanding of the social action of the subjects they contain⁽⁶⁾.

Worldwide, scientific studies on the phenomenology reference of social relationship in health and Nursing have been developed in a more expressive way in English (United States), Portuguese (Brazil) and Japanese (Japan). These studies concentrate on various topics, focusing on bioethics, with an appreciation of the experiences of the subjects in the health-disease process and in healthcare⁽⁷⁾.

In Brazil, since the 1990s, Nursing has been using the theoretical framework of social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz to support the development of qualitative research, especially in *Stricto sensu* graduate studies. Emphasis is given on the pioneer academic studies⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾ that contributed

to evidence the applicability of the theoretical framework of Alfred Schütz in knowledge construction and development of Nursing.

In contemporary times, the ramifications of this initiative translate into publications especially coming from academic research in different areas of Nursing knowledge, constituting scientific evidence relevant to the area⁽¹⁰⁻¹⁵⁾.

Considering the diffusion of scientific production in Nursing based on Alfred Schütz, the following questions arised: what is the understanding of caring in Nursing from the perspective of social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz? How to apply the theoretical concepts of Alfred Schütz in the action of caring in Nursing?

This study aims to highlight the main theoretical conceptions of social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz and its contribution to Nursing as a field of knowledge and professional practice. It is hoped that the knowledge generated provides a reference for researchers who use or will use this

theoretical framework in Nursing and related fields. Nurses in practice are expected to potentialize the social dimension inscribed in the care relationship within the different contexts of care where they act bearing the look proposed by Schütz.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF ALFRED SCHÜTZ

The sociologist Alfred Schütz (1899-1959) based his thinking in two philosophers, understood as the cornerstones of his work: Max Weber and Edmund Husserl.

Max Weber inspired Schütz by bringing out a perspective of interpretation of social reality based on the signification of the acts by the person who practices them. The contribution of Schütz to Weber's postulate was to deepen the meaning of human actions in the social world. In this sense, he sought in Husserl the philosophical framework that allowed him to understand social phenomena from the meaning attributed by the subject to the action, supporting the concepts of intentionality and intersubjectivity⁽⁵⁾.

Schütz's first work was published in 1932, in Vienna, entitled *Der Sinnhafte Sozialen Aufbau der Welt* (The construction of meaningful social world) understood as crucial for bringing the merge of Weber's and Husserl's thoughts. In 1939, Schütz came to the United States, where he continued his career as a sociologist, researcher and writer. Altogether, he published 33 texts during his lifetime, mostly in English, some translated into French, German and Spanish. Posthumously, the three volumes of the *Collected Papers* were published in English, containing most of his written texts⁽⁵⁾.

Schütz discusses the structure of reality and emphasizes the social relationship as a key element in the interpretation

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of the meanings of the subjects' actions in the everyday world. For this reason, he considers essential understanding what occurs in everyday human existence in the world of life, considered the social world. Sciences that aim to interpret the human action must start with a description of the fundamental structures formed by prereflexive, i.e. the reality that shows itself as clear and unquestionable for men. This reality is the everyday world⁽¹⁶⁾, which is permeated by a structure that enables the social construction of subjects and influences their relationships.

For the social phenomenology, the everyday world is the scenario where human beings live, which is previously structured prior to his birth. Reading this established reality makes man act naturally, from what is presented to him as a social reality. Moreover, he has the ability to intervene in this world naturally, influencing and being influenced, transforming himself continuously and changing social structures. Schütz calls this way of the subject to put himself in the world of life *natural attitude*⁽¹⁶⁾.

The everyday world is considered a cultural and inter-subjective world, as men coexist and live together, not only bodily and among objects, but also as being endowed with a consciousness that is essentially similar⁽⁴⁾. It is intersubjective because the subject is bound up in different social relationships, understanding and being understood through them. It is cultural, because from the beginning this world is a universe of meaning which must be interpreted to guide and lead the human being⁽⁴⁾.

In order to live in this world, man is guided by the way he defines the scenario of action, interprets its possibilities and faces its challenges. That precedes the recognition of the individual's current status, consisting of a sedimented history in all its previous subjective experiences⁽⁴⁾. The matrix of all social action has a common sense, yet each person lies in a specific way in the world of life, which Schütz⁽⁴⁾ calls biographical situation.

Every person, during his whole life, sees the world from the perspective of his own interests, motives, desires, ideological and religious commitments. The reality of common sense is culturally considered universal, however, the way these forms are expressed in individual life depends on the totality of experience that the subject constructs in the course of his concrete existence. This experience brings a body of knowledge that is available and accessible according to the biographical situation of the subject⁽⁴⁾.

The body of knowledge is primarily constituted through the parents, considered the mediators of human insertion in the social world. Besides those, knowledge added by educators and by practical experience sum up, which continuously structure this collection, constituting on a basis for subsequent action⁽⁴⁾. Schütz defines action as human conduct designed by the subject intentional and purposefully. When designing the action, the person anticipates behavior – the act as if it had been accomplished – and the

possibilities of doing so are directly linked to the elements of the present experienced. The biographical situation and the body of knowledge available and accessible condition the projection of the action⁽⁴⁾. When performing the action, its original meaning – the way it was planned – can be modified, considering how it was effective, opening up a range of infinite reflections⁽¹⁷⁾.

Action is interpreted by the subject from their existential motives, derived from the experiences recorded in subjectivity, constituting leading wires of the action in the social world. Those relating to the achievement of objectives, expectations, projects are called *reasons for* and those based on history, body of knowledge, experience within the biopsychosocial context of the person are called *reasons why*⁽⁴⁾.

The set of *reasons for* and *why* refers to typical situations with typical means and purposes. They do not reflect the full flow of consciousness of the other in the social relations, since, for this to occur, it is necessary that this flow occurs entirely, which is impossible⁽¹⁷⁾. From the point of view of the social sciences, the possible understanding of man in the world of life takes place through a subjective perspective of social relations. The transcendence of this understanding requires the researcher to distance himself from the subject to observe it and to develop a conceptual framework from the objectification of subjective matrix of sense, gathering information about the world of common sense – the typification⁽¹⁷⁾.

The idea of typification is one of the most important and representative conceptions of phenomenology. It favors the apprehension of an anonymous and objective knowledge of the phenomenon, which will unfold from the experiences and subjective and intersubjective experiences⁽⁴⁾.

The typification refers to a conceptual framework that unites the conscious experiences of a person or a group in the social world. It is an invariant representation of the action or the person/group that makes it homogeneous, refraining individual characteristics⁽⁴⁾. Because it is an objective elaboration, it can be expressed through meaningful language, being recognized and understood by those who experience a similar situation. Therefore, understanding that part of the existential motivation has both a meaning that is subjective – because it was experienced by the subjects – and objective – which refers to a concrete situation that shows itself significant and relevant for those who experience the phenomenon investigated.

The characteristics typified assume that the researcher considers the principles of science to ensure the scientific validity of existing models (postulate of logical consistency), the subjective meaning of the action (postulate of subjective interpretation) and the compatibility between the constructions of the researcher and the experiences of the common sense of social reality (postulate of adequacy)⁽¹⁷⁾.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF ALFRED SCHÜTZ FOR NURSING

Nursing has caring as social action, involving acts, behaviors and attitudes that are related to the health-disease process. The acts performed vary according to care situations and the type of relationship established in them⁽¹⁸⁾.

Caring transcends an action performed only by health professionals. It constitutes a natural attitude presented to the human being as a social reality. One takes care of himself, his family, friends, house. One acts naturally before care, as it is an act inherent in the human experience, the most original of interpersonal relations, the remainder being subsidized by it.

The dimension of caring in Nursing is initially experienced in the facticity of human life and it may vary from one person to another. It presents something in common that allows, in different care situations, to group characteristics that allow men to recognize them as such, in view of the fact that they have experienced them preliminarily. Care is an action experienced individually, but immersed in the world of social life. It happens in interpersonal relations, being signified and resignified from the type of relationship established with the other.

Professional care implies a kind of specific social relation among subjects who participate in it. It adds to factual care the technical-scientific dimension that distinguishes it from what is practiced by common sense, besides supporting itself on intersubjectivity, on the body of knowledge and on the biographical situation of the professional caregiver.

Caring requires the establishment of a face to face relationship, which is defined by Schütz as the one in which individuals involved are aware of each other and facing each other mutually in time and space⁽⁴⁾. The relationship in the action of caring in Nursing involves a social context that expresses different conceptions of health, disease, needs and doing itself by the nurse, which can lead to positive and negative experiences by individuals involved in the promotion, prevention and recovery of health.

At the same time, understanding care in Nursing occurs through typification of the action and it is rooted in the socio-historical context of subjects – individual and collective – involved in social relationship. This typification is constituted through a uniform and homogeneous relation of determinations and social conditions and health, sedimented in experiences brought from the common sense to the professional world. Understanding the action of caring will happen in depth as it is guided by the reciprocity of intentions and expectations between the person being cared for and the professional caregiver. The reciprocal perspectives

are typical constructions of objects of thought that reflect the understanding of this object and its aspects known to people in the social world⁽⁴⁾.

Contemporaneous Nursing has Florence Nightingale as pioneer, who established important foundations for professional Nursing in the world, giving rise to the typification of the action of caring for the profession. However, the typical characteristics of the original care should not be crystallized, taken as final and finished knowledge. The typical action of caring, therefore, is not fixed, being continuously restructured from different situations as a basis for motivations that will lead to new actions of caring.

The relevance of considering the human essence when caring for people and the search for new ways of looking at care⁽¹⁹⁾ justifies the adoption of qualitative research approach with the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz in Nursing.

This approach draws on the phenomenological interview for intuitive understanding of the experience, in order to access the experiences of the social world. This type of interview is a feature that allows the individual who experiences the phenomenon to express the meaning of their action developed in the world of their relationships⁽⁹⁾.

The interview presupposes a face to face relationship – direct and authentic encounter among the subjects – taken as the most expressive of social relationship⁽⁴⁾. It enables one to remain open and accessible to the intentional actions of another, constituting a *we-relation* permissible for the flow of consciousness of one to present to the other⁽⁴⁾. It should be guided by questions that evoke the motivation, which underlies and drives the action.

With this understanding, the thematic content of the questions aims to insert the subject interviewed in the context of his past and present experiences (reasons-why) and send him to his future (reasons-for)⁽⁴⁾. Thus, access to the meaning of the action involves a particular way of looking at a particular aspect of a person living, from the internal temporal consciousness that is based on a motivational context⁽⁴⁾.

The speech of the subjects regarding their motivation is the externalization of their intentions, which are captured by the researcher or by nurses during the interview. The intersubjective understanding through the seizure of the motives of human action structured in the midst of the experience and, therefore, the action that integrates the social relationship are searched. Careful reading and critical analysis of the content of the speech enable identification and description of the meanings of the action – the categorization – with consequent understanding of the phenomenon investigated.

The categories resulting from the study based on social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz are called concrete and

objective summaries of the different meanings of action that emerge from the experiences of the subjects. They constitute the so-called second-level constructs, emerging and originated from experiences in the social world⁽⁴⁾.

Those categories express the relevant aspects of actions that involve social phenomena as they occur in the social world, and involve both the reflection of the subjects and the researcher's view. Moreover, the meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as some aspects may be present in more than one category since they are interrelated in the experience of the subjects. The organized set of concrete categories of the experience allows the objective construction of the typical action, considered a theoretical construct⁽⁹⁾. To do so, it is necessary that it contains the meaning of the social action in focus and accurately express the methodological framework of the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz.

Both from the perspective of scientific research and from the foundation for professional care, understanding the typical action in the social world has as a guiding axis the dialogue among the results of the research, the theoretical framework of social phenomenology and scientific evidence related to the topic under study. This triad will enable a theoretically grounded and contextualized view of the phenomenon, unfolding into new perspectives of thinking and doing Nursing.

Thus, the content that constitutes the typification of the subject's or group's action investigated, under the theoretical point of view or action of care, must be interpreted in light of the scientific evidence relating to the topic studied, considering the sociohistorical context that permeates the experience in focus. Thus, both the researcher and the Nursing professional establish a dialogical relationship between what appears as a typical characteristic of action and/or the experience of the social group studied or to be cared for and knowledge production in the area, in order to contextualize the essence of the phenomenon in the field of social science. This dialogical relation is relevant and necessary for better understanding and clarification of the phenomenon investigated.

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Therefore, from the perspective of social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, Nursing care can be regarded as a social action that is set in the world of life, in which interpersonal relations are established that should be valued by nurses in the different contexts in which it acts. Such appreciation permeates the recognition of the person considering the amount of knowledge and experience acquired over a lifetime, as well as biographical situation in which it she is at the time of care. That will allow the professional to launch an expanded vision on care, based on the life of the subject and considering the social context in which he is.

CONCLUSION

The social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz is a possibility of thinking, motivating and developing the action to investigate and care in Nursing, guided by the social relations established in the world of life. Such framework values the intersubjective dimension of care and translates as the most original of the relationships among human beings.

It is emphasized that the subjects of care in Nursing, both individual and collectively, are embedded in a socio-historical and cultural context that needs to be valued. In this sense, the biographical situation and the body of knowledge available to them are important signs for planning and performance of actions for professional care. In the research field, this framework brings out the importance of careful thinking from the perspective of relations emanating from it, considering the perspective of those involved in the action of caring in Nursing.

It is hoped that this study, by incorporating the concepts of the theory of social action developed by Alfred Schütz to Nursing, allows nurses to appreciate and apply the aspects highlighted by this theoretical framework within healthcare, education and scientific research.

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