

Article

Navigating the Terrain of Lived Experience: The Value of Lifeworld Existentials For Reflective Analysis

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Abstract

In qualitative research we are often presented with a tension between having open and fluid interviews to support staying true to the lived experiences of participants and achieving a level of abstraction from the data in order to uncover the essential structures and meanings of that particular lived experience. A way of resolving this tension is through the application of theoretical frameworks. Van Manen's four lifeworld existentials offer a lens through which to explore and navigate disparate interview data and uncover the essences of lived experience, without imposing categories upon the data itself. Drawing on a study exploring the lived experiences of childless women, we explore the process and principles in operationalising the existentials and discuss the potential implications for analysis and findings. The article demonstrates how Van Manen's lifeworld existentials present us with a holistic and valuable method for reflective practice, in coming to understand lived experience.

Keywords: childlessness, lived experience, Van Manen, lifeworld

In the phenomenological tradition, the concept of the lifeworld has been used to frame the world of everyday existence. In coming to understand and explore the lifeworld, researchers have used the notion of lifeworld existentials. Drawing on a study exploring the lived experiences of childless women, this article will discuss the process of operationalising Van Manen's (1997) four lifeworld existentials. In doing so, the usefulness of the lifeworld existentials as a reflective method for analysis will be discussed. Some important considerations in the application of the lifeworld existentials when investigating lived experience are also canvassed.

Background

The Notion of the Lifeworld: The World of Lived Experience

The idea of the lifeworld is essentially the world of lived experience. That is, it is the everyday world in which we live and experience naturally and pre-reflectively, through our daily interactions and activities (Van Manen, 2002). Our lifeworld and world of lived experience is therefore what we experience before we have begun to label or conceptualise it (Lavery, 2003). The concept of the lifeworld derives from the work of Husserl (1936/1970). In his work, Husserl discusses two fundamental ways in which we come to understand the lifeworld: our natural attitude and our reflective attitude (Husserl, 1936/1970). Husserl highlights the differences between the natural attitude to life, which occurs pre-scientifically and prior to theorisation, and the reflective attitude to life that occurs subsequent to, and draws upon, the natural attitude (Husserl, 1936/1970; Van Manen, 2002). Building on Husserl's work, Schutz and Luckmann (1973) explore the notion of the lifeworld—our everyday life which presents to us as self-evidently real, that is, our “natural” reality (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

Studying Lived Experience: Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

In attempting to describe and understand the lifeworld, we can turn to the philosophies and methodologies of phenomenology. Phenomenological research can be understood as the exploration of the lifeworld, the study of lived experience (Morse & Richards, 2002). Founded in the work of German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl, phenomenology attempts to uncover the essential structures and meanings of a particular lived experience as it is experienced by a particular group, thus elucidating a deeper understanding of that lived experience (Lavery, 2003; Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology, through a process of description, reflection, and communication, assists us to identify meanings and structural essences of a lived experience of which we may have been previously unaware but are now able to recognise (Morse & Richards, 2002).

The tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology is also concerned with exploration of the lifeworld and the study of lived experience. Emerging from the philosophical works of Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1976), hermeneutic phenomenology attends to the study of human experience as it is lived, with the orientation towards creating meaning and achieving understanding (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology can be understood as both a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology, as it seeks to be descriptive of things as they appear, and an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology, as it works with the understanding that all phenomena are always meaningfully interpreted (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Van Manen, 1997). In working within the particular hermeneutic phenomenological tradition we espouse, and drawing on Van Manen (1997), we acknowledge that a hermeneutic phenomenological exploration offers one possible interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. As such, a theoretical framework such as the notion of the lifeworld existentials offers a lens through which to explore lived experience.

The Four Lifeworld Existentials

In coming to understand the world of lived experience, Van Manen (1997) offers for reflection the four lifeworld existentials of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations. *Lived body* refers to our physical body or bodily presence in our everyday lives, including all that we feel, reveal, conceal, and share through our lived body. We are always present in the world through our body; as such, it is through our lived body that we communicate, feel, interact, and experience the world. The existential of *lived time* can be understood as time as we experience it. This is composed of a subjective understanding of time as opposed to the more objective or “factual” time, and it refers to the ways in which we experience our world on a temporal level. The way we feel can influence how we experience time and moments, and conversely, constraints, freedoms, and demands placed by time can also affect how we feel. The third lifeworld existential, *lived space*, can be understood as felt space, our subjective experience of the spaces we find ourselves in. Lived space explores both the way in which the space we find ourselves in can affect the way we feel and, conversely, how the way we feel can affect the way we experience a particular space. Lastly, the existential *lived human relations* refers to the relations we make and/or maintain with others in our lifeworld. Our human relations include the communications and relationships we experience with others through the spaces and interactions we share and create with them (Van Manen, 1997). Although each of the four lifeworld existentials offers different points of focus, they are not sharply separable; rather, they are interwoven and interact with one another in the exploration of the lifeworld. Van Manen (1997) suggests that many experiences can be understood as corresponding to these four lifeworld existentials; as such, they present helpful guides through which to explore a phenomenon under investigation.

Van Manen’s lifeworld existentials have been used in various phenomenological research studies exploring lived experience. The four lifeworld existentials have been applied in the research areas of nursing (see, for example, Eggenberger & Nelms, 2006; Esquibel, 2008; Garrett, 2010; Merrill & Grassley, 2008; Moene, Bergbom, & Skott, 2006; Nelms, 2002; Willis, 2004), health (see, for example, Jessup & Parkinson, 2009; Pettersson, Appelros, & Ahlstrom, 2006; Reillo, 2008), and education (see, for example, Brown & Castle, 2007; Kirova, 2003). Predominantly, the lifeworld existentials have been applied in the later stages of data analysis, with researchers using the existentials of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations, along with thematic analysis (Brown & Castle, 2007; Eggenberger & Nelms, 2006; Esquibel, 2008; Haahr, Kirkevold, Hall, & Ostergaard, 2011; Jessup & Parkinson, 2009; Kirova, 2003; Merrill & Grassley, 2008; Moene, Bergbom, & Skott, 2006; Nelms, 2002; Reillo, 2008; Wiersma, 2007; Willis, 2004). The research cited here focuses on the presentation and discussion of study findings through the lifeworld existentials, as opposed to focusing on the methodological processes, value, and considerations in using the lifeworld existentials to navigate lived experience.

This article will discuss the decisions made and processes undertaken in operationalising the lifeworld existentials in a hermeneutic phenomenological study investigating childlessness, and it explores the practical application and considerations in using the lifeworld existentials as a reflective method for data analysis. Through the application of Van Manen’s four lifeworld existentials as a theoretical coding framework, we are offered a means through which to begin identifying and describing the various inter-related facets contributing to the composition of a particular lived experience.

The Study: Exploring the Lived Experience of Being a Childless Woman

The study discussed in this article was conducted over the course of 2008-2009. The study was conducted by a research team of four researchers, with one researcher (SR) undertaking all of the data collection. The aim of the research was to explore the lived experience of being a childless woman in contemporary Melbourne, Australia. Ethical approval was granted for this study in September 2008, from the Deakin University, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG-H 96_08). Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to guide the investigation and assisted the researchers in drawing forth meaning from the participants' views of their lived experiences, thus enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In staying true to the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, this research process worked with the assumption that the descriptions provided by participants of their everyday lived experiences were already meaningfully interpreted by the participants themselves (Van Manen, 1997). The research tasks of communicating these descriptions of lived experience into text and the processes of reflection and analysis were also considered to be meaningful interpretations of the phenomena under investigation.

Participants were recruited through an advertisement in a free weekly local newspaper, which is delivered to all households in the municipality. Five participants who were female, over eighteen years of age, and residing in or around the city of Melbourne, and had identified themselves as childless, were recruited. Face-to-face, depth-interviews were used as the data collection method. The initial interviews with all five participants ranged in duration from between one and two hours and were fluid and open in nature. A topic guide was used to ensure interviews progressed in a focused yet flexible manner (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Interviews usually began with asking the participants the broad question: "So, what is it like for you, being childless?" This opening question allowed the participants to direct the beginning of the interviews in regards to what was significant or important to them about their lived experience of being childless. Rather than attempting to explore predetermined aspects of the phenomenon that had been assumed as significant, the topic guide and follow up questions/prompts were broad and used sparingly. Second interviews conducted with participants focused on discussion of the preliminary data analysis and exploration of the early findings with the women themselves. These second interviews provided opportunity for the researcher and participants to explore together the preliminary analysis with reflection on the themes in light of the phenomenological questions and aspiration for "as much interpretative insight as possible" (Van Manen, 2011). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. During transcription the pseudonyms of Kate, Tamara, Sandra, Diane, and Liz were assigned. The study findings revealed five interrelated themes as significant facets of the lived experience of being a childless woman: woman equals mother, notions of "natural" and "unnatural," childlessness as a discrediting attribute, feeling undervalued, and the significance of being childless. The full study method and findings of this research are reported elsewhere (Rich, Taket, Graham, & Shelley, 2011).

The fluid nature of the interviews was important in allowing the discussions to be largely led by the participants; researchers encouraged the interview process to remain as intimate and true to the lived experiences of the women as possible (Lavery, 2003). This fluid nature, however, then presented the research team with the challenging task of having to navigate quite disparate interview data, in order to uncover common aspects and essences of the lived experience of being a childless woman. The research team was presented with the task of having to balance fluid interviews that remained close to the nature of the lived experience of participants with being able to achieve a level of abstraction from the data in order to uncover the essential meanings of the lived experience of childlessness. The challenge then became: how does one explore and bring together such fluid and differing accounts of the lived experience without imposing categories

upon the data itself? In the research team's discussions and planning of the analysis process, it seemed that the lifeworld existentials had the potential to provide a suitable organising device; this article explores how they were used to resolve this tension and guide the analysis process.

The Process of Analysis

For the study considered here, the data analysis process involved the phases of data immersion, theoretical and open coding, creation of categories, and thematic analysis (Fossey et al., 2002). The lifeworld existentials were utilised during the theoretical coding process, as a framework and lens through which to begin to explore and organise the data. Following this process, an open coding process was performed within the lifeworld existentials. In this phase, the lead researcher (SR) began to organise and label segments of data according to particular points or ideas that were identified within the data (Fossey et al., 2002). Once the data was organised, it was then revisited to explore the manner in which the codes could be related, in order to develop categories that connected the data logically and authentically (Fossey et al., 2002). Following the creation of categories, the process of generating themes was undertaken. This involved moving beyond descriptions of categories, towards offering explanations and interpretations of the issues being investigated (Fossey et al., 2002). As the focus of this article is on the application of the lifeworld existentials as a reflective method for analysis, the way this was operationalised in the study exploring childlessness will now be described.

Operationalising the Lifeworld Existentials

SR had both conducted and transcribed all the interviews, and this assisted the process of data immersion and provided opportunities to become increasingly familiar with the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a verification measure, all five participants reviewed their first interview transcripts for accuracy (Dagget, 2002). After all five transcripts were received back from participants, SR then read through each transcript multiple times to gain a sense of the broader canvas of this lived experience for the women involved. After this process, the task was then to explore the data collected using the lifeworld existentials as a theoretical coding framework. However, before this could begin, further decisions needed to be made about how the researchers would go about the process of applying the lifeworld existentials.

After reflection and discussion by the research team, it was decided that rather than taking one transcript at a time, exploring it for all four lifeworlds, and then moving on to the next transcript to repeat this process, a different approach would be taken. One lifeworld existential was chosen at a time and used as a lens through which to examine all five transcripts, one after the other. This process allowed all of the interviews and existentials to be approached on an equal footing. In taking one lifeworld existential at a time and exploring all the transcripts for that particular existential, equal amplification was given to each of the existentials across the interviews, not privileging one over the other but granting them all the same importance.

A second decision was then required in regards to the order that the lifeworld existentials would be used to explore the body of data. Working with the understanding that there is no hierarchy among the lifeworld existentials, the order in which the lifeworld existentials were applied was not based on importance or size. Rather, the order in which they were applied was informed by the data itself, and a desire to treat all the lifeworld existentials equally. Through the process of data immersion it became apparent that the existential of lived human relations was the most dominant and pervasive existential. As such, this existential was placed last, in order to give the other lifeworld existentials visibility and the opportunity "to be seen." Upon reflection, it also appeared that the interview content resonated strongly with the existential of lived body; the

women's discussion of their bodily experiences presented tangible and accessible elements to explore. Further to this, the topic of childlessness has bodily concepts regarding biology and reproduction attached to it. For these reasons, lived body was the existential explored first for the data collected. A decision was then to be made regarding the order of lived time and lived space. During data immersion the researchers noticed that the notion of time and references to age were apparent in the data. The notion of lived space, however, appeared more abstract, and thus it was anticipated that it would require more consideration in terms of how this was experienced by the women. Consideration of lived space was therefore reserved for third place in the order. Consequently, the lifeworld existentials were applied one at a time to the entire body of data, in the order of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations.

Lived body (corporeality).

One at a time, the interview transcripts were read, and re-read, in order to explore the participants' experiences of being a childless woman, through their lived bodies. During this phase, the data were explored in regards to the way in which the women discussed and described their bodies as childless women, notions of women's bodies in general, and their own bodily existence in relation to others.

An example of the women's lived body experiences is illustrated through the category, "a female body is a mother's body." Pronatalism has been recognised as an ideology that encompasses beliefs, attitudes, and actions that support parenthood and encourage fertility (Veevers, 1980). The socio-cultural and political climate of Australia has been recognised as characterised by a dominant pronatalist discourse (Heard, 2006). It is through pronatalist ideologies that "woman" and "mother" come to be seen as synonymous identities and facets of experience (Arendell, 2000). Such a socio-cultural synonymy between woman and mother appeared to have shaped the lived experiences of the women in the study, through their encountering of notions that a female body is a mother's body. Tamara, aged 44 years, raised the way that women's bodies were often discussed primarily as mother's bodies. Tamara was critical of this, and she highlighted the inaccuracy of presenting particular women's health issues as solely mother issues:

You know, this is a *child* thing or a *mother* thing. Stretch marks, sagging breasts, this sort of thing happens "when you have kids." It happens when you get *older*. If you don't exercise, if you don't eat right, these things happen. And it's not just about having kids. (Tamara, age 44)

The reproductive ability of women's bodies continues to hold a prominent place in the lives of women; despite not using their bodies to bear children, childless women are inevitably classified by their non-reproductive status (Mason & Swann, 2003). For Diane, who had chosen not to have children, the emphasis placed on women's reproductive ability to bear children and expectations that women must use this reproductive ability appeared to be a source of frustration. Diane emphasised that having the ability did not equate to having an obligation to exercise it:

And just because you *can*, and just because you've got a *womb*, doesn't mean you have to *use* it. You know? (Diane, age 48)

Lived time (temporality).

Following the exploration of lived body, all the interview transcripts were then explored and coded according to the existential of lived time. In applying this existential through the coding process, the researchers identified the ways in which the women experienced time in their lives;

in particular circumstances, settings, and chronological age, and as it was experienced by the women in terms of their past, present, and future. Lived time proved to be a significant aspect in the women's lived experiences, with the women discussing their future as childless women, the issue of leaving a legacy/inheritance, and the concern of having security in old age. Liz and Kate both discussed that although they were not particularly concerned with the issue of leaving an inheritance, it was something that they had considered because they did not have any children of their own to leave their possessions to:

Who do you *leave* anything to? Like what do you do? And it comes down to well I guess I'll leave some to charity, but how do you pick that? And yeah, I've been kind of struggling with it *lately*, a bit. (Liz, age 41)

It's also about having a legacy, and what do I do with all my stuff when I die?
(Kate, age 34)

The existential of lived time also helped to develop the category, "age affects how you are perceived as a childless woman." This was present through the way in which the age of participants affected how their childlessness was perceived by others. For Tamara, her childlessness moved from being something that was understood and accepted when she was younger to something that was perceived negatively and disapproved of as she aged:

When you're younger, it's more accepted, you know you're kinda groovy if you take that position a lot of the time. But as you get older, they start to see you as being more *deficient*. You're missing out, you don't understand, you don't live in the *real* world, you never grow up, that sort of thing. (Tamara, age 44)

Interestingly, Tamara's experiences illustrate that while she may have aged chronologically over time, due to her status of being an older childless woman, Tamara is perceived as having "aged" but not "matured." Additionally, Diane expressed that changes in how her childlessness was perceived had also occurred over time as she grew older. For Diane, although her childlessness was often unaccepted when she was in her thirties, pressure and expectations from others to have children had now ceased in accordance with her age:

I used to even say how I can't have children, and then they would say about IVF and that. *Now*, it's really good. *Now*, at my *age*, they don't go down that track, so that's nice.
(Diane, age 48)

Within the lived time existential, these insights from the participants highlight that the way childlessness is perceived in terms of being natural or unnatural is largely influenced by socio-cultural norms regarding what is deemed an acceptable age in which to enter motherhood.

Lived space (spatiality).

As a third phase of operationalising the lifeworld existentials, all of the transcripts were read, explored, and coded according to the lifeworld of lived space. During this phase, given the more abstract nature of lived space, the application of this existential required a more open and lateral way of thinking. It required thinking beyond the physicality of space in terms of physical proximities and locations but also considering the other applications of space, such as emotional space, divisions between public and private space, and invasion of personal boundaries. Given the more abstract nature of this existential, the transcripts were revisited multiple times to identify the

ways in which participants described, and made reference to, the spaces within which they lived their daily lives.

Although lived space initially appeared the more abstract of the existentials, through the process of theoretical coding it proved to resonate strongly with the participants' lived experiences. This is exemplified through the category, "living in a pronatalist space," which shaped the personal significance that being childless held for the participants themselves. Sandra expressed the belief that the personal significance childlessness held for her was largely the result of living in a pronatalist society:

I actually *don't think* it's that big a deal for me, but I think I *feel* it in the external world more, because I feel a bit like a fish out of water. ... maybe there are some countries where, it's not such a focus on women being mothers. (Sandra, age 44)

As previously discussed, it has been observed that Australia is characterised by a pronatalist discourse (Heard, 2006). Indeed, the emphasis in Australia's socio-cultural and political environment around women being mothers appeared to have shaped the personal significance that being childless held for Sandra. Additionally, Sandra also raised the way that, in certain places, she is often the only childless woman amongst a group of mothers and children. Sandra reflects that, consequently, at times she feels there is no space for her to simply be:

If I had of gone to that barbeque in the park, I probably would have been the only woman without children, in fact I know I probably would have been. And there would have been people that I didn't know, lots of people. And it would have been everyone sitting around drinking wine and watching the kids play, and I just don't feel like there is any *space* for me there. (Sandra, age 44)

Lived human relations (relationality).

During the last phase of the lifeworld existential exploration of the data, the transcripts were read, re-read, and coded, according to the existential of lived human relations. This involved identifying and exploring the human relations the women themselves chose to discuss, and the ways in which they described, interpreted, and experienced their interactions with others as childless women. As highlighted earlier, this existential was purposefully left until last, given its pervasive nature. Consequently, quite often aspects of the lived experiences of participants which were coded as corresponding to the human relations existential had also been previously coded as corresponding to one of the other lifeworld existentials. For example, the category, "age affects how you are perceived as a childless woman," was apparent and coded as corresponding to both the lifeworld existentials of lived time and lived human relations. It has been observed that the four lifeworld existentials, while being able to be differentiated from each other, do not exist separately in isolation (Moene, Bergbom, & Skott, 2006; Van Manen, 1997). This was reflected in the process of operationalising the existentials in the research discussed here, where lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations, although explored individually, do not exist as mutually exclusive realms but rather as interconnected facets of the one phenomenon of being a childless woman.

Lived human relations was experienced by participants through the category, "explaining or justifying being childless." For Tamara, Diane, Sandra, and Liz, a significant facet of their lived experience was feeling at times that they were required to justify or explain their childlessness to others:

Diane: And I used to go into quite lengthy explanations as to why I wasn't going to have children and, to sort of *justify* it.

Interviewer: Did you feel that you had to?

Diane: Yes. Really did feel like I had to. (Diane, age 48)

And um, you feel like you have to make an *excuse* for it or something, it just really annoys the shit out of me. (Sandra, age 44)

Sandra's comment was indicative of the frustration that most of the participants expressed at feeling compelled to justify their childlessness to others. Although enquiring about whether a person has children was accepted by most of the participants as a way people try to make "general conversation," the way in which they felt obliged to provide an excuse in response to this question was not approved of, and this proved a source of much frustration. During the course of the second interviews held with participants, Liz explained that this feeling of being required to justify one's childlessness was shaped by the way that childlessness is perceived as a discrediting attribute:

It's like you have to put a little annotation at the bottom of it; an excuse or reason.

You've got to *excuse* your childlessness because it's this discrediting thing. (Liz, age 41)

As suggested through Liz's comments, a feeling of having to justify one's childlessness to others may be influenced by the status of childlessness serving as a discrediting attribute. Consequently, in their human relations with others, childless women may at times try to justify or explain their childlessness, in an attempt to regain credibility.

Lifeworld Existentials as a Reflective Method: Applications and Considerations

The use of Van Manen's (1997) four lifeworld existentials for the childlessness study discussed here proved a valuable method for reflective analysis. Given the fluid nature of the interviews and the disparate body of data collected, the application of Van Manen's lifeworld existentials proved an extremely helpful mechanism through which to gain an insight into the phenomenon. The application of the lifeworlds helped to make tangible the more abstract components of the experiences that the participants discussed and helped the research team to uncover the commonalities and shared structures in the experience of being a childless woman.

Furthermore, Van Manen's lifeworld existentials offered a coding framework to explore the data without imposing predetermined or predefined themes. As such, the existentials did not impose predetermined categories upon the data of what was considered significant to this lived experience but rather provided four areas through which the phenomenon under investigation could begin to be understood and explored. This was considered particularly important in both staying true to the exploratory and inductive nature of qualitative inquiry and in supporting methodological congruence. As Morse and Richards (2002) suggest, methodological congruence refers to upholding consistent and congruent ways of thinking throughout the various components of the research process. Using the existentials helped to ensure methodological congruence and consistency between the exploratory aim of the research, the fluid and open nature of the depth-interviews used to gather data, and the way that the data was organised, analysed, and explored (Morse & Richards, 2002).

It is important to note that this article does not claim to offer an example of best practice but rather seeks to offer an exploration of the processes used in operationalising the lifeworld existentials and the principles that informed their application during analysis. When applying Van

Manen's lifeworld existentials, researchers will be presented with various decisions regarding the way the existentials will be applied and used to analyse their data and present their findings. In the study considered here, various decisions could have been made differently in operationalising the lifeworld existentials, for example exploring the interviews for all four lifeworld existentials at a time, exploring the existentials in a different order, using only one or two of the existentials to explore the phenomena, and so forth. Therefore, the lifeworld existentials require the researcher to think through the various decisions to be made in their own application and to consider what this may mean for the analysis they produce. Given that the decisions that are made about the way the lifeworlds are to be applied will undoubtedly shape the analysis produced, such decisions need to be made with significant reflection. Would the experience of childlessness come to be understood differently should the order of the lifeworld existentials be different? How might the analysis look if only one or two of the lifeworlds were used? These are all important aspects for consideration when using the lifeworlds to explore lived experience. In the study discussed here, the order of application of the lifeworld existentials did not seem to predominate in the expression of the findings—which instead rendered the existential almost invisible. The validation of the data analysis by the four participants in a second interview served to confirm that no adjustment was required to the way the various different themes had been stated and weighted in relation to each other. It is much harder to answer the second question in relation to use of only one or two existentials; given their interaction, this could still have allowed the different themes to emerge but it is difficult to state this with certainty.

As discussed, a significant value in using the lifeworld existentials stems from the way they offer a method through which to navigate and manage disparate qualitative data. However, the value it held for the researchers in supporting and guiding analytical reflection extended well beyond the management of disparate data. Notably, the existentials offered a counterbalance to data immersion and, in particular, the researcher's familiarity and closeness with the data. As such, the research team found the lifeworld existentials supported them in stepping back from the data and considering the wider and more subtle aspects of the lived experience they were exploring. The existentials thus enabled the team to manage the tension between remaining close to the particular experiences of each woman while at the same time retaining enough critical distance to appreciate the differences and similarities that emerged. This brought different elements into focus at different times in order to achieve and support a holistic understanding of lived experience. Through the processes of operationalising the lifeworld existentials, as canvassed in this article, we are prompted to explore all aspects of lived experience and not just those that may be more prominent, or those influenced by our own assumptions or presuppositions. Ultimately, Van Manen's lifeworld existentials provide a tangible framework that encourages a truly holistic approach to exploring lived experience.

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