

Time and a Waning Moon: Seniors Describe the Meaning to Later Life

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Six cents Canadiens âgés ont écrit leur histoire sur ce que signifie pour eux être une personnes âgée. Les textes ont été analysés et on y a trouvé un style riche en comparaisons, en paradoxes et en humour. Deux genres de paradoxes ont été décrits : d'une part, la similitude et la différence ; d'autre part, la limitation et l'expansion. Les personnes âgées ont ainsi dévoilé le mystère de leurs expériences de vie. Elles ont employé trois aspects de l'humour pour éclairer les différentes façons de faire naître la force et la joie : l'humour personnel comme étant essentiel pour survivre et comme moyen d'éclairer les fragilités personnelles, et l'humour partagé comme catalyseur de la joie et de l'amusement.

Six hundred older Canadians wrote narratives about the meaning of being a senior. The narratives were analyzed and descriptions of simile, paradox, and humor were extracted. Two paradoxical experiences — sameness-yet-difference and restriction-yet-expansion — were described as seniors shared the mystery of later life. They specified three aspects of humor to shed light on human ways of creating strength and joy: personal humor as essential for survival and as a means of making light of personal frailties, and shared humor as a source of joy and entertainment.

The meanings that individuals assign to their personal experiences are uniquely structured and intimately linked with health and quality of life (Moch, 1989; Parse, 1981; Sarter, 1987). With such universal experiences as aging, there is also a horizon of shared meaning that when explicated can enhance the health care provider's understanding (Parse, 1992). Further, shared experience provides a background that gives sharper definition to the uniqueness of individual experience. In nursing, new understanding of the aging experience may enhance the nurse-person relationship and lead to innovative ways of promoting health with older persons.

There is mounting evidence in the literature that traditional research methods are limited when it comes to generating knowledge about the human process of aging and health in later life (Ainlay & Redfoot, 1982/83; Howard, 1987; Marshall, 1986; Nadelson, 1990). In addition, much of the research on aging has focused almost exclusively on deficits, problems, disabilities, and dysfunctions. Little is known about the meanings older persons give to their life situations, or how they create health and quality of life despite limitations or chronic ailments. Yet, this knowledge is essential for nurses who practice with older persons and their family members.

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The purpose of this article is to present findings from a secondary analysis of narratives, written by 600 older Canadians, about the meaning of being a senior. The original research project conducted by Mitchell (in press) followed the six operations of scientific explication as specified in van Kaam's (1966) phenomenological method: elicitation of descriptive expressions, identification of common elements, elimination of expressions not related to the phenomenon, formulation of a hypothetical definition of the phenomenon, application of the hypothetical definition to the original descriptions, and identification of the structural definition (Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985). Findings from the initial project revealed that seven common elements structured the aging experience for older Canadians (Mitchell, in press). These were discussed in relation to descriptive expressions from the narratives, Parse's theory of nursing, and the human-health interrelationship. The common elements shed light on aspects of shared meaning for seniors. The written narratives also contained other phenomena that helped enhance understanding of the meaning of being an older person. According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative is a way of "meaning making and the drawing together of descriptions creates a higher order of meaning that discloses relationships" (p. 36). Three other meaning-laden phenomena were prevalent in the 600 narratives: simile, paradox, and humor. The meanings related to these phenomena were analyzed in the current paper.

The researcher was guided by Parse's (1981, 1987, 1992) nursing theory of human becoming. Parse specifies unique attributes of the human-health interrelationship that guide interpretation of findings from a nursing perspective. From Parse's perspective human beings are unitary, open, and in mutual process with the universe; they create unique patterns of relating and "freely choose ways of becoming as meaning is given to situations" (Parse, 1992, p. 37). Health is viewed as a process of becoming and as the way people live their daily lives. Interpretation of findings was guided by three themes contained in Parse's theoretical principles: "structuring meaning multidimensionally," "cocreating rhythmical patterns of relating," and "cotranscending with the possibles" (p. 37-38). The researcher believed that human beings assign meaning to life experiences, establish patterns of relating, and continuously move toward new possibles. The findings presented in the current paper specify what meanings, patterns, and possibles were described by older participants in simile, paradox, and humor.

Method

The quarterly newspaper, *Especially for Seniors*, published an invitation for the submission of original essays about the meaning of being a senior. Six hundred respondents, 65 years old or more, sent their 500-word (maximum) narratives to the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens. The invitation indicated that submissions would be viewed as consent, allowing the newspaper to "retain the rights to

future publications of submitted material” (Ontario Advisory Council on Aging, 1988, p. 1). Permission to analyze the essays was granted to the researcher by the Advisory Council. The essays were copied by the researcher with all names and addresses removed to protect confidentiality.

During the first analysis of the narratives, the researcher was struck by the prevalence of three phenomena: simile, paradox, and humor. This led to a second analysis of the 600 essays with the specific purpose of identifying and synthesizing descriptions of these phenomena. The method followed for the second analysis was to:

1. Identify descriptions - Each narrative was read to identify and extract passages that contained simile, paradox, and humor.
2. Identify themes - Similes, paradoxes, and descriptions of humor were grouped according to predominant theme.
3. Relate themes to experience - The themes were related to the unity of experience of being a senior as described in the 600 narratives.
4. Validate findings - The researcher consulted with an expert nurse researcher who validated theme construction based on participant descriptions.

The researcher focused on meeting the standards of qualitative inquiry outlined by Burns: “Standard I, descriptive vividness; Standard II, methodological congruence; Standard III, analytic preciseness; Standard IV, theoretical connectedness; and Standard V, heuristic relevance” (1988, p. 48). The findings were vividly described and themes linked to both the lived experience of later life and Parse’s nursing theory in order to advance the knowledge base of nursing. A second researcher verified themes and interpretation. Polkinghorne (1988) stated that when interpreting any qualitative data, “intersubjective consensus minimizes the likelihood of arbitrariness or...falsity of interpretation” (p. 116).

For the purpose of this study, simile, paradox, and humor were defined, as follows. Simile is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often, but not necessarily, introduced by “like” or “as.” For example: Life is like a roller coaster of ups and downs. Similes link ideas that have a common element in such a way that the newly established commonality enhances understanding of meaning (Nimis, 1988). Simile prompts a pause and a reflection upon the meaning of a particular phenomenon.

Paradox is the coexistence of contradictory ideas, thoughts, or feelings. Defined by Parse as “apparent opposites” that actually comprise different aspects of the same rhythm (1992, p. 38), paradox conveys meaning about the complexity of life and

the process of shifting views in day to day living. For example, a person might express both feelings of joy and feelings of sadness related to a given situation. Paradox has been linked to health in later life (Gadow, 1983; Jonas, 1992; Mitchell, 1990; Wondolowski & Davis, 1988).

Humor is a disposition, temperament, quality, and state. It has been identified as an important aspect of health and healing (Buxman, 1991; Cousins, 1979; Nahemow, McClusky-Fawcett, & McGhee, 1986; Rose, 1990; Ruxton, 1988) that is personal and contextual, and often brings a change of perspective to a serious or difficult situation (Montagu, 1981; Parse, 1990; Rose, 1990; Wagnild & Young, 1990). The meaning of a humorous situation sheds light on a person's situation in ways that can change health experiences.

Findings

Of the 600 narratives analyzed, approximately 300 were submitted by women and 200 by men (not all persons indicated their gender). Findings reported here are based on a total of 100 similes, 73 uses of paradox, and 60 illustrations of humor. The similes were grouped according to six themes; two patterns of paradox and three aspects of humor were also uncovered.

Themes Expressed in Simile

Approximately 100 older persons used simile to describe the meaning of being a senior. Similes were grouped according to six predominant themes. The first theme compared life to travelling or journeying. Later life was described as both the last lap of the road and as a new pathway of discovery. Struggles and hardships were likened to potholes and detours.

We are like travellers in time, enjoying the wonder of three worlds. We can choose to retreat into a safe, secure memory world of the past, or plunge boldly into the challenging world of the future. Or, within microseconds we can choose to touch the peaks of both worlds while living life to the fullest in each moment of time.

Travelling across miles of life, there comes a time when some would say we have reached the finish line.

The second theme compared later life with a wearing down or diminishing. People wrote about feeling that life was shrinking, winding down, or coming to an end:

Being a senior means a diminishing. It is something like a waning moon, pinch-faced and pressed against the night sky. But now, the shadowed light pulls inward all the edges and every form seems hunched for a diminishing.

Your face and body start falling and looking like a prune.

The third group of similes related to color, rainbows, and light. Respondents described later life as vividly colorful and referred to themselves as beacons of light for others.

Being a senior is as colorful and glowing as the weathered maple standing stalwart and majestically attired in a rainbow of autumn colors.

Being a senior is like a coat of many colors, being coated with many characteristics and qualities like knowledge, experience, and wisdom gathered through the years.

Freedom, flight or sudden release was the theme of the fourth grouping of similes. Older persons used descriptions like spreading their wings, having shackles severed, and being freed from responsibilities and timetables.

Being a senior means to be free, like an eagle soaring high in the sky.

Time, that old ogre that bossed your life, is now a servant of yours to command.

The fifth group of similes compared later life with aspects of nature—harvest time, winter, or sunset—and respondents compared themselves to flowers, rivers, snowflakes, trees, and gardens.

The flower signifies our growth and maturity. By the time we have experienced the sun, wind, rain, and storms in the varied events of our lives. The seeds that ripen and spread are like an image of the way in which seniors can share knowledge.

Days seem to hasten like the autumn leaves driven in the fall breeze. Leaves like the seniors, once lush and green and full of vigor, now brown and wrinkled, are free to blow in the gutters or to be piled up in refuse heaps.

Some seniors compared themselves to works of art, with wrinkles as marks of a long and meaningful life. For example:

We are all different pictures in the gallery that life has painted. Painted as a creative, independent, and viable loner or collaborator.

A senior is a work of art, roughed in by all the past ages and specifically and intimately etched by the acids of the twentieth century.

The Use of Paradox

In this analysis, 73 narratives related paradoxical experiences. Of these, sameness-yet-difference was the most common theme. People reported no change or difference in themselves, yet at the same time, saw change and difference:

I am still the same person, with the same need to love, feel needed and useful. But, I've also changed. Memory plays embarrassing tricks, but this is outweighed by greater experience and mature judgement.

The odd aches and pains in the knees slightly confirm my age; the fear of falling substantiates it. Strangely, one doesn't feel different inside; one cares for the same things and people, and looks at the world much the same way. Perhaps one has gained a little wisdom. I think it is the mirror that finally gives credence to the fact that one is a senior.

Restriction-yet-expansion was a second paradoxical theme. People saw themselves as living with limitations while simultaneously seeing self or situations as expanding. The following excerpts capture the restricting-expanding paradox:

Being a senior has its drawbacks, its ups and downs, its limitations. But there are compensations that far outweigh the negative side. Every day is a renewal, a challenge. I came to the conclusion that, in a monetary sense, I have nothing. But in the love and consideration of my beautiful family, I would say, yes, I have everything.

Being a senior is bittersweet. The gradual leave-taking from the familiar details of one's professional life, all the while wondering. There is also anticipation and a sense of exhilaration that comes with looking forward to doing so many things that have been put on the back burner over the years.

The Use of Humor

Sixty essays contained specific references to the experience, quality or need of humor or laughter. Three different aspects of humor in life were identified. First, humor was described as important or essential for survival. For example, elders wrote:

My sense of humor is still there. I need it more these days I find, especially since I'm gray.

The aging process covers a lot of disagreeable problems, but a certain long term philosophy and a sense of humor help a great deal.

I enjoy my life and find that an open mind and a sense of humor help.

The second aspect of humor described laughing at self and personal frailties. For example:

And how uplifting when we laugh at our frailties and the stages we go through. Memory seems a problem, but we laugh it off and say join the club.

Seniors do not need to save face, they have learned to laugh at themselves.

Rocking with laughter at missing a street.

The third aspect of humor related to the joy of sharing humor and laughter with others. The following excerpts are typical:

The time I squeezed Nivea face cream to brush my teeth gave me a jolt. I rushed to the phone to share this one with my sister-in-law. It was worth the long-distance call to hear her hardy Har! Har!

I have raised four children and when we are together we are all young and age is no factor. We laugh a lot together and enjoy each other.

To be still good friends with my husband so we can talk and laugh together at bits of nonsense.

Discussion

Similes in the 600 narratives examined here, linked the meaning of later life to journeying, diminishing, color and light, release and freedom, seasons and trees, and the artful making of wrinkles. Taken as a whole they convey the depth of meaning given to old age.

The simile is a literary device that has been used for centuries by philosophers and poets to describe the aging experience. Aristotle claimed that metaphors and similes allow people to grasp fresh ideas and to communicate meanings that are difficult to put into words (Nimis, 1988). Socrates referred to older persons as having travelled a road that all must journey, and suggested asking elders to describe whether the road was easy and smooth or rough and difficult (Plato, 1968). Many other authors and poets have capitalized on simile to stretch thinking about the aging experience. Consider the following poem, *The Coming of Wisdom with Time*, by Yeats (1951):

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.

Poets have compared older persons to sturdy oaks (Sarton, 1974), and aging knees to twisted old thorn trees (Yeats, 1962). Old age has often been compared to an uphill climb, sunsets, winter, and the harvest of life (see for example Rossetti, 1962; Shakespeare, 1932; Taylor, 1937). Sohngen and Smith (1978) noted that most poets who use similes perpetuate a negative view of later life. The similes contained in the 600 narratives analyzed here did not overwhelmingly illuminate life's thorns, warning signs, diminishings, uncertainties, fears, and finish lines. On the whole they were connected to strength, courage, discovery, wisdom, freedom, and reward. Few narratives presented only one side of the aging experience. Consider the following:

I am travelling down the last lap of the road of life with a smile and a song.... This intrepid traveller scans the territory, uncertain and fearful, yet eager too. The shoes are made for adventuring, as tough and comfortable as the character who wears them. The jacket is light but warm, made of tenderness and caring. The outfit is completed with a jaunty cap of courage. On one arm hangs the umbrella of hope to protect in stormy weather. A walking cane made of determination and perseverance gives strength There are some aches and pains. The legs are not as strong. The road seems to be winding uphill. More rests are required. Some of the companions have fallen by the wayside. Others have gone on ahead.

The journey becomes onerous as the traveller leans more and more heavily on the cane. A steady rain begins to fall. Up goes the umbrella, bringing fresh hope. The cap is tilted, to let more courage reach the walker.

The meaning that older persons give to their experiences in later life is often revealed in simile. Meaning shapes and is shaped by the individual's perspective and way of viewing self and the world (Parse, 1981). Parse suggests that people, "continually cocreate reality through assigning meaning to multidimensional experiences that occur all at once (1981, p. 42). For example, there are unique perspectives on the significance of facial wrinkles. For some, wrinkles signified a shrinking, and for others they represented the creation of art. Sarton (1984), who equated wrinkles and wisdom, wrote that, "A face without lines, that shows no marks of what has been lived through in a long life, suggests something unlived and empty" (p. 61). Campbell (1962) wrote, "As a white candle / in a holy place, / so is the beauty / of an aged face" (p. 1148).

The two paradoxical rhythms uncovered in the 600 narratives shed light on the complex nature of the older persons' relating with the world. The paradoxical pattern of feeling the same, yet different is especially critical for understanding lived experience in later years. Older persons are frequently judged and labelled by the way they look rather than according to their beliefs and perspectives about who they are. Cowley (1980) captured this prejudice when he stated, "We start by growing old in other peoples' eyes, and then slowly we come to share this judgement" (p. 5). The older persons in this study indicated a timeless sense of self, yet also described agreeable and disagreeable changes that contributed to a continuously changing process of growth.

The phenomenon of feeling the same while changing with age has been described elsewhere. Sarton (1984), in her journal at 70 years of age, made repeated references to not feeling like her age. She wrote, "One thing is certain and I have always known it - the joys of my life have nothing to do with age. They do not change...flowers, the morning and evening light, music, poetry, silence" (1984, p. 17). Kaufman (1986) an anthropologist, also reported on the "ageless self" from her research with 60 elders who were more than 70 years of age. Although Kaufman focused on the ageless self, the other side of the paradox was clearly present in participant descriptions. Kaufman stressed the importance of continuity and suggested that there is less "becoming" in later years.

It is suggested from the current study that the complex rhythm of feeling the same yet different does not mean less becoming. Indeed, the complex nature of the rhythm may indicate movement toward increasing diversity and people may simultaneously live at multiple realms of the universe (Parse 1981, 1992). Scott-Maxwell wrote,

"Life has changed me greatly, it has improved me greatly, but it has also left me practically the same" (1968, p. 17-18). In the current study older individuals felt timeless, ageless, and unchanging in one realm, yet they described disagreeable changes in appearance and despairing limitations. Still other realms revealed discoveries, comforts, surprises, and growth. As noted earlier, numerous nursing studies have addressed the limitations of later life, and ignored the paradoxical expansions and opportunities. In the current study, the restricting-expanding experiences referred to the many limitations and opportunities described by older persons. Amidst the aches, pains and memory lapses, and failing eyesight and hearing, respondents described many freedoms, challenges, discoveries, and wonders in later life. Mitchell (1990) and Jonas (1992) both described a paradoxical rhythm of lived experience in old age that was very similar to the restricting-expanding one uncovered here. Older persons in Mitchell's study described the meaning of taking life day by day; one of its core concepts was "glimpsing a diminishing now amidst expanding possibles" (Mitchell, 1990, p. 32). The elderly individuals experienced many restrictions and hardships in later life, but they also envisioned expanding horizons and opportunities for growth, learning, and change. Similarly, Jonas (1992) described restrictions that prevented 45 Nepalese elders from working in the fields, but with the restricted activities came new opportunities to help others and be respected for wisdom. Wondolowski and Davis (1988) explored the aging experience with 100 older persons and described a concept called creative transfiguring that related to a frailty-vitality paradox. Gadow (1983) also elaborated on the frailty-vitality paradox in later life, maintaining that to view only frailty distorts the perspective of aging.

In the current study humor was found to enhance life, change perspectives, and foster joy with others. These findings are consistent with several other authors' works (Montagu, 1981; Nahemow, 1986; Parse, 1990; Rose, 1990). Montagu (1981) claimed that humor broadens one's outlook, and that the ability to laugh at oneself is a more important and powerful capacity than the ability to laugh at others. Older persons in the current study wrote about laughing at one's self, and at the trials and tribulations of life, honoring the past with a laugh, chasing tears with humor, and having the freedom to develop a stronger sense of humor. Ruxton (1988) quoted a woman living with cancer as stating, "through humor I have found freedom. Freedom to be honest, to take risks, to live one day at a time" (p. 60).

Nahemow (1986) referred to humor as a defining human attribute. She elaborated on the humor that emerges from incongruities or discrepancy between what is expected and what is found. This aspect of humor, which happens when persons see two sides of a situation simultaneously, is said to be, "more complex but less intimidating" (Nahemow, 1986, p. 21). Further, this phenomenon of finding humor in incongruity has been linked to health (Parse, 1990; Rose, 1990; Wagnild & Young, 1990).

Parse (1990) described the spontaneous glimpsing of the paradoxical as an aspect of moving oneself toward desired change. The recognition of incongruence can lead to laughter, which changes one's outlook. Montagu (1981) and Rose (1990) also suggest that humor expands the person's view. Several nurse researchers have described this aspect of humor that involves the glimpsing of the paradoxical.

In a phenomenological study of psychologic health, Rose (1990) reported that women described an inner strength that was linked to humor. One woman related, "No matter how deep the pain is, I nearly always can find something humorous in it...that somehow I've got the resilience or that ability to see two sides at least...and then there's that bubble that comes up and makes me laugh" (Rose, 1990, p. 65). Similarly, Wagnild and Young (1990, p. 253) offered the following quote from a 70-year-old female study participant: "It just seems as if you have to take things in stride. And you have a sense of humor. You have to be able to laugh. You have to be able to laugh at things that seem terribly tragic - kind of see it in a different perspective....You have to laugh loud..." (Wagnild & Young, 1990, p. 253).

Interpreting Findings for Nursing Science

Simile as a vehicle of meaning relates to three concepts of Parse's first principle: languaging, valuing and imaging. Older persons cocreate reality by giving meaning to their experiences. And their perspectives are "incarnated through the personal languaging of imaging and valuing" (Parse, 1981, p. 42). Expressing oneself through simile is a way of languaging. Languaging expresses the images of one's chosen values and meanings. It gives a distinct form to one's structure of reality and illuminates the unique perspective of one's world view. The images shared in the similes reveal the reflective-prereflective shaping of personal knowledge. Parse (1981) states that the pictures or images of one's perspective reflect a searching for truth and knowing. One's images of life also reflect chosen beliefs and values that clarify concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams. Values reflect meaning and as one moves toward increasing diversity there is a continuous process of integrating and reprioritizing what is valued and important. According to Parse (1981), this process of prioritizing values and choosing meaning in daily life is health.

The paradoxical rhythms reported here, of feeling the same-yet-different and restriction-yet-expansion, are connected to Parse's second principle, "cocreating rhythmical patterns of relating is living the paradoxical unity of revealing-concealing and enabling-limiting while connecting-separating" (1981, p. 50). The paradoxical patterns reported in the current study further confirm Parse's belief that human beings cocreate rhythmical patterns of relating with the universe. Further, the restriction-expansion paradox is linked to Parse's theoretical concept of enabling-limiting. This concept is evident in human life as people choose how to engage

the struggles of daily living, what projects to be involved with, and who to relate to. Choosing happens simultaneously at many different realms. Every choice leads to a range of possible consequences, opportunities, and limitations. The restriction-expansion paradox shows the unique nature of what constitutes opportunities and limitations in any given situation.

The enabling-limiting paradox is described by Parse as a unitary rhythm. The concept enabling-limiting refers to the many opportunities and limitations that unfold as persons make choices and live cherished values. As described by elders in the current study, life is never entirely restricting or expanding. Both sides of the rhythm coexist as daily life fluctuates in a mysterious way embracing both restrictions and expansions. The 600 narratives contained multiple references to the blessings, joys, and comforts that exist simultaneously with fears, sorrows, and concerns.

The paradox of feeling the same-yet-different is connected to Parse's description of the rhythmical process of transforming, in which there is "struggling to integrate the unfamiliar with the familiar" (1981, p. 63). Transforming is a concept in Parse's third principle, "cotranscending with the possibles is powering unique ways of originating in the process of transforming" (1981, p. 55). From this principle flows the notion that in the process of transforming there is a continuous integrating that confirms the person one is, was, and will become all at once. In the paradoxical rhythm of feeling the same-yet-different, there is both the connecting thread of sameness and the unfolding new that prompts a "leaping beyond in continuous movement toward greater complexity" (Parse, 1981, p. 63). In this process there is an openness to the discovery of self as new perspectives and meanings layer and transform human becoming.

Humor is also linked to the concept of transforming. Parse describes an aspect of transforming that involves a person's changing perspective amidst new insights and fresh ways of viewing familiar situations. These ideas are connected to the changing perspective that accompanies the often humorous experience of glimpsing the paradoxical. Additionally, humor is related to Parse's concept of powering in which there is a pushing-resisting movement toward increasing diversity. Older persons described a strength gained through humor that made it easier to go on living. Indeed, humor powers human becoming for some persons.

The three phenomena explored in this paper relate to health and quality of life. Health, in Parse's theory, is the unfolding process of human becoming. Values, beliefs, choices, meanings, hopes, fears, paradox, and dreams are all aspects of human becoming. But the specific ways in which these phenomena are experienced by individuals can only be defined by the persons themselves.

Implications for Practice and Research

Findings reported here about simile, paradox, and humor considered in light of Parse's nursing theory surface possible ways of being with older persons in practice. It seems redundant to emphasize the crucial role that personal meaning has in relation to health and quality of life. For nurses who view persons as unitary beings, who are open and continuously participate in the process of human becoming, meaning is viewed from the perspective of each person, and is honored by the nurse when it is expressed in the nurse-person relationship. Nurses whose practice is guided by Parse's theory ask persons what life is like for them. This question invites the individual and/or family the opportunity to describe what is happening and what their experiences mean to them. Descriptions are imbued with meaning and the nurse offers true presence to the individuals as they illuminate meaning with as much depth and clarity as they choose. For example, if an older man states that he feels like a bump on a log, this simile could be explored. The nurse might ask him to tell more about what it is like to feel like a bump on a log, and what that means.

The meaning revealed by persons in these situations, is not for the nurse's benefit although it is a privilege to bear witness to such expressions. The process is valued because as Parse suggests, when persons speak about the meaning of personal thoughts and feelings, the meanings change and they are propelled beyond the meaning moment. In addition to exploring the meanings language in simile, the nurse might ask the person to image the simile and describe its appearance. Alternatively, the person might want to write about the simile or make a drawing that captures the experience. Practice with groups of older persons could be enhanced by exploring the meaning of similes. Group members might choose to relate stories, read poetry with similes, or share various similes that capture the meaning of experiences throughout life. During these group discussions, the nurse explores what the stories, poems, and similes mean to individuals.

The paradoxical rhythms of feeling the same-yet-different, and restriction-yet-expansion might be explored in discussion with nurses. The nurse guided by Parse's theory believes that patterns of human becoming are paradoxical and that by going with the person's rhythm in whatever direction or realm that may be, other aspects and dimensions of the rhythmical pattern will surface. Thus, if an older person speaks of feeling the same, the nurse might ask him or her to speak more about the sameness. This process of going with the person's rhythm commonly surfaces other paradoxes. Persons often continue to mull over what they said in the presence of the nurse and in this way continue to change and transform long after a specific discussion has ended (Parse, 1992).

The current study describes three aspects of humor in later life. However, some persons may not value humor or want to create it in their lives: this choice is

respected in Parse's theory even though some individuals find it to be a source of great strength. Parse (1990, 1992) suggests that people know their own way, and that their becoming can be enhanced by nurses. It was evident from the current study that many persons do value humor and sharing laughter with others. In such cases, the nurse might explore things e.g, a comedic movie or a book of jokes or experiences that increase the presence of humor in day to day life. It is important that the nurse be open to others' desires for humor and facilitate their plans for creating it.

The final more complex aspect of humor to be discussed is glimpsing of the paradoxical. It surfaces in the individual's relationship with the universe, and is connected to an expanding, changing perspective. It is a consequence of shifting views and perspectives and may show itself in nurse-person discussions as individuals illuminate meaning, synchronize rhythms, and move beyond, all at once. One way the nurse might enhance this process is by exploring the different views of a situation that a person sees. For example, after a person describes how terrible a certain situation is, the nurse may ask if there is any other way of looking at the situation. New views may thereby surface and the person may glimpse the paradoxical.

Further research based on findings from this study might include more in-depth exploration of the identified paradoxical rhythms or the experience of humor. Research with groups of older persons could evaluate changes in quality of life when opportunities for sharing meaning or humor are incorporated into nursing practice.

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