

and Hogan (2005) described a new understanding of and treatment for grief through induced after-death communication. The focus is not disengaging but engaging in “a changing, dynamic relationship with the loved one” (p. xix). Although this specific therapy uses the eye movement desensitization reprocessing procedure, the authors acknowledge that, for some people who are open and receptive on their own, after-death communication can arise spontaneously without the therapy.

Much more work is needed to develop a unitary view of death and dying, grief and grieving in nursing. Rawnsley (1986) and McEvoy (1990) conducted early studies within a Rogerian perspective on death and dying. Todaro-Franceschi, Cody, and Pilkington, whose work is highlighted in this column, are now leading the way to a new understanding that can inform nursing practice and research.

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# Studying Synchronicity Related to Dead Loved Ones AKA After-Death Communication: Martha, What Do You Think?

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In a world where concrete evidence-based practice is becoming increasingly relished, I often wish that those who have died would reveal themselves more often, just to let those of us nonbelievers know that there really is much more to it all than we could ever imagine. It is not valid to say we must see it to believe it; sometimes you just sense it or somehow know it. We would not have the things we have today if it were not for the many visionary individuals who had the audacity to dream.

For instance, I recently read that there is at least one (and likely many more) nebula in space that has developed, through magnetic forces, into the shape of DNA, the double helix evident in all living things (Morris, Uchida, & Tuan, 2006). Although this is the first time it has been observed, undoubtedly it might have been there (or at least somewhere out there) before this *evidence* was ever found. The study's lead author, Morris (as cited in Carey, 2006) of the University of California, Los Angeles, noted that nothing like this has ever been observed before and that “Most nebulae are either spiral galaxies full of stars or formless amorphous conglomerations of dust

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and gas—space weather. What we see indicates a high degree of order.” There might not have been as much emphasis placed on this finding, if the importance of the DNA double helix shape had not already been discovered by another's vision.

Somehow I do not think that Martha Rogers would have been surprised to learn about that double helix nebula; she was always looking out at space and envisioning the future. Indeed, she was often thought of as being from *out there*. Yet, her conceptual nursing framework has inspired many of us in healthcare to look beyond the ordinary line of vision and to try esoteric ways to assist individuals to actualize their unique potentials. For a number of people, her vision has changed the way we have gone about being and becoming. And as John R. Phillips, renowned Rogerian scholar, is fond of saying, everywhere you look you can still hear Martha's voice and see Martha's vision.

The purpose of this short column is not to embark on a report of the grief healing research that I have done, since

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this can be read about elsewhere (Todaro-Franceschi, in press). Rather, my goal is to emphasize the need for, and the value of, continuing to develop and apply original unitary healing modalities in nursing practice.

### The Unitary View of Energy and Rogers' Science

About 20 years ago, I embarked on a search for an answer to the question, what is energy? Being a critical care nurse my feet were firmly planted in the realm of Newtonian science. The goal for critical care, of course, was to conserve or replenish energy resources. At that time I was also a graduate student and was introduced to Rogers' science of unitary human beings. After having identified two views of energy across multiple disciplines, I became a convert; today I see everything from a unitary perspective (Todaro-Franceschi, 1997, 1999a).

Encompassed in the unitary perspective of energy is the idea that nothing ever truly dies, but rather transforms. It was this view of energy that formed the philosophical foundation for me to explore synchronicity (meaningful coincidence) related to dead loved ones as a natural healing modality for bereaved individuals (Todaro-Franceschi, in press). I know Martha would have loved this study, though she undoubtedly would have debated some of the premises that I identified in that earlier study related to the phenomenon of energy (Todaro-Franceschi, 1997, 1999b).

### Still Here-There-Everywhere

In the science of unitary human beings (Rogers, 1992) energy is a phenomenon that is never lost or depleted. Human beings and their environments are manifestations of energy, and changes come about through a mutual, rather than causal, process of energy transformation. Changes are never ending, always new and never entirely predictable. Energy transformation is apparent throughout the universe; for example, in the formation of a DNA nebula, or very close to home and for me most immediately right now in my garden room, where a monarch caterpillar has just completed its metamorphosis into a chrysalis. Hopefully in 10 days or so, a monarch butterfly will emerge, although one cannot predict for sure that this will happen.

Even though it is common knowledge that many people believe in some form of life after death, for bereavement groups the traditional focus is on learning how to go on living without loved ones who have died. Instead, I chose to explore grief healing from a unitary perspective. Why not work from the premise that when we physically die, we are still here-there-everywhere in this pandimensional universe?

Exploring synchronicity related to dead loved ones in a focused group setting yielded significant insights for those who participated in the weekly group meetings. By and large, those who attended group meetings verbalized that sharing and hearing about experiences of synchronicity helped them to reconcile paradoxical feelings about life, living, death, and dying (Todaro-Franceschi, in press).

### Implications

From a research perspective, it is important to note that had I not been looking through a unitary lens, I would never have chosen to explore synchronicity related to dead loved ones in the first place. Surely those individuals with their feet firmly planted in the traditional Newtonian realm would not think about pursuing this line of inquiry.

When I began to study meaningful coincidences related to dead loved ones, I was aware that it might be ridiculed by some. From the start, I used the scholarly term, synchronicity (Jung, 1973), instead of many other possible words to depict what it was that I would be studying, especially when I applied for a small grant to do this nontraditional research. I had hoped that the use of a Jungian term would lend an air of credence to the work and maybe it did, because I was funded for two such studies by the Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York, combined for more than \$10,000. Although not a significant sum of money, getting funded to do this work should be encouraging, I think, for nurses and other healthcare professionals who want to explore unitary healing modalities.

I should mention that a local newspaper journalist, having heard about the esoteric approach to grief healing, requested permission to sit in on one of our weekly group meetings and consequently wrote an article in the local newspaper (Sottile, 1999). I received an overwhelming number of calls from grieving individuals who wanted to come to group meetings in the weeks that followed.

Thinking of outer space, in Sagan's (1985) novel *Contact*, repeating prime numbers, a universal language recognized by all, is used to let us know that we are not alone in the universe. Maybe his idea, albeit written as fiction, is closer to reality than we know. Perhaps we are not alone in the universe. As you read this, I am sure some of you may be thinking, what nonsense is this? And that is quite alright.

Isaac Asimov was one of the greatest science fiction and nonfiction writers of all time. Today, much of what he wrote as fiction is part of our current reality. And the idea of studying after-death communication as a healing modality (yes, let us call a spade, a spade, now shall we?) might seem a bit like fiction and for many individuals a not so very scholarly endeavor. But once upon a time a double helix was *just* a shape, and then DNA was discovered and found to be in every living thing. Now it has been discovered that a nebula out in space has formed in the shape of DNA. Who is to say that it is not a sign that life is throughout the universe in its many manifestations? Or perhaps it is just another example of the orderliness of the universe. Either way, at one time those who spent their days gazing out into space or into a microscope dreaming of the infinite possibilities were often thought to be a little eccentric, and look at what they have accomplished thus far!

So let the eyes of nurses who value a unitary perspective continue to look out into space, and perhaps still be occasionally accused of *being* from outer space, since after all, we are composed of stardust anyway. And in the meantime,

we can continue to envision innovative ways of knowing and healing, while trusting that we are and will be in the good company of many others who have come before us.

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# Developing Nursing Knowledge on Grieving: A Human Becoming Perspective

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**G**rieving is a universal human experience (Cowles & Rodgers, 1991). The phenomenon of grieving has long interested researchers in the psychosocial sciences, and there is a large body of theoretical and research literature in those disciplines. However, there is room for further knowledge development related to nursing science, because knowledge about grieving that has been generated by other disciplines is not necessarily transferable to nursing practice. For example, psychoanalytic theory and behavioral psychology typically assume an objectivist stance in which the focus is on delineating normal and abnormal grieving, leading to a prescriptive model of practice (Cody, 1991, 1995; Pilkington, 1993). Such knowledge is incommensurate with nursing perspectives that emphasize human subjectivity and whose practice approaches focus on seeking understanding, rather than prediction and control, of human experiences (Cody, 2000; Pilkington, 1993).

Over a decade ago, Cody (1991) initiated a quest for knowledge about the experience of grieving a loss from a human becoming perspective. Five studies on grieving framed within the human becoming school of thought have since been independently conducted by Cody (1991, 1995, 2000) and me (Pilkington, 1993, 2005). My purpose in this article is to present a synopsis and synthesis of knowledge development about the phenomenon of grieving through research guided by Parse's (1981, 1998) human becoming theory.

The ontological basis for inquiry aligned with the human becoming school of thought consists in its philosophical assumptions and principles (Parse, 2001), wherein the human-universe relationship is a mutual process (Parse,

2001); the human is indivisible, unpredictable, and ever-changing (Parse, 2002); and health is a process of becoming in which the human participates. The epistemology flows from the ontology and focuses on "universal lived experiences of health and quality of life, meaning that all persons experience the phenomenon" (Parse, 2001, p. 165). Accordingly, Cody and I conceptualized grieving as a universal lived experience of health and quality of life, with reference to major themes of meaning, rhythmicity, and transcendence that underpin the principles of the theory (Parse, 1981, 1998). In brief, grieving was viewed as "an experiential process of becoming, characterized by meanings uniquely representing each person's experience, rhythmical patterns of relating with others, and transcendence, which is moving beyond what is to what is not yet" (Cody, 2000, p. 84).

Parse's (1987, 2001) phenomenological-hermeneutic research method was used in all five studies. Developed to be consistent with the ontology of the theory, the method is used "to discover the meaning of lived experiences through a study of persons' descriptions of experiences" (Parse, 2001, p. 167). Like all phenomenological methods, it seeks to discern what is essential, or core, to the meaning of phenomena; however the research processes are unique (Parse, 2001). First, through the researcher-participant process of *dialogical engagement*, participant descriptions of the phenomenon under study were elicited. Next, through *extraction-synthesis*, the essences of the descriptions in the participants' language were abstracted in the researcher's