

Commentary on “Sacred Journeys of Nurse Healers”

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Drs. Hemsley and Glass conducted a study of the experiences of nurse healers and disseminated their research in a two-part article. The journal is credited for allowing authors to use this two-part article format, which provides authors the latitude for a fuller explanation of the study. In Part 1, the authors discussed the relevant research and theoretical literature, leaving Part 2 for a full report of the study details.

The significance of the sacred journeys of healers and the relevant studies from the disciplines of nursing and anthropology were reviewed in Part 1. The authors described Jean Watson's caring-healing model as their conceptual approach and explained their hermeneutic methodological approach based on the works of van Manen, Gadamer, and Heidegger.

In Part 2, the authors described their phenomenological study of the transformative experiences of 11 nurse healers from Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Participants were included in the study if they were nurses who also defined themselves as healers. The purpose of the study as stated by the authors was to “explore the extraordinary and transformative experiences (sacred journeys) of nurse healers” (Hemsley & Glass, p. x). In individual audiotaped interviews, researchers asked participants to “describe your emotional and spiritual experiences associated with your coming to be a nurse healer” (p. y). Through their data analysis, the authors found “walking two worlds” as the overarching theme;

belonging and connecting, opening to spirit, summoning, wounding and healing journey, and living as a healer were the five essential themes.

The findings from this study have implications for holistic nursing practice. At the very least, experiences shared by these nurse-healer participants demonstrate to other nurse healers that they are not alone in their journey. They may in fact have common experiences and perhaps can gain power in the universality of these experiences. Holistic nurses can also use the findings (especially as related to the “open to spirit” theme) to protect themselves against the adverse effect of negative energy. To avoid vicarious traumatization that can result, being closed to the spirit is sometimes the best way to respond. If our bodies and/or spirits are noncontinuous, open beings, then there are times when we are best served by “plugging up the holes.”

Reference

Hemsley, M., & Glass, N. (2006). Sacred journeys of nurse healers. *Journal of Holistic Nursing, 24*(4), 256-268.

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