ABSTRACT

Discussions about real knowledge contained in grand theories and models seem to remain an active quest in the academic sphere. The most fervent of these defendants is Rosemarie Parse with her Humanbecoming School of Thought (1981, 1998). This article first highlights the similarities between Parse’s theory and Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism (1969). This comparison will act as a counter-argument to Parse’s assertions that her theory is original “nursing” material. Standing on the contemporary philosophy of science, the very possibility for discovering specific nursing knowledge will be questioned. Second, Parse’s scientific assumptions will be thoroughly addressed and contrasted with Blumer’s more moderate view of knowledge. It will lead to recognize that the valorization of the social nature of existence and reality does not necessarily induce requirements and methods such as those proposed by Parse. According to Blumer’s point of view, her perspective may not even be desirable. Recommendations will be raised about the necessity for a distanced relationship to knowledge, being the key to the pursuit of its improvement, not its circular contemplation.

KEYWORDS

Nursing knowledge, Humanbecoming theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Philosophy of science, Discipline of nursing, Nursing theories.
INTRODUCTION: Nursing knowledge and methods

Discussions about theories and conceptual models seem to be losing their prominence within the nursing discipline. However, some theorists remain very active and influential, especially in academic circles. They converge towards the “simultaneity” paradigm, associated most often with the human sciences and qualitative research (Parse, 1987). This paradigm and its associated theories\(^1\) are often portrayed as introducing a “necessary fracture” between nursing and biomedical knowledge and the so-called “positivist sciences”. Simultaneity paradigm scholars claim that their theories are more representative of, and connected to, a “real” nursing knowledge, because of the originality of the nursing role promulgated and the knowledge put forward in their conceptualizations and methods. Indeed, this paradigm proposes specific research methodologies, which become “nursing” modes of inquiry and knowledge, in opposition to “borrowed” ones. The most popular case of this logic is Rosemarie Rizzo Parse’s Humanbecoming School of Thought (1981, 1998, 2014).

\(^1\) This paradigm includes Parse’s Humanbecoming theory (1998) and Roger’s Science of Unitary Human Beings (1970). The more recent works of Roy (2008) and Watson (2005) may also be included in this paradigm.
This article is divided into two parts. The first is dedicated to analyzing some of the Humanbecoming assumptions and comparing them with the Symbolic Interactionism School of Thought proposed by Herbert Blumer (1969). The surprising results of this comparison will act as a counter-argument to Parse’s assertions that her theory is original "nursing" material. Given that Parse's writings are often cited as an exemplar and this paper will put this claim to the test, it will be argued that there may be no such thing as specific or real nursing knowledge. Considerations for recent developments in the philosophy and sociology of science will be suggested. From this point, other aspects of Parse’s assumptions, which are that studies made within her framework have to be conducted within her own phenomenological methodology, will be thoroughly addressed in the second part. Again, Blumer, with his more moderate view of knowledge, will act as a contrasting reference. It will lead to the recognition that the valorization of the social nature of existence and reality does not equate or induce phenomenological studies and even less Parse’s specific methods. In fact, while coherence between theoretical perspective and methodology is important in research, whether quantitative or qualitative, a monistic and intransigent approach to research, such as Parse advocates, may not be desirable. Recommendations will be raised about the necessity of a distanced relationship to knowledge as being the key to the pursuit of its improvement, not its circular contemplation.
SIMILARITIES: HUMANBECOMING AND SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Humanbecoming theory is based on the concepts and assumptions from Roger’s model (1970) and on some of the foundations of the phenomenological-existential movement of Sartre (1963) and Heidegger (1972). It reposes on nine assumptions (Table 1) and three synthetized assumptions designed to provide nurses with a vision that embeds the unique nature of individuals and existence as the heart of nursing practice. Three principles then highlight concepts contained in these three synthetized assumptions (Table 2). In a recent revision of her theory, Parse (2007, 2014) included a fourth assumption claiming that “Humanbecoming is humanuniverse cocreating a seamless symphony” (p. 258). In addition, Parse elaborated on postulates which explain the basic ideas underlying the ontology of Humanbecoming.

Symbolic Interactionism finds its deep roots in the teachings of G. Simmel (1858-1918), and G. H. Mead (1863-1931). It is often associated with the “Chicago School” which refers to teachers and students of the University of Chicago’s sociology department. It is a well-known fact that the arrival of a massive number of immigrants, along with the rapid expansion of cities and extreme poverty, was fertile ground for second-generation Chicago sociologists such as Blumer (1900-1987), Goffman (1922-1982) and Becker (1928-), as
they attempted to capture, for the purpose of documenting, stories of individuals and groups living through these rich experiences. It is necessary to point out that the Chicago School has not produced an exact, shared conceptualization of social living. Hence, debates have been accompanied by a plurality of viewpoints (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003, Becker, 1986). However, the Chicago School perspectives were principally formalized by Blumer (1969), through the “Symbolic Interactionism” School of Thought. Blumer synthesized the processes associated with it by identifying the development of “meanings”, “relationships” and “lines of action”. He also stated that Symbolic Interactionism encompassed three premises (Table 2) and six “root images” (Table 1) that present similarities with Parse’s theory.

**Meaning and meanings**

For Parse, meaning can be attributed to any objects in general, such as others, ideas, things, situations or projects. Meaning is the significance individuals attach to these various objects. It is based on their interpretations of them and it can be either linguistic or constituted of imaged content. It arises from the human-universe process and is highly connected to “ultimate meaning”, purpose in life or simply to the meaningfulness of everyday moments. Blumer says something similar regarding the meaning of objects. Objects are, he says, “anything that is pointed to or referred to—a cloud, a book, a legislature, a banker, a
religious doctrine, a ghost, and so forth” (p. 10). But, to this, he adds the “nature of an object [...] consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object” (1969, p. 11), by which, he means that individuals attribute significance to objects on the basis of their interpretation of them. Like Parse, he exposes the personal meanings that all individuals constantly create when they face situations.

Also, for Blumer, as well as for Parse, changes in meanings are an inevitable part of life. Thereupon, he defines an “interpretative process” by which individuals continually “make sense” of their situations. Interpretation is a “formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action and definition of action” (1969, p. 5). It is constituted from the constant relation or communication one has with oneself. This involves identifying objects, giving meaning to them and using the process as the foundation for actions. This interpretative process is made up of two distinct steps:

First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to point out to himself the things that have meaning. The making of such indications is an internalized social process in that the actor is interacting with himself. [...] Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).
Indeed, Parse refers to a similar process in her first principle, through the imaging concept. *Imaging* is the “reflective-prereflective coming to know the explicit-tacit all-at-once” (1998, p. 36). It refers to the person’s structure of meaning, which is coherent with his worldview (Parse, 1998). This would correspond to Blumer’s first step. When she adds “[t]he human is a questioning being, however, and all that is imaged explicitly-tacitly is an answer to a question, and the questioning is a searching for certainty” (1969, p. 36), she is undeniably referring to something that corresponds to Blumer’s second step of the process, where meanings are questioned and modified.

Note that Parse expands her description of this process with the paradoxes of reflective-prereflective and explicit-implicit knowing. Explicit knowing is, as she says, “articulated logically and reflected on critically; it has a form and a substance” (1998, p. 36). In contrast, “[t]acit knowing is prereflective, prearticulate and acritical […] it lies, “hidden from reflective awareness” (1998, p. 36). On this subject, Blumer, who overtly plucked the idea from Mead’s work (1863-1931), does in fact, lay out the same elements when he distinguishes between two separate forms of social interaction (including the relation to self). These two elements are the *non-symbolic* and the *symbolic* interactions. Referring to non-symbolic interaction, Blumer writes that “one responds directly to the action of the other without interpreting that action” (1969, p.8). Humans, claims the author just a few sentences further, “engage plentifully in non-symbolic interaction as
they respond immediately and unreflectively to each other’s bodily movements, expressions, and tones of voice” (1969, p. 8-9). Symbolic interaction, on the other hand, seeks to understand the meaning of the actions of others and also involves the use of significant symbols.

Furthermore, both authors recognize the importance of “valuing” in the interpretive process. Valuing, according to Parse (1998), is “confirming-not-confirming cherished beliefs in light of a personal worldview” (p. 37). This paradoxical rhythm consists in “choosing from imaged options and owning the choices” (p. 38). Blumer (1969), expressing himself in more general terms, stresses what human beings take into account when deciding on a line of action that includes their own wishes and objectives as well as many other factors pertinent for valuation. In what could stand as a paraphrase of Parse’s first principle, he asserts that “[w]e must recognize that the activity of human beings consists of meeting a flow of situations in which they have to act and that their action is built on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what kind of projected lines of action they map out” (p. 16). Indeed, in a comparable manner, Parse (1998) says, “[t]hese happenings are cocreated as the human chooses the meanings of situations and, through these choosings, the possibilities of personal becoming” (p. 21). Consequently, in order to explain the means used by individuals to express cherished beliefs, Parse proposed the “ languaging” concept which is “signifying valued images through speaking-being silent and moving-being still” (p. 39).
Blumer’s terminology is semantically cognate. He states, “[a] gesture is any part or aspect of an ongoing action that signifies the larger act of which it is a part (1969, p. 9). He further illustrates that gestures are intended indications of what an individual's plans are and what he is expecting from others or what he wants them to understand. Those responding to gestures base their own responses on their interpretations of these gestures. This detail is anything but banal. On page 40 of her book, Parse (1998) also stresses that this languaging process situates itself in the context of situations and individuals’ stories, and reflects their specific intentions as well. Note that the concept "revealing-concealing", associated with the second principle, further captures Blumer’s expressed ideas.

**Patterns of relating and social interaction**

Similarities between the two authors go even deeper as they meet on the subject of relations and interactions. For Blumer (1969), meaning is also profoundly intersubjective. He says, “The activities of the members occur predominantly in response to one another or in relation to one another. [...] Social interaction is a process that forms human conduct” (p. 7-8). Parse (1998) exposes the very same idea when she writes: “People in close association who have common ties and interests cocreate and perpetuate language and living patterns; thus although unique realities are structured by each individual, these are
cocreates through mutual process with others” (p. 39). The theorist goes further in explaining how individuals cocreate with each other. One can read: “[p]ersonal meanings emerge in the human-universe process as individuals view themselves, as well as view themselves being viewed by others” (p. 52). Finding the identical idea in Blumer’s book is astounding: “The meanings of objects for a person [which includes self] arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts (1969, p. 11). Hence, both authors are very aware that the development of meaning is about reciprocal and constructed processes.

In this same line of thought, Blumer (1969) also describes the process involved in forging individual and collective lines of action. As they interact with others, humans adjust their individual actions, which means that they take into account what others are doing. They are thus compelled to adjust their “intentions” and “responses” in order to develop lines of action that intertwine with those of others. Talking more directly about the shaping process of collective actions, he further indicates that human association is “a flowing and developing process in which the act of each individual becomes organized, bent, redirected or built up in the light of how he takes others into account” (p. 112). Showing this intersubjective and fluctuating composition, Parse (1998) writes that “[w]hen one person greets another person, rhythmical patterns of relating emerge as words become sentences and are shared with a certain volume at a particular tempo.
with unique intonation, all-at-once with a certain gaze, gesture, touch, and posture” (p. 40). This process involves “struggling with the unfamiliar of an imaged not-yet, as one reveals and conceals who one is and can become” (p. 25). Then stressing the influence of others on individual behaviors Blumer (1969) points out that the “makeup of the individual, as well as elements of that makeup, comes under the influence of the developing interaction, being withheld at this point, suppressed at others, and revised by others” (p.112).

This process of weaving lines of action with those of others, echoes, but again, Parse’s rhythmical patterns of relating. Evoking this idea, Parse (1998) suggests that “Pushing-resisting patterns emerge in the human-universe process and are present in every human engagement, creating tension and sometimes conflict. Possibles emerge through the tension and conflict that create alternatives from which one can choose in reaching beyond” (p. 48). Referring to the living certainty-uncertainty pattern, she writes: “Individuals are called on continuously by others to be more conforming and less unique, while moving that which is more certain than uncertain (p. 49-50), evoking both the positive and negative influences which the actions of others can have on each other’s course of action.

**Cotranscending with possibles and developing lines of action**
After having both discussed the social meanings and the mutually-formed interactions, Blumer and Parse wrote as well on the subject of “moving forward” by the means of actions. Actions are both personal and the result of intersubjective processes of a connected nature, making them “cocreations”. Moreover, for these authors, the development of lines of action is a dual process. “Any instance of joint action, whether newly formed or long established, has necessarily arisen out of a background of previous actions of the participants” (Blumer, 1969, p. 20). He adds that “[p]articipants involved in the formation of the new joint action always bring to that formation the world of objects, the sets of meanings, and the schemes of interpretation that they already possess. The new form of joint action always emerges out of and is connected with a context of previous joint action” (p.20). For Parse (1998), this duality is an inherent aspect of the process captured by the third assumption and principle. She specifies that “[t]hreads of consistency are apparent in the process of integrating, specifying the all-at-once presence of who one is, was, and will become. [...] The individual is recognized through this pattern that incarnates chosen values in a coherent connectedness of the familiar-unfamiliar” (p. 51-52). In interactions that differ markedly from those that precede them, explains Blumer (1969),“There is always some connection and continuity with what went on before” (p. 20), thus reflecting the Parsian notion of continuity of persistence through change. Indeed, she states, “They are ever-shifting with the emergence of the differences in change and the continuity of persistence all-at-once” (1998, p. 20). Even Parse's notion of “paradox” is not far from Blumer's thought,
identifying a comparable process. Indeed, Parse indicates that a paradox is a “unity of apparent opposites; two dimensions of one rhythm” (1998, p. 98), which is very similar to Blumer’s. During an interview in 1950, he said, “Human nature is something which is quite variable—made up of a lot of feelings and a lot of sentiments. Many of […] [them] come together in contrary pairs” (Quoted in Morrione, 1998, p. 195).

On this subject, the way both authors conceive the emergence of new situations constitutes another gathering point. According to Parse’s third principle, engaging with others, as well as with ideas, issues and desires is a source of constant tensions between opportunities and restrictions that reside in the various alternatives we have in situations. She says, “Possibles emerge through the tension and conflict that create alternatives from which one can choose in reaching beyond. Tension is the struggling between pushing and resisting while engaging with others, issues, ideas, desires, and hopes all-at-once in striving to reach new possibles” (1998, p. 48). Blumer (1969) expresses the equivalent idea, stressing that even *maintaining* a line of action reflects a balance of tensions, as if not changing were, itself, an active process:

New situations are constantly arising within the scope of group life that are problematic and for which existing rules and inadequate […]. Repetitive and stable joint action is just as much a result of an interpretative process as is a new form of joint action that is being developed for the first time. This is not an idle or pedantic point; the meanings that underlie established and recurrent joint action are themselves subject to pressure as well as to reinforcement, to incipient dissatisfaction as well as to indifference; they may be challenged as well as affirmed, allowed to slip along without concern as well as subjected to infusions of new vigor. Behind the
facade of the objectively perceived joint action the set of meanings that sustains that joint action has a life (p. 18).

As presented throughout this section, Blumer and Parse’s perspectives are alike in various aspects, as seen in their concepts of meaning, interaction, the development of lines of action and their recognition of the constructed nature of reality. Both of them put forward the concept of the social nature of humans and argue for its valorization. They also provide structures for conceptualizing processes related to the construction and the production of meanings and their contribution to the formation and duration of actions.

**Beyond unique nursing knowledge**

These troubling similarities have major implications for nursing and supporters of the Humanbecoming School of Thought, which is considered to be a pioneer in defining unique nursing knowledge. This constant comparison of Parse and Blumer’s work now puts into question this claim. Clearly, the content of this theory is not unique or original since Blumer had already conceptualized it even before Parse had finished her PhD in July 1970. However, and it should be clear in every reader’s mind, that no accusation of plagiarism is insinuated. This paper aims to exemplify and support the social and embedded nature of knowledge and knowledge development. Indeed, as Parse and Blumer both stated, one cannot set aside or recognize sufficiently how others, including teachers and authors, define thoughts and figures in the world of
individuals. In this case, the influence of Symbolic Interactionism, or at least the Chicago School of Thought is evident, as can be found in references to E. Goffman and A. Schutz, two eminent sociologists cited in Parse’s book. Without disputing the integrity of Parse’s work, this demonstration constitutes a serious charge against the claims of the “uniqueness” of her theory. Since it represents a hallmark example of real “nursing knowledge”, this observation also introduces a breach in the belief that such a thing may, in fact, be possible.

This foreseeable reversal of perspective about unique knowledge should not be seen as a dark outcome for nursing endeavors. To the contrary, it constitutes an opportune occasion to look at the progress which has been made by the philosophy and sociology of science throughout the last fifty years. One of these advances is exposed quite effectively in Risjord’s 2010 book. Using the spiderweb analogy, he argues that links with different kinds of knowledge and with other disciplines constitute, in fact, a reinforcement of the strength and pertinence of it, an idea that can also be found for example in Bruno Latour’s writings (1987, 2001). Therefore, the Humanbecoming theory can still be interesting in its conceptualization of social conduct and living.
However, some choices made by Parse throughout the years, especially on the topic of science and research, have cast a shadow upon this appeal. In parallel, the connections and links with the Symbolic Interactionism School of Thought do not go much further. In the second part of this paper, the comparison exercise between Parse and Blumer’s theories will reveal divergent underpinnings about scientific knowledge and methods. In order to preserve ontological and epistemological coherence within the two frameworks, they will be presented separately.

**Reality and knowledge as perspectival in the Humanbecoming theory**

In recent papers, Parse stresses one of her most cherished notions to be found in her school of thought. “Change is ongoing and humanuniverse is indivisible, unpredictable, everchanging” (2007, p. 310). Humanuniverse is unpredictable and indivisible in part, because each person constructs reality according to “the meaning of the situation” (1996, p. 56). Supporting the unique processes of constructing meanings and the multiple possibilities associated with it has led Parse to claim that individuals are living in “multiple unique realities”. Mitchell and Cody (1992) write: “There is no subject-object dichotomy; reality is viewed as cocreated with the universe and others while experienced uniquely by the person” (p. 60).
For Parse, personal existence is a *coconstructed* intersubjective process, which therefore defies all mechanistic or determinist endeavors (Parse, 2008). According to the latter, as well as Cody and Mitchell (2002), the knowledge produced by quantitative methods does not capture health experiences because of their objective and dehumanizing character, which moreover, contribute to the perpetuation of violence and suffering existing among patients and caregivers in the health system. That is why all the current evidence-based practice is somehow rejected and only the knowledge produced by qualitative methodologies, excluding those adhering to a logical positivist, are acceptable and consistent with the approach. She says, “With qualitative research, the knowledge about human experiences arises from descriptions given by humans” (Parse, 2001, p. 4). She justifies this practice by claiming that all knowledge, being personal knowledge, is invariably "perspectival". It is always based, as she says, on “the individual’s own frame of reference” (Parse, 2001, p. 2-3). To support this argument, Parse gives epistemological priority to individuals’ own accounts of their experiences.

In order to bring these accounts to light, the Humanbecoming School of Thought encompasses two research phenomenological methodologies aimed at fostering an understanding of phenomenons as experienced by all “humans”, namely universal human experiences (Parse, 1998). These methods are the *Parse research method* and the *Humanbecoming hermeneutic research method*. In brief, they consist of
analyzing the thoughts of individuals by asking them a single open-ended question or by studying a specific work of art through a sequence of pre-determined steps (Parse, 2001). These pre-determined steps are very important in Parse’s views on research. Indeed, she defines the latter as “the systematic study of phenomena with rigorous adherence to a design, the data of which comprises oral, written, or artistic descriptions of human experiences, and for which there are no digital findings” (emphasis added, Parse, 2001, xxiii). In the Parse method, the use of a single interview question aims to capture the person’s experience “as lived” and to prevent the impact of the presuppositions, preconceptions and biases of the interviewer’s own belief system. In the analysis process, the researcher produces a synthesis of participants’ accounts and transfers them into his or her own words and sentences. The end product of the study is the presentation of the “essence” of the phenomenon in the Humanbecoming theory terminology. The explanation and the integration of findings in an a priori model that underpins the whole process are of paramount importance. Given that knowledge is perspectival and reflects a researcher’s own belief system, this process aims to improve the transparency of the researcher’s analytical process and the framework used. Parse indicates: “It is important for the researcher to specify the frame of reference with which he or she approaches the text so that the meanings presented through interpretation can be understood by the reader” (Parse, 1996, p. 12). In her logic, this will ensure the “scientific merit” of the research product:
A research study with scientific merit enhances the knowledge base of the discipline by focusing on a phenomenon from a frame of reference relevant to the discipline, using the language of the discipline throughout the research process, and preserving semantic consistency. Scientific merit is reflected in the logical coherence of the entire process. This is evident when there is careful articulation of a focus on discipline-specific knowledge acquisition—from discussion of the frame of reference through discussion of the findings (Parse, 2001, p. 19).

**Verifiable knowledge about human conduct in Symbolic Interactionism**

Turning to Blumer, he also suggests that one cannot pre-determine “how people are going to act in any given situation” since it is determined “upon the basis of the new way in which people happen to size up the situation in which they are” (Quoted in Morrione, 1998, p. 195-196). Blumer also suggests that individuals live in “different worlds”, which are mainly the consequences of their life history and the unique situations they have been confronted with. He states:

> Out of a process of mutual indications common objects emerge—objects that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner by them. [...] From their standpoint, the environment consists only of the objects that the given human beings recognize and know. The nature of this environment is set by the meaning that the objects composing it have for those human beings” (p. 10-11).

Given this perspective about reality, Blumer exposes his prerogatives about science. Although in Cody's opinion (1995), paradigms identified by Parse are not derived from another discipline, but are rather
indigenous to nursing science, it is very interesting to note that Blumer comes with the same kind of
dichotomy. Indeed, Blumer (1969) is as critical as Parse when it comes to scientific documenting of social
relations and actions. Throughout his book, numerous examples demonstrate the failures and mistakes of
some scientific practices, done in a “deterministic” perspective. He points out:

It seems clear that it is improper to conceive human association in terms of a given
psychological character or composition of the individual human being. [...] Because of the fact
that interaction is a process having the character and results that have been noted, it seems
logically necessary to recognize that it cannot be legitimately construed in terms of some
hypothecated scheme of the psychological makeup of the human being (p. 112).

Although Blumer notes how different the world of each individual is and admits the ensuing difficulties for
contemporary science to capture social phenomenons, however he does not reject the existence of a given
“objective” reality. This marks an essential difference between Parse and Blumer’s writings, which also
constitutes his first criticism.

In this sense, no fault can be found with the contention that the empirical world necessarily
exists always in the form of human pictures and conceptions of it. However, this does not shift
“reality”, as so many conclude, from the empirical world to the realm of imagery and
conception. [...] The position is untenable because of the fact that the empirical world can “talk
back” to our pictures of resisting, or not bending to, our images or conceptions of it. This
resistance gives the empirical world an obdurate character that is the mark of reality (p.22).
In fact, the recognition of the social nature of the world does not equal epistemological relativism or subjectivity. During an interview in 1980, Goffman goes further by claiming that “[o]therwise, there wouldn’t be much reason to continue in the business [of science] except as a livelihood. It would be just a question of who could paint a picture that would sell” (Verhoeven, 1993, p. 330). These assumptions have major implications upon Blumer’s methodological orientation. While keeping in mind Parse’s similar preoccupations, such as the social composition of scientific truth, Blumer is also attentive to the importance of controlling the influence of the researcher’s own perspective to make sure that he is able to capture the principle elements of the phenomenon (Blumer, 1969). The strategies used are totally distinct from the ones put forward by Parse (2001). For example, Interactionists avoid inferring a “universal description” on the basis of their phenomenons. On this subject matter, Goffman affirms: “If we try to give a picture of the whole, then we do end up in making an arbitrary selection of the features to talk about” (Quoted in Helle, 1998, p. 189). Given the capacity of the empirical world to talk back, the researchers’ goal consists instead in yielding “verifiable knowledge of human group life and human conduct” (Blumer, 1969, p. 21). They concentrate on producing a more concrete and provisional vision of their phenomenons, seeking for changes and contrary cases instead of uniformity.
Blumer (1969) also rejects the previously established protocol that promotes a pre-arranged set of techniques that shapes the findings in advance. “Its guiding maxim is to use any ethically allowable procedure that offers a likely possibility of getting a clearer picture of what is going on in the area of social life” (p. 41). Stated otherwise, Blumer advocates for research designs that are “adapted to circumstances and guided by judgment” (p.41). In this perspective, their studies concern not only individuals, but also groups and collectives. Making another departure from Parse’s writings, Blumer writes:

“It is both proper and possible to view and study such behavior in its joint or collective character instead of in its individual components. Such joint behavior does not lose its character of being constructed through an interpretive process in meeting the situations in which the collectivity is called on to act” (p. 16).

As a consequence, the kind of data to be collected will vary from study to study. The concurrent use of these various methods is justified by the belief that researchers come closer to the phenomenon and to agents’ experiences by remaining mindful of the context within which the actions take place and the ways individuals and groups interact with and in it.

It cannot be understood apart from that context […] One is on treacherous and empirically invalid grounds if he thinks that any given form of joint action can be sliced off from its historical linkage, as if its makeup and character arose out of the air through spontaneous generation instead of growing out of what went before (p. 20).
In fact, Blumer (1969) insists on the fact that it may involve any kind of data that appears worthwhile, including “direct observation, interviewing of people, listening to their conversations, securing life-history accounts, letters and diaries, consulting public records, arranging for group discussions, and making counts of an item” (p. 41). For Blumer, to identify « the objects that comprise the world of an individual or a collectivity […] requires, first of all, ability to place oneself in the position of the individual or collectivity” (p. 51). Moreover, one can easily recognize the epistemological priority that he gives to observations and group discussions that he considers “a genuine ‘must’ to guard against the admitted deficiencies of individual accounts” (p. 52).

Finally, and most importantly, Blumer does not suggest adhering and remaining faithful to a particular theoretical perspective or method. On the contrary, he implores researchers to test their hypotheses and views about objects against empirical reality and in multiple contexts. “It is particularly important in exploratory research for the scholar to be constantly alert to the need of testing and revising his images, beliefs, and conceptions of the area of life he is studying. […] He should cultivate assiduously a readiness to view his area of study in new ways” (p. 41). On this subject and even in recognizing that “Symbolic interactionism may provide the premises for a profound philosophy” (p.21), he makes a statement that draws a clear line about what he aspired for his model: “I am dealing with symbolic interactionism not as a
philosophical doctrine, but as a perspective in empirical social science-as an approach designed to yield verifiable knowledge of human group life and human conduct” (p. 21). A few pages further on in the text and throughout his methodological position section, he writes: “Superficiality, humdrum conventionality, and slavish adherence to doctrine in the selection and setting of problems constitute a well-known bane in empirical science” (p. 25).

**Toward a distanced relationship to knowledge**

Parse considers reality the result of individual beliefs and values. Therefore, knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is highly subjective and perspectival. Given her assumptions, she focuses on phenomenological studies aimed to highlight the “universal health experiences” of a few selected participants by using strict designs and rules. The comparison made with Blumer’s positions on science and method reveals equally important and pressing issues. Blumer’s reality is also something that is individually and socially constructed, but also *shared*, which means that it does not only reside in individuals’ minds or constitute “individual experiences”. Blumer considers that individuals’ representations of the world and social action, may be conceived as fixed or changing, is the major focus and interest of the human sciences. He directs his attention to individuals and collectives using multiple strategies, including observation and group
discussions. This allows contemplating the idea that considering individuals’ experiences also means groups, collectives and institutions, as well as different angles and views about the same subject or experience. This new positioning regarding social science spontaneously opens horizons for rich and diverse studies related to nursing. In fact, it reintroduces some phenomenons that Parse and her supporters had rejected as they did not represent universal experiences and therefore were not “consistent” with their approach. Furthermore, it was reputed to enhance knowledge in disciplines other than nursing (Parse, 1996, 2001). Given that the defined boundaries between nursing knowledge and the one coming from other disciplines have been put into question in the first part of the article, this argument now seems to be unfounded.

Therefore, this more moderate vision of science and knowledge development has several benefits. This vision sets aside the sole universal and abstract experiences, allowing researchers to study various social phenomenons related to health or nursing practice in their multiple occurrences and contexts. In documenting it in a concrete and detailed manner, nursing scientists make this knowledge accessible and meaningful for every person, not only for those who situate themselves in a specific perspective that sometimes skirts “moral hegemony” and “diabolism” (Diefenbach, 2007, Paley, 2002). Also, by setting apart the “adherence to a framework logic” and the individual experience imperative, the relevance of a few
predetermined methods and designs becomes, in its turn, obsolete. As Blumer stated, the objects under study determine the design and the methods, not the framework. On the contrary, studies aim to challenge representations that may be contained within actual frameworks. Objects are then evaluated using various strategies, allowing researchers to understand the context and the variations of perspectives about them, that interviews alone cannot capture. From this point of view, one can question who, between Parse and Blumer, is more coherent with his or her ontology.

In a parallel manner, this work joins that of others who have dedicated their efforts to bringing to the forefront the inconsistencies existing in phenomenological studies made by nurses in the larger field of phenomenology, as well as with its pioneers, including E. Husserl (1859-1938) and M. Heidegger (1889-1976). Paley’s 1998 paper essentially identifies similar problems in phenomenological studies that supposedly derive from Heidegger’s ideas, such as the Parse method. Throughout his article, he highlights the problems of methodological “rigidity”, the explicit selection of a monistic model supposed to alter “bias” and foster “transparency”, and claims the impossibility for science to generate truths while making generalizations about “universal” experiences. Moreover, Paley puts into question the value of these results, as does Goffman, since they only consist of the experiences of a few individuals, accessible to the researcher and brings it to the level of something every individual experiences, regardless of the context,
such as geographic proximity and class relations between the researcher and the participants. In fact, in order to do this "purification" work, the researcher has to remove everything that is personal or contextual to the individual account to make it of a general nature, which then is incompatible with phenomenology as seen by Heidegger. Furthermore, Paley introduces the idea that Heidegger would have been more inclined to agree with or be in line with the thinking of Symbolic Interactionism as presented in this paper. He asserts:

A Heideggerian realism would, naturally, be a realism of practices rather than a realism of objects, and would be concerned to show how social practices are constitutive of both the self and social structures. It would be skeptical about any monistic account of the social world, although it would certainly not be relativistic, and would probably be inclined to a more fragmentary and ad hoc perspective (Paley, 1998, p. 822).

Recognizing the pertinence and the importance of these criticisms, Symbolic Interactionism and other perspectives on social conduct may be interesting paths for anyone wanting to explore social phenomena related to health and nursing practices and to be able to document them in a more concrete, flexible and communicable way.

This statement allows the introduction of an important point that has not been discussed until now, but that could be the source of significant misunderstandings. This paper does not suggest replacing the
Humanbecoming theory by Symbolic Interactionism. This conclusion would ignore the important epistemological issues raised in the second part of the article and would, in fact, reproduce mistakes committed by some theorists and their supporters. On the contrary, Symbolic Interactionism constitutes an example of an ontological and epistemological perspective that promotes the understanding of social life and practices without the disadvantage of cleaving all other sources of knowledge, perspectives and methods. It suggests a more distanced relationship to knowledge that allows playing with different perspectives and challenging them in different situations and contexts. Stated otherwise, these methods advocate for tangible kinds of knowledge, ones that can more readily serve as the basis of intellectual discussions and collegial debates (Becker, 1958, Becker, 1967, Gouldner, 1968). They encompass the work of scientists, since science is, after all, a falsification enterprise (Popper, 2004). At least science produces fallible knowledge which is different from saying that it is false or too uncertain (Hammersley, 2013). This endeavor is paramount for Blumer since it allows refutation, which is essential to the progress of knowledge (Adler, 1965, Hussey, 2000, Kikuchi, 1992, Kikuchi and Simmons, 1996, Paley, 2001, Paley, 2006, Popper, 1994, Thorne et al., 1998). These processes are closely associated with the development of academic knowledge, as Symbolic Interactionism and the Chicago School of Sociology both attest (Woods, 1991, Tomasi, 1998). It is no surprise, then, that Symbolic Interactionism thought has itself evolved and developed from the time of Blumer’s early work. Since the 1970s, the understanding of Symbolic
Interactionism has not ceased to increase, exploding into thousands of micro and macro studies (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003, Denzin and Faust, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This paper has advocated the strong connections between Parse’s theory and the Symbolic Interactionism School of Thought, particularly as Blumer presented it in 1969. This leads to suggest that Humanbecoming might be recognized as a reinterpretation of its predecessors, rather than original nursing knowledge. The fact that unique or real knowledge can even exist, has, as yet, to be debated. Arguments put forward in this paper invite nursing scientists to at least reconsider this quest since it is based on an outdated philosophy of science. Therefore, it is scientists’ duty to establish connections between new and existing knowledge, regardless of its source. Rather than trying to isolate each knowledge basin into unique “subjects” or “theories”, they should be inclined, as Risjord (2010), Thorne et al. (2004) as well as Kikuchi and Simmons (1996, 1999) proposed, to produce more solid and rigorous links between scientific knowledge and nursing’s social mandate, which should, in the end, enhance research and contribute to the proliferation of its results. Following Risjord’s discourse (2010) on nursing knowledge development, the strong connection made by nursing research to existing knowledge could help in producing new knowledge. This new
knowledge could be more closely related to real nursing activities and to the knowledge that nurses expressly need to accomplish the moral service and professional responsibilities to which they committed in becoming nurses and health professionals. This would permit nursing to be more open, critical and beholden to the knowledge that it has developed. Resorting to other sources of knowledge and frameworks could also contribute to stimulating academic exchanges and hence strong intellectual debates within the discipline that would, eventually, foster more interest for what nurses do, study and teach.
References


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