Brown (2015) noted that, generally speaking, individuals’ needs for cognitive certainty, accompanied by often-desperate, simultaneous needs to ‘be right,’ have resulted in widespread fear of personal vulnerability. In common parlance, vulnerability is seen as a relatively negative state, something to be “overcome” (deChesnay, 2005, p. xix). From a perspective that views vulnerability as ‘susceptibility to harm’ (Sellman, 2005; Mechanic & Tanner, 2007; deChesnay & Anderson, 2016), vulnerability becomes a negative circumstance, one that threatens possibility of attack or harm. In fact, within nursing, overcoming vulnerability is a focus for a number of nursing theories (Boyle, 2008; Smith & Liehr, 2008).

It can be readily argued, however, that vulnerability is not inherently negative; rather, vulnerability is neutral, reflecting merely “an interaction between the resources available to individuals and communities (including workplace communities) and the life challenges they face” (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007, p. 1220; parenthetical phrase added). Viewed from a point beyond the mantle of a positive/negative dichotomy, vulnerability can be understood to reflect a state of openness to environmental features, whether those features portend threat or opportunity (Brown, 2012). “All people are vulnerable,” as Sellman (2005, p. 3) noted, because vulnerability is the essence of the human condition. Moreover, “being more-than-ordinarily vulnerable may also provide opportunities for more-than-ordinary flourishing” (Carel, 2009, p. 216).

The investigators present an evidence-based model of leadership that supports ‘more-than-ordinary flourishing’ that exploits the vulnerability of both students and faculty members. Abductively derived from metasyntheses of published literature and lived experiences, the model demonstrates the centrality of vulnerability to personal and professional growth in academic settings. Integrated within the model are notions from several theories that, when applied comprehensively, interact to guide nursing education program administrators toward openness for the betterment of all. Specifically, the model combines features of vulnerability, itself (Brown, 2015; Mechanic & Tanner, 2007), with concepts from Cross’s (1981) model of adult learning, Meleis’s (2010) theory of transitions, and Shelton’s (2003) model of academic support. Implications for development of policy and for future research will be addressed.

The implementation of “new leadership” (Grossman & Valiga, 2017, p. vii) through the proposed model enables nurse educators and administrators to shift “the distribution of relative advantage and disadvantage” (Vladeck, 2007, p. 1231). The model undergirds success among education stakeholders, thereby strengthening the successes of the academic setting, itself. Reflecting findings of the literature they reviewed, the investigators argue that as it supports vulnerability, the model simultaneously supports authenticity and courage. As, through the model, students and faculty alike are empowered to embrace a sense of personal legitimacy (Brown, 2012, 2015), inspiring more-than-ordinary flourishing.
References:


Abstract Summary:

Vulnerability is not inherently negative. The investigators present a summary of their metasyntheses of literature and lived experience to offer an evidence-based model of leadership supportive of more-than-ordinary flourishing. The model demonstrates the centrality of vulnerability to personal and professional growth in academic settings.

Content Outline:

Introduction--
A. Vulnerability is not inherently negative

B. Academic settings require a culture of vulnerability supportive of openness

Body--

A. Vulnerability reflects merely an interaction between resources and challenges

1. All people are vulnerable

2. Views of vulnerability ought to incorporate awareness beyond the typical negative perspective

3. A positive perspective on vulnerability provides growth opportunity

B. An evidence-based model of leadership built through metasynthesis supports more than ordinary flourishing

1. Vulnerability sits at the core of the model

2. Numerous leadership theories are integrated in the model to support the openness inherent in vulnerability

C. Nurse educators and administrators can shift the ‘distribution of relative advantage and disadvantage’

1. The model strengthens opportunities for success in academic settings

2. Stakeholders are encouraged to develop authenticity and courage as they experience personal legitimacy

III. Conclusion--

A. Implementation of ‘new leadership’ using the model provides opportunity in academic settings

B. Students and faculty alike are inspired to embrace more-than-ordinary flourishing

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Author Summary: Dr. Specht's research interest incorporates both family and workplace mentoring relationships, especially as those relationships impact nursing faculty. She seeks to ease the transition of junior faculty into their new roles as nurse educators though the use of mentoring.