“I Can’t Do as Much as I Used to”:
The Concept of Frailty as Defined by Older Adults

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Key Findings: This study explored how older adults experienced or avoided frailty. Older adults explored frailty primarily through three interactive processes: 1) Coming to Terms with Aging, 2) Losing Aspects of Independence, and 3) Forming a Self-Concept of Frailty. Frailty is a highly individualized and multi-dimensional concept that evolves over time and situations.

Background
Frailty is a concept that lacks a consistent definition and operationalization across disciplines. Utilizing Straussian grounded theory, this study sought to explore how older adults viewed frailty in order to establish a more patient-centered use of the term.

Participants were asked to describe what frailty was, what a frail person looked like, and how frailty affects older adults’ quality of life and life satisfaction.

Methods
- Purposive sampling approach through a senior center (Ohio) and in-person referrals (Utah)
- Eligible participants were 65 years or older, English-speaking and writing, living in the community or assistive-living facility, and physically and cognitively able
- N=15 participants were recruited at two sites
- 30-45 minute audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim
- Edmonton Frail Scale, demographic form
- Coding and analysis in Dedoose 5.1.26
- Constant comparative analysis of transcripts, field notes, memos & team-based coding process

Findings
- The summation threshold to personal frailty was admitting to being both old and experiencing a loss of independence in a permanent way
- To admit to frailty was embarrassing; it was also courageous and brave, making oneself an object of social awareness
- Bearing frailty involved perseverance, preserving as much independence as possible, and resisting the social categorization that came with frailty

Conclusions
Researchers agree that frailty is multidimensional, exists on a continuum, and varies over time. However, this study proposes that frailty as experienced by older adults, is a highly individualized self-concept, formed by personal and social interactions and processes between older adults and their social networks, centered around aging and the prospect of dependency, forming the basis of a patient-centered concept of frailty.

Conceptualizing Frailty from the Perspective of an Older Adult

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