

Foundations for Scholarship: Historical Research in Nursing

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NEW THEORIES FOR A CHANGING WORLD

WOMEN ARE BEGINNING to realize that dead and dying theories about the nature of human behavior have failed to say much that is meaningful about the true nature of women. Theories and conceptual frameworks growing out of patriarchal thinking have been damaging to women's health, their self-image and their sense of well-being. But women are finally awakening and beginning to question theories in fields ranging from religion to economics and politics. Although women are not likely to advocate the development of a matriarchal social order, they are no longer willing to go along with the limitations imposed on them by male-dominated traditions. Liberated women want to think freely. They want to develop their own theories to explain the realities of their world and to shape their ideals accordingly.

In *The Modern Researcher*, the authors rightfully point out that facts "are seen through ideas. . . that are not immediately visible and ready to be noted down. They are searched for with a purpose in mind. The facts once ascertained, a mind has to frame a hypothesis to arrive at what is properly called *theory*: a total view of related events."¹(p176)

The mutability of knowledge is well known. Science itself must alter and modify "its interpretations every few years, and on its frontiers hypotheses conflict."¹(p55) The development of women as theorists, scientists and artists will inevitably bring with it vast changes in our thought processes and our perceptions of the world we live in. Already the questions being raised by women have led to the reordering, revision and updating of many ideas and facts.

As an outgrowth of liberating the minds of women and men, future theories will present us with an even more total view of related events than theories of the past have been able to present. In the past, men have been the predominant generators and carriers of ideas, and have been more biased in their development of theories than most of them would care to admit.

Men have not only created ideas, they have used them to give shape and form to our values, beliefs and social organizations. Our legal, economic and political systems with their many constraints on women have also been derived from these biased ideas. The boundaries and limitations placed on women in these systems are the focus of the women's movement and motivate women to seek

new knowledge and new interpretations of human behavior and the functioning of society.

In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt comments on the nature of limitations:

Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself . . . the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people, and the laws which protect and make possible its political existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because no such limiting and protecting principles rise out of the activities going on in the realm of human affairs itself. The limitations of the law are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from without. The boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships, that is, its specific productivity; this is why the old virtue of moderation, of keeping within bounds, is indeed one of the political virtues par excellence. . . .²(p190)

Arendt emphasizes that limitations and boundaries are not useful frameworks when social change is in order. This observation is fascinating in relation to women's role in society and especially in relation to the role of the nursing profession. Where nursing is concerned, *the conceptual framework* guiding our development for more than a century has been one of limitations and boundaries. This framework has defined our professional identity, our political existence and relationships in the world of work. The specific productivity of

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nursing in various economic and social organizations derives from boundaries and limitations which are often not defined by nurses' aspirations, experiences and thinking.

CREATIVITY AS THE FOUNDATION FOR SCHOLARSHIP IN NURSING

It is precisely this framework of boundaries and limitations that the present generation of nursing students and scholars must transcend if we are to develop meaningful theories to guide the expanding horizons of our practice and our persons. Breaking away from old ideas and conceptual frameworks is not an easy task. The leap into what may be new and unfamiliar territory is frightening as well as stimulating. But this leap constitutes the act of creativity required to go forward.

Creativity has not traditionally been the major goal of nursing education, and it has certainly not been a goal in practice settings. It is time, however, for educational programs to make creativity their main objective in teaching, practice and research. The foundations for

scholarship in the art and science of nursing must be creativity. Without creativity, we will labor in vain. Without creativity, we will not be fostering scholarship but stagnation, and there will be no new insights to move us forward in thought or in action.

There are several reasons why there has not been more creativity in nursing. First, it is generally recognized that nurses are predominantly women, and women have not been thought capable of really having valuable ideas; society has not expected them to produce ideas and create knowledge. Second, creativity takes time and freedom from excessive pressure and trivial busy work. Many climates in nursing education and practice simply do not provide an atmosphere supportive of creative activity. A jack-of-all trades or a person handy about the house, hospital or clinic does not have the time or energy to concentrate on conceiving new ideas.

Finally, creativity *is not* a totally painless process. Just as bringing a child into the world takes long months of pregnancy and an often painful delivery, the birth of new insights depends on months of pregnant thought followed by disciplined work to give shape and physical form to that thought. In other words, the birth of anything and everything takes time and is accompanied by some pain and some joy. Those people who wish to avoid discomfort are not likely to be found creating anything.

Among works on the process of creativity, May's *The Courage to Create* best describes some of the emotions experienced when a new insight breaks through to consciousness. Here are his

own reactions to getting new insights:

A dynamic struggle goes on within a person between what he or she consciously thinks on the one hand and, on the other, some insight, some perspective that is struggling to be born. The insight is then born with anxiety, guilt, and the joy and gratification that is inseparable from the actualizing of a new idea or vision.

The guilt that is present when this breakthrough occurs has its source in the fact that the insight must destroy something. My [new] insight destroyed . . . [other hypotheses] and . . . destroy [ed] what a number of my professors believed, a fact that caused me some concern. Whenever there is a breakthrough of a significant idea in science or a significant new form in art, the new idea will destroy what a lot of people believe is essential to the survival of their intellectual and spiritual world. This is the source of guilt in genuine creative work. As Picasso remarked, "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction."³(pp59-60)

But May goes on to say, "the main feeling that comes with the breakthrough is one of gratification. We have seen something new. We have the joy of participating in what the physicists and other natural scientists call an experience of 'elegance'."³(p160) As May so clearly points out in *The Courage to Create*, the essence of creativity is the making of something new. This birth can profoundly disrupt the life of an individual or society. For the advancement of civilization, there are times when it is most appropriate to upset the status quo. Clinging to outdated ideas, values and beliefs is not a constructive use of energy, and it does not provide a sound foundation for scholarship. A creative

turning away from what one needs to let go of indicates a healthy responsiveness to the force of life and to changing ideas.

Why should a historian who loves to study and ponder over the past advocate creativity and the avid pursuit of the new as the foundations for scholarship in nursing? History is the study of creative activity in human behavior; studying and understanding the past gives one the courage to create and respond to what is new without fear of losing one's identity with the whole of humanity.

A quote from the historian Williams further explains the purpose and value of historical research in helping people to creatively overcome the binding chains of the past:

History as a way of learning has one additional value beyond establishing the nature of reality and posing the questions that arise from its complexities and contradictions. It can offer examples of how other . . . [women] faced up to the difficulties and opportunities of their eras. Even if the circumstances are noticeably different, it is illuminating, and productive of humility as well, to watch other . . . [women] make their decisions, and to consider the consequences of their values and methods. If the issues are similar, then the experience is more directly valuable. But in either case the procedure can transform history as a way of learning into a way of breaking the chains of the past.⁴(p479)

As another author puts it: "The benefit . . . usually expected of . . . [history] is an enrichment of the imagination that promotes a quick and shrewd understanding of the actions of men in society. Hence the value of historical training to the student of any aspect of

man's life and to the worker in any branch of social intelligence."^{1(p54)} According to this writer, history is the "cornerstone of a liberal education."

CHANGING THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN NURSING

Historical research in nursing has, to date, consisted of purely descriptive reporting of data without any conceptual analysis of their meaning for nurses and for society. Creativity in the writing of nursing history has been almost totally lacking. Furthermore, the descriptive reporting of data is all the more meaningless since historical research into nursing has been highly insular with little reference to documents originating outside of our field. Published accounts of the history of nursing cannot be considered history proper. For the most part, they are simple chronological recordings or narratives that do not offer any real explanations or any real understanding of the complexity of our growth and development. Much of the written history of nursing has been used to support illusions that foster false pride. This can be said of the history of medicine as well. There are not, as yet, any accurate histories of the development of the American health care system as a whole.

History is the record of human behaviors, actions, thought and beliefs. These do not occur in a vacuum or in isolation from intellectual ideas shaping a society and its people. History records the struggles of humans to be humans. It tells of wars, prosperity and poverty.

History tells of man's inhumanity to man and of woman's inhumanity to woman.

May comments on what he perceives as a prevalent "uninterest in history and the refusal to study it." He associates this lack of interest in history with the need or unconscious wish of Americans to remain innocent. In the words of May:

To hang on to . . . [a] picture of innocence, you must deny history. For history is the record, among other things, of man's sins and evils, of wars and confrontations of power, and all the other manifestations of man's long struggle toward an enlarged and deepened consciousness. Hence so many of the new generation turn their backs on history as irrelevant; they do not like it, they are not part of it, they insist we are in a brand-new ball game with new rules. And they are completely unaware that this is the ultimate act of *hubris*.^{5(p56)}

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any authentic historical studies to give us knowledge to use in deepening the consciousness of our humanity. Our identity has suffered greatly because we have not carefully studied our history and incorporated historical knowledge into theoretical and clinical teachings. Without this knowledge, the foundations of nursing scholarship and practice have indeed been shaky.

Because of the nature of the profession and its holistic approach in dealing with the needs of humanity, nursing has always been and will always be both an art and a science. The devaluation of history has brought shallowness and stagnation to both aspects. Without knowledge of history as a base, the artistic side of any practice field is neglected, ignored and lost sight of almost totally, and the art of nursing is indeed sorely underdeveloped. Without knowing history, one cannot approach knowing truth. Without historical thinking, science can all too easily become a fiction, an illusion, a social lie told with no regard for what is true.

What both nurses and the American public as a whole need are sound, socially enlightening historical studies, studies providing interpretations and analyses of how our health care system developed. Many of today's problems have always existed. The crises we hear so much about in health care are often repeats of history.

To more fully explain such crises and to eliminate their unnecessary recurrence, nursing histories in the future must give us more than isolated facts about nursing and nurses; they must give us meaning and understanding. These histories must explain for the profession and for the public the complex economic and political struggles of nurses and how they relate to other groups, classes and factions within the health care system and within communities and society. Our history in the future must be an intellectual history that examines the ideas and modes of thought shaping the

formation of human behaviors and institutions.

THE HISTORIAN AS ARTIST AND SCIENTIST: THINKING HOLISTICALLY

Collecting data and writing intellectual history involve the application of theories and concepts from all fields of knowledge known to humanity. Only with the use of theories and conceptual frameworks can historical data be accurately interpreted; this is the scientific part of the historical researcher's work.

Facts, events, ideas, institutions and societal trends do not speak for themselves, but must be interpreted by a human mind hard at work trying to analyze the continuity, diversity and change involved in the complex interrelationships that characterize human history. In *Historical Thinking*, Tholfsen clearly states the concerns of the historical researcher; these are the dimension of time, the categories of change, continuity and diversity as reflected in human affairs. Within human life the past is connected to the present, and it is the task of the historian to reveal "the nature of man, in his being and becoming in the course of time."⁶(pp6-7)

Tholfsen and other male historians tend to see history as the history of man and woman. However, in writing and studying history, it must be kept in mind that the history of man is not the history of woman. Our future histories must distinguish between the two. Much of woman's history is filled with pain and prejudice inflicted upon her by men.

The mental reconstruction of this history may well be a somewhat painful task for the female historian who undertakes this reconstruction.

The process will be painful because the historian, through an active use of imagination, actually tries to relive the past. Historians as artists try to feel in body, mind and soul what the people they are studying actually might have felt in their lifetime. A quote from Berlin best describes the artistic side of historical research:

the historian's activity is an artistic one. Historical explanation is to a large degree arrangement of the discovered facts in patterns which satisfy us because they accord with life—the variety of human experience and activity—as we know it and can imagine it.

... This kind of historical explanation is related to moral and aesthetic analysis, in so far as it pre-supposes conceiving of human beings not merely as organisms in space, the regularities of whose behavior can be described and locked in labour saving formulae, but as active, beings pursuing ends, shaping their own and others' lives, feeling, reflecting, imagining, creating, in constant interaction and intercommunication with other human beings; in short, engaged in all the forms of experience that we understand because we share in them, and do not view them purely as external observers.^{7(p40-41)}

The historian cannot be narrowly scientific because the recreating, reliving and writing about the past constitute nothing less than a work of art. Another reference to Berlin provides a beautiful explanation of this process:

Capacity for understanding people's characters, knowledge of ways in which

they are likely to react to one another, ability to "enter into" their motives, their principles, the movement of thoughts and feelings (and this applies no less to the behavior of masses or to the growth of cultures)—these are the talents that are indispensable to historians, but not ... to natural scientists.^{7(pp40-41)}

Nurses should make excellent historians since many of the artistic talents necessary for the making of great historians are also required to make a great nurse. The heart and core of nursing is

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understanding and feeling for others; these are the essence of the historian's work as well. In an integrated, holistic fashion, both nurse and historian must be skillful in the creative use of intellect and feeling, and both must be artists.

THE USE OF THEORY IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH: SUGGESTED STUDIES

Among other things, history deals with the social, the political and the economic. The use of theories in each of these fields is, therefore, essential in the analysis of historical data. The historian must use old, new and emerging theories and concepts to explain human behavior

and to explain the functioning or non-functioning of institutions.

It is common knowledge that our health care system is and has been an industry since the turn of the century. It is an economic enterprise, and a lot of money is exchanged in the marketplace of medical care delivery. In this system of capitalistic enterprise, profits are made from the continuing existence of much sickness and disease. People are literally being made mentally and physically sick by this system. This inhumane development is directly related to economic profit. If people in our society were well, happy and relatively healthy, our present health care system would collapse because no one would be making any profits from diseased humanity. Many, if not most, of our past and present problems are purely economic. To understand them fully, we must utilize economic theories.

The theories of Marx are particularly relevant to the history of nursing. It was Marx who came up with the insight that all of history is a history of class struggles. It was Marx who devoted his research and his life to efforts to free oppressed working classes from the miseries of capitalist domination. Since nurses have historically been cast into the role of the subordinate working class or productive force within health care settings, a Marxist interpretation of our struggles and difficulties is imperative for providing new understanding of our plight in the world of work.

A Marxist interpretation of nursing history and the history of the American health care system would also shed light

on the dehumanization and disintegration observable within this system. Williams comments interestingly on the appropriate use of Marx's theories in explaining developments in our society:

Americans have never confronted Karl Marx himself. We have never confronted his central theses about the assumptions, the costs, and the nature of capitalist society. We have never confronted his central insight that capitalism is predicated upon an overemphasis and exaltation of the individualistic, egoistic half of man functioning in a marketplace system that overrides and crushes the social, humanitarian half of man. We have never confronted his perception that capitalism is based upon a definition of man in the marketplace that defines the dialogue between men as a competitive struggle for riches and power. And we have never confronted his argument that capitalism cannot create a community in which how much men produce and own is less important than what they make, less important than their relationships as they produce and distribute those products, less important than what they are as men, and less important than how they treat each other.^{8(p18)}

With our present health care system causing almost more problems than it cures, we must take Marx seriously and carry out historical studies that will explain more fully the damage done to humanity by this capitalistic system. Some of Marx's own thoughts help explain the historical development of class struggles within the nursing profession and medical hierarchy. He wrote:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the struggling classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guildmasters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; and in almost all of these particular classes, again, other subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has only established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.^{9(pp57-58)}

This analysis of class struggle describes the American health care system almost perfectly. The elaborate social rankings within medicine, nursing and the emerging paramedical profession can scarcely be comprehended by the public. Consumers and workers alike seldom question the hierarchy and the confusion and competition associated with it. Utilizing economic theories in historical research can lead to an understanding of the damaging effects of this hierarchical health care system.

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peting for a recognized place in society or the marketplace. The development of physician assistants, emergency technicians and other groups will only intensify these struggles, making the health field even more complex, costly and confusing than it already is to the public.

The lack of unity we hear so much about within nursing is really an outgrowth of class struggle. A historical understanding of these struggles and the political and economic purpose they serve can help us overcome the conflicts we have about them. In addition, utilizing economic theories can help nurses overcome the brainwashing they have been subjected to by economic and social systems that pay them poorly and treat them badly.

From a psychological standpoint, oppression and the brainwashing that accompanies it cause great harm to humans. Nurses have not escaped this kind of damage. There is a need for historical studies that will help nurses analyze and better understand just what has been done to their concept of themselves as persons and as productive humans.

Brown discusses the "disease called man" in his book on psychoanalytic interpretations of history:

The doctrine that all men are mad ap-

pears to conflict with a historical perspective on the nature and destiny of man: it appears to swallow all cultural variety, all historical change, into a darkness in which all cats are gray. But this objection neglects the richness and complexity of the Freudian theory of neurosis.

. . . it is a Freudian theorem that each individual neurosis is not static but dynamic. It is a historical process with its own internal logic. Because of the basically unsatisfactory nature of the neurotic compromise, tension between the repressed and repressing factors persists and produces a constant series of new symptom-formations. . .

. . . The doctrine of the universal neurosis of mankind, if we take it seriously, therefore compels us to entertain the hypothesis that the pattern of history exhibits a dialectic not hitherto recognized by historians, the dialectic of neurosis.^{10(pp11-12)}

Brown goes on to say "a reinterpretation of human history is not only an appendage to psychoanalysis but an integral part of it."^{10(p12)} He emphasizes that "Freud not only maintains that human history can be understood only as a neurosis but also that the neuroses of individuals can be understood only in the context of human history as a whole."^{10(p12)}

Whether we like Freud's views or not is irrelevant when it comes to the use of Freudian theories in interpreting historical developments. Freudian thought has had a tremendous impact on society and human behavior, and its influence is most relevant to historical research into the psychological makeup of women and men. There are numerous other psychologies we must draw on as well,

namely the thinking of Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, humanistic psychology and the newly emerging field of transpersonal psychology.

The application of psychological theories in historical research has given rise to a whole new approach to the study of history, called psychohistory. Much has been written about this approach. Lifton explains its development:

Radical historical moments like ours—characterized by extraordinary intensity of change, inertia, and threat—call forth equally radical responses. This applies not only to social action but to modes of investigation as well. One example of what might be called investigative radicalism is the current intellectual effort . . . to apply psychological methods to the study of historical patterns, present and past. This psychohistorical approach, however, is more than a mere expression of social upheaval. It stems from a general uneasiness among practitioners of both psychology and history about the capacity of their traditional methods to describe and explain man during the latter part of the twentieth century. And a specific uneasiness about certain conventional stances of their professions. . . . The psychologist's tendency to eliminate history; and the historian's impulse to ignore, or else improvise poorly, psychological man.^{11(pp1-2)}

Lifton describes his own work in psychohistory as an effort to "explore ways in which men and women—some of them exposed to the most extreme experiences of our extreme epoch—suffer, survive, adapt, and evolve new modes of feeling and thought, of rebellion, and of life."^{11(p12)} Lifton's work "suggest(s) systematic ways of studying and interpreting . . . diverse, and in

some degree unprecedented, human developments."^{11(p12)}

Nurses need to do research that will provide psychohistorical profiles of living nurses; we need to know their feelings, their thoughts and what has served to give meaning to their lives. This type of research can be of great benefit to future generations of nurses. Young practitioners entering the profession will be able to compare their own experiences with those of nurses who have gone before them, a comparison useful in preventing many of the struggles nurses have lived with in the past.

CREATIVE OPENNESS: FACING NEW HORIZONS IN RESEARCH

These suggestions for historical studies in nursing barely touch the surface of what needs to be done in this area of research. History opens wide opportunities for creative activity by nurses. Modern researchers recognize historical investigation as the parent of various sciences, including anthropology, archeology, biology, sociology, economics, political science, psychology and linguistics. Long before these offspring emerged as well-defined sciences, they were a part of historical investigation and writing. These sciences are still viewed as the "handmaidens" of the historian, who draws heavily from their bodies of knowledge and studies their development both as history made and as history in the making.^{1(p218)}

The study of history gives people their identity and their philosophical reasons for being. For the sake of our own

developing science and art within nursing, certain accepted assumptions about our role in society and its organizations must be questioned. Creative approaches to this questioning can generate exciting developments in nursing research and writing. Just as the foundation for scholarship in nursing should be creativity, this creativity

The foundation for scholarship in nursing should be creativity, and this creativity should itself be founded on a reexamination of our history, an examination that will take us in our thinking well beyond the boundaries and limitations we have lived with in the past.

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Scholars in various disciplines are becoming aware that research in the social sciences has not begun to solve our social and human problems. One critic argues that inquiry will increasingly be "turning inward toward the mechanisms of the knower's mind" or toward the study of "states of mind and their causes—states of mind such as happiness, bad temper and boredom."¹² He concludes that the traditional methods of experimental science do not lend themselves to the full and adequate exploration of human emotions.

In the cultivation of ourselves as artists and scientists, self-knowledge and

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self-understanding are of paramount importance. As we understand ourselves and our emotions more fully, we can feel more secure and more competent when working with both healthy clients and acutely ill ones. With creativity as our base, and with strong historical

knowledge and awareness, nurses can become pioneers in developing new types of inquiry as inquiry itself shifts away from experimental science and turns inward toward self-knowledge and self-understanding.

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