
Editorial

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THE PREVAILING methodology of nursing research is grounded in the scientific method, which is based on context stripping. Yet, the human experience—the focus of nursing inquiry—is context dependent; ie, it can be understood only within its context. Certain aspects of human behavior are not amenable to scientific explanation. The scientific method alone cannot be expected to produce knowledge of a discipline based on assumptions of holism and open systems. Munhall¹ has taken a similar position and juxtaposed the characteristics of the scientific method with the stated values of the nursing profession. A unitary, organismic view of people and health requires methodology consistent with these basic assumptions.

Other authors have addressed this issue and offered methodological alternatives. Mishler² suggests three: phenomenology, sociolinguistics, and ethnomethodology. According to Mishler, phenomenology seeks to identify enduring reciprocities that constitute relevant meanings of events. The purpose of sociolinguistics is to identify context-dependent rules. In ethnomethodology, the objective is to remedy indexical properties of discourse, those dependent on context.

The characteristics suggested by these methods, ie, enduring reciprocities and context dependence, together with my previous experience in trying to synthesize nursing diagnoses, lead me to the conclusion that the methodology appropriate for the development of nursing knowledge is the methodology of pattern. The assessment framework developed by the nurse theorist group of the National Conference on Classification of Nursing Diagnosis requires identification and description of the pattern of the person being diagnosed. The pattern is reflective of the whole person in interaction with the environment.

How can one define pattern? Some of the characteristics of pattern are configuration, design, identifiable/recognizable, dynamic,

and meaning. Qualifiers might include rhythm, composition, and intensity.

How can pattern be identified? According to Beal, "pattern interpretation is limited by the level of awareness of the individual."^{3(p12)} The evolution of awareness has depended on a complex combination of the senses, such as sight, hearing, touch, etc, but even as one reaches a high level of sensitivity in terms of this input, one realizes that what one sees or hears is only a part of a greater reality. Intuition tells us that there is more there than meets the eye. Beal asserts that pattern is omnidirectional, multidimensional, and omnipotent—what we sense of this depends on our point of view. Beal continues: "Individuals who spend all their waking hours in rational, everyday consciousness are functioning below their optimal level. . . ."^{3(p15)}

As Ellis⁴ has suggested, the human being is the best instrument to assess human experience. If the sensitivity of the human being is diminished, a valuable tool is lost. Beal points out that introspection is discouraged in Western culture and that "higher significant data can only be acquired by going into ourselves—for we are the observers and the interpreters of the world."^{3(p15)}

Pattern processing is subjective and has two essential components: enhancement and pattern recognition.³ Enhancement is the process of bringing things into focus, of improving the overall appearance of the whole pattern. At the same time, one aspect of enhancement is concerned with only portions of the whole pattern and enlarges the subtle or extracts information that is buried in background clutter. As this process proceeds, the apparent absence of pattern is important and may reveal disorganization or a cue to search for the larger pattern of which it is a part.

Pattern recognition is at the heart of awareness. In animals, recognition of the pattern of the predator is necessary for survival. We are familiar with the experience of recognizing a

familiar voice or pattern of movement. Sometimes at first meeting there is the click of pattern recognition of two harmonious souls.

Beal summarizes his position regarding the patterns we observe: "The world exists on interpenetrating levels of varying degrees of reality. Each level is, as it were, a precipitate from, and a partial expression of, the level above it."^(p46) This view is similar to Bohm's conceptualization of explicate and implicate order. Basically, Bohm⁷ asserts that the universe possesses an implicate order that is undivided and that the physical manifestations that can be perceived (living organisms, physical objects) constitute the explicate order that is a manifestation of the whole. All of the things that appear to be separate but interacting entities are really part of a larger undivided whole.

Knowledge that is based on a method that separates and isolates entities does not reflect a holistic view. If we continue to regard our theories, based on such a method, as descriptions of reality, we suffer from the illusion of the world as separate but interacting fragments. Some have said that wholeness is only an ideal and that fragmentation is the reality. Bohm asserts that "what should be said is that wholeness is what is real, and that fragmenta-

tion is the response of the whole to man's action, guided by illusory perception, which is shaped by fragmentary thought."^(p7) "... So what is needed is for man to give attention to his habit of fragmentary thought, to be aware of it, and thus bring it to an end."^(p7) What Bohm calls for is not an integration of thought or a kind of imposed unity, such as we do when we try to sum up or synthesize the facts. Such a product is merely another fragment. Our different ways of thinking are different ways of looking at reality. The whole is not perceived in any one view but is grasped implicitly.

REFERENCES

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