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am sure there are many other possible solutions.

However, while there may be many solutions, the problem remains: Without accurate information about research being conducted in the discipline, can we ever know exactly what is the state of the art?

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*Author's response:*

I am genuinely sympathetic to Ms. Nicoll's comments about the exclusion of unpublished works (particularly theses and dissertations) in my article, "Research Testing Nursing Theory: State of the Art." However, Ms. Nicoll makes the assumption that the decision to exclude unpublished work was mine, when it was not.

Some background information should help clarify this point. The database for this article (ie, the 62 studies mentioned therein) primarily came from a manuscript of mine soon to be published in the *Annual Review of Nursing Research (ARNR)* (see reference number 12). Because the *ARNR* series are edited volumes with many contributors, the editors have had to establish some basic guidelines to ensure consistency across reviews. One of my guidelines was that the review was to include *published* research; use of unpublished doctoral dissertations was discouraged. Since this was editorial policy that I felt could be legitimately justified, I honored it.

Nevertheless, clarification of this point does not elucidate the conceptual issue of whether unpublished works (in particular, theses and dissertations) should be included in state of

the art reviews or other works. The two sides of this issue have been alluded to by Ms. Nicoll. Let me spell them out more explicitly, as I have heard the arguments.

1. *Against use of unpublished doctoral dissertations:* Doctoral dissertations are conducted primarily to learn about research; thus they contain many more conceptual and methodological problems than research conducted by seasoned researchers. Consequently, few manuscripts based on doctoral dissertations get published in leading research journals because they cannot meet the rigorous standards of scientific merit. Therefore, to include them in written works would jeopardize the validity of the works as the conclusions drawn may be based on invalid data that have not met peer-reviewed scientific standards. However, if data from doctoral dissertations remain unpublished, one is left with one of two unsettling conclusions: The author of the dissertation chose not to publish the results of the dissertation, for whatever reasons, thus neglecting a professional responsibility to publish research results, or the author attempted to publish the dissertation data but was unsuccessful, thus raising doubts about the study's scientific merit.

2. *In defense of use of unpublished doctoral dissertations:* Because research is unpublished does not mean it lacks scientific merit. Doctoral dissertation research follows carefully specified university research requirements and is conducted under the auspices of a committee of research experts, thus helping to ensure scientific validity. In addition, the scientific body of knowledge in nursing is relatively new; therefore, we cannot afford to dismiss the research of an increasingly growing number of potential scholars—doctoral students or candidates. To exclude their research from a state of the

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art review (or other works) could invalidate the review (or other works) to the degree that the conclusions drawn with the dissertation data would be different from those drawn without the dissertation data.

Because use of doctoral dissertations in manuscripts is a controversial issue, there is not a right or wrong answer regarding their usage. The challenge is to construct rationally justifiable arguments for one's position. I have tried to show both sides of the issue, as well as underscore the point that the decision may neither be easy nor solely in the author's hands.

In this regard, then, whether or not my state of the art review was limited or inaccurate depends on where one stands on the preceding arguments, as the ultimate concern on both sides of this issue is the possibility of invalid conclusions. In my article the criteria for the studies' inclusion or exclusion were clearly identified (see p 2), and the conclusions were carefully generalized to that database and not beyond (see p 10).

Ms. Nicoll makes another assumption about my article—that I did not include unpublished studies (in particular, dissertations) because they are hard to locate. She is correct in her assertion that I did not use dissertations in my article (for reasons previously noted); however, she is incorrect in her assertion that I did not locate dissertation content relevant to my topic. Through systematic hand searches,

a research assistant and I located all dissertation abstracts in *Dissertations Abstracts International* from 1952–1984 that explicitly cited the nursing models of Dorothy Johnson, Calista Roy, Dorothea Orem, Martha Rogers, and Margaret Newman. I would be happy to share these references with any interested readers, as I was willing to share the 62 studies in the article under discussion.

The last point Ms. Nicoll raises concerns the process of disseminating and communicating research results. On this point, I am in total agreement with her. Collecting data for the article under discussion was a time-consuming and painstaking task because of the extensive hand searches involved. These hand searches were necessary because the vast majority of research based on nursing models contains neither the names of the theorists nor the models in the studies' titles or abstracts. We in nursing do need to improve our strategies for cataloguing and retrieving research studies, especially those based on nursing and related discipline models.

In sum, then, the use of unpublished research in scholarly writings is controversial. To avoid this controversy, the investigator must make every effort to conduct quality research that has the highest probability of being accepted for publication in a leading research journal. Fortunately, in nursing today, several such journals exist and others are on the horizon.

Mary Silva, RN, PhD

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