
From the editor

DISCOMFORTS OF KNOWLEDGE

It is always interesting to me to notice which *Advances in Nursing Science* issue topics bring forth a large response from nursing's community of scholars, and which topics yield few manuscripts. I have not yet developed a systematic theory about my observations, nor have I gone so far as to collect systematic empirical data. Nevertheless, when the hours of preparation for the peer-review process grow along with the seemingly endless mountains of paper, I cannot help but reflect on the nature of the topic that brought forth such an impressive response. Likewise, when a cycle emerges with an unpredictably skimpy stack of manuscripts—and part of me celebrates the relative freedom from editorial demands—I usually spend a few of the “extra” moments pondering the nature of nursing's priorities, and speculating about the nature of the knowledge that nurses have yet to develop.

Preparation of this issue (15:1) represents one of those times when I experienced the dissonance of a welcomed relief in the usual workload, along with a nagging discomfort that collectively the nursing community may be overlooking something. For me, nursing has traditionally been about the most simple, fundamental, and essential of human experiences. At the same time, in a world that increasingly values the abstract and complex, and that profits from mystification and obfuscation, that which is simple becomes a taken-for-granted commodity deserving of little serious attention.

The essential comforts of the human body/spirit, so long associated with that which is woman, are assumed to be freely granted by those who naturally acquire the know-how of “making comfortable” by virtue of genetics or gender socialization. Further, human comfort and pain, as Nel Noddings has brilliantly set forth,¹ are experiences that are also closely associated with Western theologies and ideas about evil. To indulge in “excessive” comfort, or to move to alleviate an undeserving person's pain, is to participate in evil. To suffer certain types of pain, such as that of childbirth, is to somehow atone for evil.

Reflecting on these associations, I wonder what nurse scholars might explore in our collective ideas and value systems to free any barriers to seriously developing the knowledge nurses need to provide comfort to others, or to alleviate human pain and suffering. I selected these two concepts for an issue topic of *ANS*, not because they are necessarily related to one another, but because they are each fundamental to the nature of human experiences involved in almost every nursing interaction. In ways familiar to no other professional group, time after time nurses meet and greet others who need comfort, or who need relief from pain. Further, nurses do not perceive that our “real” job is done if we merely pass a few moments offering a prescriptive form of relief or assurance. Nurses sit with the person in pain, or share the nagging discomfort for hours on end, or return time and time again seeking to bring comfort in situations where there is little comfort.

What do nurses know, and what do nurses need to know, to do what we do? It is time to return with pride and with utter commitment to the fundamental and essential arts upon which our practice is built. It is time to claim and reclaim the roots of the body/spirit connection that are essential for human health and wholeness. I applaud the authors whose manuscripts became a part of this important issue, and all of those who presented manuscripts that are not published herein. Each of these authors, along with a growing number of other nurse scholars, is focusing on foundational issues that could be among nursing's highest priorities. It is my hope that *ANS* readers will continually call one another to seriously attend to these taken-for-granted and day-to-day human experiences. I hope that nurses will collectively move boldly into a future where knowing about, and doing something about human needs for comfort and relief from pain are clearly within nursing's realm.

REFERENCE

1. Noddings, N. *Women and Evil*. Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press; 1989.

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