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Unitary Appreciative Inquiry

Cowling, W. Richard III RN, PhD

▼ Author Information

Associate Professor; School of Nursing; Virginia Commonwealth University; Richmond, Virginia

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Unitary appreciative inquiry is described as an orientation, process, and approach for illuminating the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence that are the pattern of human life. It was designed to bring the concepts, assumptions, and perspectives of the science of unitary human beings into reality as a mode of inquiry. Unitary appreciative inquiry provides a way of giving fullest attention to important facets of human life that often are not fully accounted for in current methods that have a heavier emphasis on diagnostic representations. The participatory, synoptic, and transformative qualities of the unitary appreciative process are explicated. The critical dimensions of nursing knowledge development expressed in dialectics of the general and the particular, action and theory, stories and numbers, sense and soul, aesthetics and empirics, and interpretation and emancipation are considered in the context of the unitary appreciative stance. Issues of legitimacy of knowledge and credibility of research are posed and examined in the context of four quality standards that are deemed important to evaluate the worthiness of unitary appreciative inquiry for the advancement of nursing science and practice.

Unitary appreciative inquiry was developed as a method for uncovering the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human existence to inform the development of nursing science and to guide the practice of nursing.¹⁻⁵ It is grounded in the concepts, assumptions, and perspectives of the broad conceptual and theoretic frame of reference known as the science of unitary human beings developed and refined by Rogers.⁶ Unitary appreciative inquiry was created, in part, on the premise that nursing needs, in addition to its current methods of inquiry, approaches that avoid the neglect of important facets of human life that are not fully accounted for when human phenomena are "clinicalized" with an over-emphasis on diagnostic representations.¹

The development of unitary appreciative inquiry is in line with the pleas for the development of methods that are suited to answering questions that will

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advance nursing science and theory.^{7,8} In particular, Thorne and her colleagues have called for the use of noncategorical qualitative alternatives to traditional methods responding to nursing's unique knowledge mandate that "has gradually shifted the priorities within our research enterprise to the point that we can begin to build methods that are grounded in our own epistemological foundations, adhere to systematic reasoning of our own discipline, and yield legitimate knowledge for our practice."⁸(p172) Of particular importance to these authors is the species of knowledge requisite for nursing practice, most notably general knowledge of the type that enhances particularization in practice as suggested by Dzurec.⁹

Although unitary appreciative inquiry is grounded in the science of unitary human beings, it responds to common disciplinary challenges for knowledge creation expressed in a number of critical dimensions. These dimensions are the dialectics between the general and particular or the universal and unique, action and theory, empirics and aesthetics, stories and numbers, sense and soul, and interpretation and emancipation. This article serves to explicate what unitary pattern appreciation is, how it may inform the knowledge dialectics of nursing science and practice, and to what extent it can be counted on as legitimate and credible.

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UNITARY APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: WHAT IS IT?

Unitary appreciative inquiry has a primary focus on seeking to know the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life as a context for understanding phenomena and conditions of concern to nursing and guiding action in practice. It has an orientation, involves a process, and uses a set of approaches or practices that serve to actualize ontologic and epistemologic assumptions of a unitary-transformative paradigm.^{1-5,10} Unitary appreciative inquiry originally was designed as a method of research and later as a method of practice. Subsequently it was combined into a unitary appreciative endeavor blending research and practice elements toward a potential praxis. It generates theory that is both general and particular, serving the parties engaged in the endeavor, the inquirer-participants. It was designed for inquiry related to individuals, groups, families, communities, or societies, but it has been used primarily with individuals and with a community.

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Orientation

The orientation of appreciative inquiry arises from the assumptions, principles, and concepts of unitary science.⁶ It is a conscious choice freely made and openly acknowledged by the researcher/practitioner to use the metaphysics of the unitary perspective as a means of viewing, seeking, and envisioning human life and possibilities. This orientation requires taking a stance toward inquiry that extends the vision of possibility for all participants. The basic referent of inquiry is the underlying pattern of human life that is reflected in one's experience, perceptions, and expressions.³ The goal is the appreciation of wholeness, uniqueness, and essence manifested as a singular pattern, a process termed "pattern appreciation."¹⁻³ Whether the inquiry pertains to an individual, group, family, community, or society, the referent point is the field pattern of that entity. This form of inquiry requires an inclusive view of what counts as pattern information and involves multiple modes of awareness. The field pattern reflects the environment as all aspects of the context of human life. By seeking to know the pattern in its fullness, one comes to know environment; for example, when discussing despair with women, I have come to know context or environment through their experiences. A construction process of synopsis and synthesis is used for understanding information that emerges from unitary appreciative inquiry encounters.

The format for conveying and presenting pattern appreciation is dependent on

what is meaningful for the participants and what best captures the fullness of the pattern as experienced by the participants. Actions of practice and design of inquiry emerge from the knowing participation in change inherent in the appreciative process. Concepts and theories of unitary nursing science and practice emerge that are specific to the case but may inform broader theory development. Examination across cases yields knowledge of potential universals of human life patterning.

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Process

The process of unitary appreciative inquiry involves four essential aspects. The process is guided by the overarching ideal of appreciative knowing and is fundamentally participatory, synoptic, and transformative.^{1,3} Although unitary appreciative inquiry was developed independently from the appreciative inquiry in organizational life proposed by Cooperrider and Srivastva,¹¹ there are striking similarities. In particular, the conceptualization of appreciation as a way of knowing is consistent with a unitary perspective. Appreciative inquiry in organizational life is portrayed by its developers as "a viable complement to conventional forms of action research"¹¹(p129) and its potential target for knowing is organizational life. Unitary appreciative inquiry evolved from an intellectual commitment to the unitary view of existence as relevant to nursing and from a desire to develop a method that would be suited to exploring the fullness and richness of human life to inform nursing science and art. The potential target of unitary appreciative inquiry is individual, group, family, or societal life. Rather than being grounded in organizational conceptualizations and being concerned with organizational life, unitary appreciative inquiry is grounded in unitary conceptualizations and is concerned with human life. In spite of these contrasts, the language of appreciative inquiry in organizational life is consistent with a unitary perspective in many instances.

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Appreciative knowing

The ideal of appreciative knowing is best described as going beyond questions of epistemology and having as its basis a metaphysical concern positing that human life is a miracle that never can be comprehended fully.^{11,12} Using the language of Cooperrider and Srivastva and replacing the words "social," "organization," and "organizing" with the words "human," "existence," and "living," respectively, as noted in brackets, for a unitary slant, "more than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of [*human existence*] we are compelled to study."¹¹(p131) Further, "serious consideration and reflection on the ultimate mystery of being engenders a reverence for life that draws the researcher to inquire beyond the superficial appearances to deeper... life generating essentials and potentials of [*human*] existence."¹¹(p131) The unitary appreciative inquirer is "drawn to affirm, and thereby illuminate, the factors and forces involved in [*living*] that serve to nourish the human spirit."¹¹(p131) Again, the focal points of organizational appreciative inquiry and unitary appreciative inquiry ideals are distinct, but the conceptualization is metaphysically consistent.

Appreciative inquiry, whether organizational or unitary, embraces the notion of a type of knowing that is different from critical knowing. Human life is viewed as a miracle of a variety of ordinary and extraordinary forces and is characterized by relatively unknowable mystery. This means that appreciative knowing seeks for something it can never fully know, and can probably never accurately and completely represent, particularly with language or diagnostic boxes. The power and possibility of appreciative knowing is the realization of the inquirer/participant that I/we have chosen, in spite of the unverifiability of the miracle and mystery of life, not to become "tranquilized by the trivial."¹¹(p163) As an inquirer-participant, I come to be with another or other inquirer-participants, to reach to see a pattern that reflects the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the individual or group. That pattern, when represented and reflected on, provides a way of understanding

human life conditions and situations that has potential to go beyond fragmentation, normative thinking, and superficial comprehension. As was pointed out by Marcel [12](#) and noted by Cooperrider and Srivastva,[11](#) a problem is something that bars my passage, whereas a mystery is something I find myself caught up in. Further, according to Kolb [13](#) and also noted by Cooperrider and Srivastva,[11](#) unlike criticism that is based on skepticism, appreciation is a process of affirmation based on belief, trust, and conviction. "This act of affirmation forms the foundation from which vital comprehension can develop.... Appreciative apprehension and critical comprehension are thus fundamentally different processes of knowing."[13](#)(pp104-105)

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Participatory

The metaphysical idea of human life as miracle and mystery gives rise to a "participatory consciousness," whereby there is a personal stake or partnership with the universe.[14](#) It implies that the inquirer-participant is not an alienated observer of what is happening in the world, in this case the intersection of human living with nursing, but rather is a direct participant in this process. In this sense unitary appreciative inquiry is dependent on the willingness of parties involved to come together freely and openly. Mutual understanding of the appreciative process is of extreme importance. This means being clear about "the egalitarian ideal inherent in the relationship, the openness to emergent discovery in the work, the potential for negotiation, and that potential outcomes are not predicted or prescribed."[1](#) (p21)

The capacity of humans to participate knowingly in change and in patterning is one of the central tenets of the science of unitary human beings. Opportunities for mutual discovery by inquirer-participants create possible avenues of action. Chosen actions emerge from appreciative knowing in exploration of unitary pattern. Although there is a partnership between a nurse and participants, all seen as inquirer-participants, "the participant is viewed as an expert on his or her own life and the source of his or her own power and knowledge."[1](#) (p21) Acausality and unpredictability are notions of a unitary perspective that are inconsistent with the ideal of control and imposed expectations or outcomes. Change is an emergent of knowing participation, and thus participatory relating is a cornerstone of unitary appreciative inquiry.

The capacity of humans to participate knowingly in change and in patterning is one of the central tenets of the science of unitary human beings.

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Synoptic

The process used for considering information from the appreciative encounters is synoptic. It is derived from the idea of synoptic empiricism [15](#) employed by Murphy [16](#) in his research on transformation. "Synopsis is the deliberate viewing together of aspects of human experience which for one reason or another, are generally kept apart by the plain man and even by the professional scientist or scholar."[15](#)(p8) The object of synopsis in unitary appreciative inquiry is on sensing an emerging pattern that reflects the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life. "Thus, aspects of human life, namely the experiences, perceptions, and expressions associated with living are viewed together in an inclusive way to reveal the fullest picture of the inherent wholeness."[1](#) (p20) Inquirer-participants seek for themes, commonalities, connections, and relationships among the data of experience, perception, and expressions. An assortment of ways of knowing may be employed. The intent is to "reveal a compelling sense of wholeness amidst the variety of phenomena of life"[1](#) (p20) inherent in a unitary pattern or, to use a weaving analogy, to see beyond threads to the tapestry.

All forms of information are important to the inquirer-participants, and

synopsis implies an inclusive view of what counts as pattern information. Although focus is on experience, perceptions, and expressions associated with living, phenomena, regardless of category or label such as physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual, are included as pattern information.^{1,3} This encompasses information from inquirer-participants about the environmental and social context of living, including the experience and perception of barriers and forces that inhibit full expression of life. Unitary appreciative knowing does not strip environment or context from the synopsis, rather, appreciating a unitary pattern involves appreciating environment and context. Everything that emerges as information from the appreciative engagement and encounters is viewed and understood contextually as arising from wholeness and reflecting pattern, not parts that do not exist in the unitary perspective. "The multiple, and sometimes seemingly disparate, manifestations of the field pattern form an ensemble of information that conveys a singularity of expression."⁶ (p140) Developing one's synoptic ability to sense life pattern and wholeness is one of the goals of appreciative inquiry.

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Transformative

There are three ways in which the unitary appreciative process is potentially transformative:

1. the way in which it seeks to understand a condition of existence
2. the use of pandimensional or unitive consciousness
3. the development of one's self as an instrument of appreciation

The phenomena associated with human living are seen in a new light and a new context when attention is given to the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human existence through appreciative knowing. An example of this transforming potential occurred when working with women in appreciating the condition of living in despair. Revelations emerge "that go beyond the tendency to treat and/or understand the despair as a symptom of a disease or single condition."¹ (p22) Emphasis is placed in the unitary appreciative process on the essentials, potentials, and possibilities that exist within the wholeness of life and that reflect the uniqueness of each being.¹

Unitary appreciative inquiry also offers inquirer-participants the possibility of looking at one's life situation and change within the perspective of pandimensional awareness or unitive consciousness, which is a concept of the unitary framework. This view is not imposed on the process but is offered by the nurse participant as a way of seeing time, space, and movement that may or may not be useful. It is critical to consider both unitary and nonunitary ways of understanding change in alignment with respect for all participants. Ultimately, the choice of viewing change is acknowledged and embraced as an aspect of the participatory and exploratory nature of unitary appreciative inquiry. Pandimensional awareness is congruent with the spiritual concept of "unitive consciousness,"¹⁷ when individuals become referent to infinity, meaning that they realize infinite potential and infinite time-space-movement-change. It has been described as a state where sensing, thinking, and feeling become a unified continuum not limited by bodily boundaries, and time is experienced as "a new birth and what is being born is not merely the product of the past, not merely the cause of some earlier effect, but rather part of a ceaseless cosmos of revelation."¹⁷ (p66) This means that we cease locating ourselves as finite. "We are movement and flow. Our careers, our health, our families and possessions may temporarily represent a harbor of our sense of self, but ultimately we are always far more."¹⁷ (p67) It is this sense of revelation and possibility that offers the potential for transformation.

Finally, the transformative potential for inquirer-participants is in the development of one's self as an instrument for unitary appreciative knowing. The

quest in appreciative knowing requires attention to all realms of data, and, consequently, one must develop data acquisition skills that allow for the data to reveal themselves. This can be likened to spiritual practices such as Zen. In Zen practices, injunctive tools are used for developing an ability to sense data disclosure.¹⁸ The injunctive tools are developing in the quest for unitary appreciative knowing and need to be specified, honed, refined, and clarified. In essence, the inquirer-participant possesses a willingness to use injunctive devices that will open one to the revelation of unitary pattern data. Likewise, this inquiry process calls for using data in ways that respond to the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the individuals or the group involved. Inquiry design choices and action-practice strategies evolve from effectively using the injunctive tools of appreciative inquiry. This process requires at least a relative transformation toward being a more sensitive instrument of awareness. The aim is toward "appreciating an inherent wholeness that illuminates potentials of understanding and possibilities of action."¹ (p23)

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Approach

Unitary appreciative inquiry is an approach that actualizes the ontologic and epistemologic assumptions of a unitary worldview and addresses the metaphysical concerns of an appreciating orientation toward human life. It is important to emphasize that the set of practices that comprise the approach emerge from appreciative knowing and are individualized consistent with the particular situation and inquiry endeavor. The elements of the approach outlined are *suggestions* for implementing a plan of unitary appreciative inquiry.

The scientist/practitioner seeks or is sought out for the purposes of exploration of a life situation, phenomenon, or concern from a unitary perspective. The scientist/practitioner describes the inquiry endeavor, including its focus on unitary field pattern, emphasizing that the approach is aimed at appreciating the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the particular situation, phenomenon, or concern. The unitary appreciative inquiry is approved as a research project through the typical human subjects review, and an informed consent for participants is provided. A partnership is suggested that embraces all involved as coequal participants in the appreciative inquiry endeavor. The term "inquirer-participants" is used for both the scientist/ practitioner and all other participants. Specific intentions of the inquirer-participants are made explicit with one another, and a form and structure for the unitary appreciative endeavor are agreed upon. This can take the form of dialogue, discussion, interview, observation, or any practice or practices that illuminate the underlying human life pattern. Storytelling, poetry, photography, drawing, and music have been used creatively for this purpose in appreciative inquiries. Other modes of inquiry and ways of knowing may be integrated into the approach consistent with achieving the deepest and fullest picture of the pattern.

Documentation of experience, perceptions, and expressions are accomplished through journaling, audiotaping and/or videotaping, photographing (including the photographing of meaningful artifacts), recording music, and actual creative products. The choice for documentation is based on what best reflects pattern information that is meaningful to participants. Journaling for the scientist/practitioner may involve theoretic notes, methodologic notes, peer review notes, and general reflective notes. All documentation is shared among participants if requested. The appreciative inquiry lasts for a period of time agreed upon by participants to meet their shared expectations and desires. The scientist/practitioner sees the other participants as the experts and honors and respects their wishes for determining the nature and length of the appreciative engagement. Some engagements have lasted for more than a year and others for only several weeks.

Synopsis is used to create a pattern profile that is a construction based on the information that emerges from the appreciative inquiry. The form of the profile is determined by the participants according to what meaningfully represents the

underlying pattern as reflected in experience, perceptions, and expressions of participants and captures the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of life. The profile can be constructed by the scientist/practitioner, by the other participant or participants, or it can be a joint venture. In some cases the scientist/practitioner may facilitate the construction. In cases where I have developed the profile, I have shared it with a participant who reviews it to assess whether it conveys the richness and fullness of the participant's life experience. It is altered depending on that assessment. The primary voice in the process and content of the profile construction is always that of participants other than the scientist/practitioner. That voice is used to determine if the profile portrays life as lived by the participants. In all cases in which I created a profile and shared it with a participant, it was viewed as a gift, and I experienced the creation as an opportunity to acknowledge and honor the person's experience as perceived and expressed. However, the ideal profile would be created by the participant himself or herself. The profiles that have been developed in the praxis are primarily in the form of stories that integrate metaphor, images, and music.

The pattern profile becomes a referent point for knowledge development that serves practice aims and for the development of unitary theory. Because the knowledge is specific to the individual case, the concepts and theory generated reflect the uniqueness of the particular pattern. The scientist/practitioner may use the appreciative knowledge of the pattern profile as a context for exploration for participant-centered change. The scientist/practitioner also may generate a theoretic synthesis from the unitary appreciative knowledge to posit further unitary theory, a kind of situation-specific theorizing. It is also possible to look for universals that may exist across cases as long as the individual differences are acknowledged while seeking the commonalities. This could be considered a group profile in the case of individuals with relatively similar situations. A report may be generated and shared with professional audiences through publications or presentations with the same respect for confidentiality and anonymity as any other formal research report and with the permission of participants.

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UNITARY PATTERN APPRECIATION AND CRITICAL DIALECTIC DIMENSIONS

Nursing scientists and practitioners are faced with an array of disciplinary tensions or dialectics that influence the course and content of the advancement of nursing knowledge that supports a practice discipline. Significant tensions create dialectics, namely of the general and the particular, action and theory, sense and soul, stories and numbers, aesthetics and empirics, and interpretation and emancipation. Unitary appreciative inquiry creates a potential dialectic bridge or conversation between these tensions.

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General and particular

The general and the particular dialectic centers around the need for practice knowledge that is shared by persons in similar situations and that is particular to the individual case.⁸ Thorne and colleagues cited the work of Dzurec,⁹ who described "a practice and scholarship climate within nursing that is clamoring for general knowledge of the sort that enhances particularization in practice."^{8(p171)} Pointing to the work of Mitchell and Cody,⁷ they claim that nursing theory has been one device facilitating the need by nurses for "forms of inquiry that reveal processes for applying aggregated knowledge to individual cases."^{8(p170)}

The general and the particular dialectic centers around the need for practice knowledge that is shared by persons in similar situations and that is particular to the individual case.

In the 1960s, Allport ¹⁹ addressed the issue of the general and unique in

psychologic science, describing research methods that provided two equally indispensable types of differentiated information. This holds true as well in nursing; we require information for practice of the varieties of general/universal *and* particular/unique. Allport described the information as dimensional for the general form and morphogenic or idiographic for the unique. "Dimensional information is derived from the commonalties that run through all individuals"^{20(p57)} and "morphogenic information is derived from the unique world and experience of the particular individual."^{20(p57)} Using a similar type of case scenario as that of Allport, if we were working with a person, Mary, who is depressed, and we used dimensional information based on research and clinical standards that are evidence based, we would have normative knowledge of what we might anticipate will occur and what strategies have been effective in large samples of individuals like Mary. We could use this information in helping Mary, and it probably would be useful. What we do not know from this information are the specifics of Mary's situation. We do not know from dimensional information that Mary has had experiences that lend themselves to her recovery, that she has a strong belief that helps her transcend some of her pain, and that she has a commitment not to use medications to treat her illness. This is a form of morphogenic information that complements dimensional information. It may be argued that nursing has become overly dependent on dimensional information in its endeavor to have a sound theoretic and scientific base. At the same time, nursing has a history of sensitivity to the individual receiving care. The general/universal and particular/unique dialectic in nursing is a dialectic of dimensional and morphogenic information and ways of knowing.

Unitary appreciative inquiry is a bridge between the general and particular, creating dialogue between the two. It starts with a premise of wholeness and uniqueness in each human life while it simultaneously comes from a theoretic base that encompasses principles about the nature of change, including human trends. Engaging appreciative inquiry allows for the generation of morphogenic information that comes from the intense focus on the case. At the same time, appreciative inquiry allows for the generation of dimensional information when the inquirer-participants look across cases or notice similarities or commonalties in other cases. In addition, the scientist/practitioner engaged in a broader program of inquiry guided by the overarching framework of unitary science may be doing a form of theory testing of the general type by comparing findings from the case or cases with other scientific and theoretic work in the field. This is not the same as traditional theory testing research driven by experimental and quasiexperimental designs, and the contribution of unitary appreciative inquiry is clearly more of the morphogenic variety. It offers the scientist/practitioner a tool for complementing dimensional information.

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Action and theory

Theory has been viewed as central to the formulation of reality, and the theoretic contributions of science as among the most powerful resources that humans have for contributing to change and development. However, nurses who deliver care are bound to be skeptical of theory that does not inform action in practice. Experience with graduate students suggests that the link between theory and action is rather tenuous at best. "When theories are viewed as relevant, rarely are those theories specific to nursing."^{21(p132)}

The disconnection between theory and action is exemplified in two major stances taken in nursing by many academicians and practitioners. Practitioners are not likely to see theory as relevant to practice, given the multiplicity of contingencies they face in practice on a day-to-day basis. Academicians are fairly removed from action in practice because of the contingencies they face in academia. It could be that practitioners facing priorities of patient care delivery, economic considerations, immediacy of action requirements, and institutional priorities require action to take precedence over knowledge generated from theory. Academic scholars, on the other hand, unintentionally undermine the development of useful theory because of educational bias and expectations for credible scholarship grounded in detachment, unilateral control, rigor, and

operational precision.²² In a sense, creative theorizing is beleaguered by practitioners and academicians alike.¹¹

It is warranted that practitioners and educators would reject theory derived without attention to pragmatics. Likewise, it is reasonable to call for actions in practice that speak to the wholeness and uniqueness of the person, group, family, community, or society, given nursing's espoused commitment to holistic and individualized care. The dialectic of theory and action is mediated most readily by the notion of "theory in action."

Unitary appreciative inquiry offers a bridge for the dialectic of theory and action in its ability to be action-oriented and theory-generative. The process of appreciative inquiry is one of participatory action and of theory emerging from action. This represents what Cooperrider and Srivastva refer to as a "bold shift in attention whereby theoretical accounts are no longer judged in terms of their predictive capacity, but instead on their generative capacity."¹¹ (p137) Rather than ameliorating the dialectic of theory and action, generative theorizing nourishes the dialectic. It brings about a dialogue between what is taken for granted and what is possible in generating new alternatives for action. In unitary appreciative inquiry, the test of the theory is not its correspondence with observed facts, but its ability to offer provocative possibilities for action.¹¹

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Sense and soul

The rise of modernity in the West was the context for the creation of modern science with a differentiation of it from the cultural value spheres of art and morals. According to Wilber,²³ there was both dignity and disaster in this differentiation. Wilber's disaster was the invasion of scientific materialism and imperialism, which dominated the other value spheres. What accompanied this invasion was the pronouncement that "the Great Nest of matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit could be thoroughly reduced to matter alone."²³ (p13) Although nursing scholarship reflects the reductionism of modernity, there are many scholars of nursing who theorize about and research matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit connections in an integrative way. The vast amount of support for research is arguably within the domains of matter, mind, and body. There is minor support for spiritual inquiries in spite of nursing's avowed embrace of diverse domains of inquiry.²¹ Thus, the dialectic of sense and soul is evident in the work of nursing knowledge development.

Unitary appreciative inquiry requires attention to all realms of data, sensory and soul, in order to be truly unitary. Disregarding or denying the existence of physical, mental, or spiritual data diminishes the capacity of the scientist/practitioner to fully appreciate the wholeness of human existence. The goal is to create within a profile the richest representative tapestry reaching across the realms of matter and body and soul and spirit to the inherent pattern of unity that is human life and the fullness of human experience.^{1,3}

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Stories and numbers

There have been considerable debates in nursing about what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge and how knowledge should be generated.²⁴ However, it also can be argued that nursing has come quite some distance in embracing the credibility of both qualitative and quantitative methods and the accompanying roles of stories and numbers, depending on the aims of the research project.^{24,25} A more sophisticated line of argumentative exposition, in juxtaposition to dichotomizing stories and numbers, has evolved that makes the case for distinctions between methodology and methods and the role of paradigm in methods choices.²⁴ The argument is that method "refers to the particular procedures used to gather evidence" and methodology "pertains to a theory of how research is carried out, or the general principles about how to conduct research

and how theory is applied."^{24(p19)} Paradigms do not constrain the methods being used, particularly not on the grounds of the way they have been used historically. More important than the selection of methods is "the way in which methods are used, the ways in which researchers interact with participants, and the ways in which researchers attempt to represent the experience of research participants."^{24(p19)} It has been argued that stories and numbers may be useful in discovering knowledge in any of nursing's paradigms,²⁴ and that in the critical theory paradigm, the fundamental consideration is whether stories and numbers provide persuasive evidence to bring about personal empowerment and social and political change.²⁵

In terms of unitary appreciative inquiry, the assumptions of a unitary perspective and the ideals of an appreciative stance toward knowledge are critical to methodologic concerns but do not constrain scientist/practitioners to either stories or numbers as sources of evidence. Some of the important method choice questions for the unitary appreciative inquirer are:

* In what ways might numbers or stories illuminate the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the unitary pattern of human life?

* Are there ways in which the scientist/practitioner might be informed by stories and numbers to evaluate whether a practice is fragmentary or responsive to personal wholeness?

* In what ways, if any, might stories and numbers be used to highlight unitary changes associated with actions in practice?

* Are there ways in which a combination of stories and numbers might more fully reflect manifestations of a unitary field and of the mutual environment/human process?

* In what ways are stories and numbers useful to the participants in shedding light on what is and what might be possible?

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Aesthetics and empirics

The complementary yet distinctive benefits for nursing of aesthetics and empirics as ways of knowing have been elucidated in the literature.^{26,27} However, there is some tension between the aims of the science and art of nursing knowledge development similar to that of the general and particular tension. The practitioner needs to have practice-oriented knowledge of an aesthetic variety to provide nursing care while at the same time there is a need for normative-oriented knowledge of an empiric variety to guide clinical decisions and meet professional standards for sound practice. The nursing scientist who lives in the academic world understands that the primary mode for advancement arises from research of an empiric variety generating normative-oriented knowledge, even though there may be a high regard for aesthetic knowledge.

One of the goals of many unitary scholars, consistent with the founding mother of unitary science, is to develop theory testing knowledge, including description and explanation, but perhaps not prediction because of the unitary tenet of acausality.⁶ Certainly the conceptual, theoretic, and empiric representations of phenomena from a unitary paradigm perspective are desired. Moreover, if unitary science is a science, it would need its own kind of empirics.²¹

Comparatively, an examination of aesthetic knowing reveals descriptions engendering images of the unitary and the appreciative. Chinn and Kramer ²⁶ define aesthetics as a noun for "the perceptual ability to appreciate artistically valid form" and as an adjective for identifying an object or experience as valid, being coherent in form and substance, conveying a sense of a whole beyond the formative and substantive elements, and evoking a response. The expression of aesthetic knowing is emergent and artistic in art/act or experience-action. Art is

the process of creating an aesthetic object or experience and involves the ability to work with elements in creating a form, as in the pattern profile of unitary appreciative inquiry. It also involves "inner capacities to imagine the whole before it becomes an expression and intuitively brings into being the elements as an integral whole."^{26(p185)} This is the essence of the process of unitary appreciative inquiry.

Rogers ²⁸ was clear about the relationship of art and science and defined the art of nursing specifically within a unitary context, claiming that nursing art is the creative use of knowledge based on unitary theory in practice. The emphasis of unitary scientists primarily has been on the development of unitary empirics, and it may be time to consider the need for unitary aesthetics.²¹ Unitary appreciative inquiry brings empiric and aesthetic aspects into complementary relationships serving dual purposes. The empirical aspects are mainly its theory-generative capacity, and the aesthetics aspects are its orientation toward action in practice.

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Interpretation and emancipation

There is an ongoing debate among some nursing scholars about whether the interpretive paradigm in nursing science can be emancipatory.²⁹ Specifically, the debate has centered on the issue of praxis, that is, the challenge that interpretive research is not praxis because it does not meet the critical paradigm standard of explaining and critiquing hegemony, which coincides with emancipation.²⁹ The unitary-transformative paradigm,¹⁰ of which unitary science is an exemplar, has been described as falling within the domain of interpretation. Unitary appreciative inquiry is not precisely hermeneutic inquiry, which is clearly the exemplar of the interpretive paradigm. The unitary appreciative inquiry perspective does share in common with the interpretive paradigm "the ontological assumptions that reality is complex, holistic, and context dependent."^{30(p71)} However, unitary appreciative inquiry does not have as its goal to "understand and derive meaning from the human experience,"^{30(p71)} but rather to illuminate wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life, or what is conceptually labeled "unitary pattern" in theoretic terms, as a referent point for nursing knowledge development, both theoretical and practical.

Likewise, unitary appreciative inquiry is not precisely a form of critical social theory inquiry, which is exemplified by praxis and emancipation. However, unitary appreciative inquiry can be praxis and has emancipation as one of its potentials. Critical theory inquiry effectively uses the device of critique of the institutions and structures that oppress and exploit humans to accomplish social change and praxis accompanied by emancipation of participants.²⁹ Like the appreciative inquiry of organizational life,¹¹ the unitary appreciative inquiry of human life is both pragmatic and visionary as it seeks to expand the universe of exploration, kindle a perception of new possibilities, and foster innovations in human life arrangements and processes. The processes of unitary appreciative inquiry, including the creation of a pattern profile, provide the context for potential emancipation. The profile captures what liberates, as well as what oppresses, as it reaches for wholeness, uniqueness, and essence.

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UNITARY APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: IS IT LEGITIMATE AND CREDIBLE?

Returning to the call by Thorne and her colleagues ⁸ for the building of methods that are grounded in nursing's uniqueness, it is important to note that it was also a call for "legitimate" knowledge and for "credible" research. Although the development of unitary appreciative inquiry is in its infancy, having been used over the past few years with some refinements, the questions of legitimacy and

credibility must be answered in order for this method to be taken seriously as a tool for advancing nursing science and practice. It has been used by one team of researchers to address the pattern of a community and is being used or considered for use in several dissertations.

The issues of legitimacy and credibility were considered from the very beginning and were addressed by a set of approaches based on general tenets of qualitative research credibility, namely member checking, auditing, and peer review.³ These were written with the intent of being beginning ways of achieving credibility and legitimacy, knowing that further development of standards might be necessary. A peer review system is encouraged to assist the scientist/practitioner in ensuring logical consistency in the process. It is desirable to engage a peer reviewer who is familiar with the conceptual system and method, a major challenge given the newness of the method. A peer reviewer's goal would be to enhance the reflective aspects of the process. Member checking is built into the process of unitary appreciative inquiry because of the high priority given to participation, the notion of "inquirer-participants" in an egalitarian relationship, and the primary emphasis on a pattern profile reflecting the voice of the participants. Audit procedures enable review of documentation for grounds for making unitary knowledge claims of the participants. The auditor should be an expert in the unitary conceptual system and understand the method. The case study report can be scrutinized for legitimacy by participants, peer reviewers, and auditors.

Standards of legitimacy and credibility have not been addressed fully by scholars of the unitary-transformative paradigm, generally, or of the unitary conceptual system, specifically. This is in part because of the evolving nature of and diversity within the paradigm and its openness to a variety of perspectives in its current state of development.

In order to address the issues of legitimacy and credibility, a perspective on the quality of inquiry is employed. This more general perspective of quality with its standards was chosen because it encompasses both legitimacy of knowledge and credibility of research that are intertwined, and because the standards "transcend paradigm boundaries."²⁴(p23) The standards are those of Ford-Gilboe and her colleagues, who contend that there are four basic issues to be considered in evaluating the quality of any research: "(1) quality of the data, (2) investigator bias, (3) quality of the research process, and (4) usefulness of the study findings."²⁴(p23)

The quality of data is related to trustworthiness in the interpretive paradigm,³¹ and given the interpretive dimension of unitary appreciative inquiry, the same standards may apply. The gold standard for yielding higher quality data, as it is in interpretive inquiry, may be the diversity of data sources and theoretic schemes used by the researcher, as well as designs that uncover patterns of commonality and uniqueness.²⁴ Unitary appreciative inquiry accomplishes this standard by having an orientation toward inclusiveness of data sources through use of synopsis and synthesis for creating theoretic schemes, and by incorporating approaches that are designed to uncover unitary pattern, which would include uniqueness within cases and commonality across cases.

Again, because there is no current agreed upon standard for handling investigator bias in the unitary perspective, both the standards of interpretive inquiry and critical inquiry are used for the reasons of the interpretive quality, the praxic potential, and the emancipatory goals of unitary appreciative inquiry. Investigator bias relates to the interactivity of the researcher and participant.²⁴ The interpretive position is one of acknowledging interactivity, and even capitalizing on it for gaining data, while strategizing to minimize it "so as not to impose the researcher's viewpoint."²⁴(p24) The critical position is to view interactivity as a powerful force that can be used to benefit the research enterprise, and, therefore, a dialogic interview is the strategy of choice for inquiry.²⁴ The unitary appreciative position is one that creates a blend of these

two positions. It attempts to acknowledge interactivity through a plan of documentation and audit that may uncover instances of imposition of the researcher's voice over the voices of inquirer-participants. However, being unitary in orientation, it acknowledges the mutuality of human existence that may make it difficult to separate voices. Likewise, being appreciative in orientation, it seeks to illuminate factors and forces that contribute to the human condition using the interactivity quality. Further, it is dependent on interactivity to create the potentials for praxis and emancipation.

Once again, because of the nature of unitary appreciative inquiry as interpretive, emancipatory, and having the potential of praxis, the quality of the research process is addressed within the interpretive and critical positions. The principle of confirmability associated with the interpretive paradigm is satisfied by "the use of audit procedures and validation of the findings of the study with research participants."^{24(p24)} The critical position that "the degree of change brought about as part of the research is of primary importance"^{24(p24)} is satisfied also within the unitary appreciative inquiry process. The quality of the research process standard from the appreciative and unitary positions is extended to include the generative-theory capacity of the study ¹¹ and the capacity of the study to provide a context for knowing participation in change.

In unitary appreciative inquiry, the quality standard of the usefulness of study findings veers somewhat from the interpretive and critical positions. As in the interpretive paradigm, there is a desire to obtain transferability to other contexts by seeking rich descriptions of context and sample participants. In addition, the usefulness of the study findings rests in their ability to make a positive difference in the lives of the participants. It also rests in their ability to inform the use of process skills derived from the inquiry that might be applied to other areas of one's personal life or to facilitate broader knowledgeable change. In other words, the unitary appreciative stance concerning usefulness of findings might include the question: To what extent do the study findings illuminate the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of these human lives that would inform knowing participation in change? The critical position on usefulness of study findings relates to applicability to other forms of oppression, and critical inquiry incorporates strategies that ensure this, including sample composition, design of the study, and interpretation of the data.²⁴ Unitary appreciative inquiry clearly is not targeted to the kind of oppression that critical theory addresses. Perhaps unitary appreciative inquiry might be judged on the usefulness of its research findings in understanding the potential for personal oppression that may occur when humans are subjected to nursing practices that do not account for important facets of human life.

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CONCLUSION

Unitary appreciative inquiry responds to the call for developing new paradigm-directed methodologies ²⁴ and the building of methods grounded in nursing's epistemologic foundations.⁸ It provides an orientation, process, and approach that guide the inquiry endeavor aiming to uncover the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life that is unitary pattern, and to mobilize the capacity for knowing participation in change to the benefit of participants. Unitary appreciative inquiry brings the scientist/practitioner together with others to mutually explore a focus of inquiry related to human conditions of concern, with everyone involved becoming inquirer-participants in an egalitarian relationship. The unitary appreciative enterprise is guided by knowledge that comes forth from a unitary understanding of human life. It has both a theory-generative aspect as well as a situation-specific aspect that provide theoretic and practical knowledge. The work of unitary appreciative inquiry considers and embraces critical dimensions of nursing knowledge development, including the general and particular, action and theory, stories and numbers, sense and soul, aesthetics and empirics, and interpretation and emancipation. As part of the development and evolving application of unitary appreciative inquiry, there has been attention to the need for standards of quality, including legitimacy and credibility. These will be crucial in determining whether unitary appreciative inquiry will be considered a

method worthy of advancing the aims of nursing science and practice.

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Key words: appreciative inquiry; method; nursing science; Rogers' science of unitary human beings; unitary inquiry; unitary theory

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