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# From the Editor

## WHERE THEORY AND NURSING PRACTICE SHINE

As the process for selecting manuscripts for this issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* was nearing completion, manuscripts for the next issue, which will focus on the topic of "Theory and Practice," had begun to arrive. The distinction between the two issues began to grow dim as I realized the predominance of theory in the manuscripts addressing emotional and mental health, and how closely the authors linked their theoretical ideas to their practice.

Perhaps this close association is possible because there is little to rely on unless we have a mental image, or a mental construction, of what the emotional/mental world is like, what it consists of, how it functions, and what it all means for human experience. The more directly accessible sensory perceptions concerning the physical world may form a crutch, or a false illusion about those aspects of human experience. Empirical science, which claims to admit as knowledge only that which relies on sensory perceptions, often overlooks the distortions that occur by way of the manipulations, interpretations, and extrapolations involved in obtaining what is taken to stand for a valid sensory measure. The sciences that require indirect measures that ostensibly represent sensory reality, like those dealing with emotional and mental health, are obliged to recognize the possible distortions and interpretations involved in their representations. As a result, theory, or mental constructions to represent, explain, and understand experience are an essential tool—not only for the purposes of developing and creating knowledge, but also for the practical work that addresses the human needs for healing and health in the emotional and mental realms.

The more theoretically oriented realms of inquiry also acquire a healthy level of skepticism, always open to questioning the soundness of the mental constructions, perpetually seeking perhaps a better way to understand the world, and in turn to better address human health and healing. When a theoretical claim or construction seems ill-suited to a particular life experience, or the situation of a particular group of people, the scientists and the practitioners in these fields engage in a form of praxis to revisualize what is accepted knowledge. They go about the dialectic tasks of reflecting on what they themselves observe and on the previously accepted theories and models, questioning the interpretations and conclusions, and working to construct another view that more closely accounts for the experience. Often the new construction provides an extension of, not a replacement for, the previously dominant views. The various perspectives, interpretations, and theories that emerge over time coexist as possibilities for understanding and interpreting human experience.

This open and dynamic theory/practice link that is typical of the less visible/palpable realms of experience has often been derided as "soft" or "lesser" science. In fact, it enriches the scientific endeavor, and it gives a dynamic substance to practical endeavors to improve the human condition.

As the articles in this issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* demonstrate, nursing stands at the forefront in opening the doors of possibility, both for the science that seeks to deepen knowledge of emotional and mental health, and for the practice that seeks to find health and healing. We welcome your responses and comments to these very provocative articles!

—Peggy L. Chinn, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Editor