
Letter to the Editor

Chinn's editorial, "Physiology and the Idea of Holism,"¹ raises a perhaps unintended question of what is meant by holism. As Chinn makes a case for the importance of research about physical phenomena for nursing in general and for publication in *Advances in Nursing Science* in particular, she notes, "... we have consistently reflected an underlying commitment to the fundamental nursing value of holism, calling for works that embrace holistic approaches to the development of nursing knowledge."¹(p287) She goes on to point out that "as nurses and as nurse scholars, all of us have a long tradition of seeking to embrace the whole."¹(p287)

The implication I drew from Chinn's editorial is that scholarly work addressing physical phenomena somehow constitutes holism, presumably in combination with "phenomena that are perceived to be outside the realm of the physical."¹(p287) If my interpretation of Chinn's editorial is correct, her notion of holism must be a sum of parts. That notion of holism is consistent with a philosophical position known as the reaction worldview,² in which people are viewed as bio-psycho-social and, sometimes, spiritual beings. In that worldview, the "bio" part could be construed as physical phenomena.

Or, does Chinn mean that each person is made up of physical and some other parts that have meaning only within the context of the whole, such that the whole person cannot be reduced to distinct parts? That notion of holism is in keeping

with the reciprocal interaction worldview² and the totality paradigm.³

What Chinn cannot mean is a holism consistent with the simultaneous action worldview² and the simultaneity paradigm.³ That is because these two philosophical positions do not permit any consideration of parts. Rather, human beings are viewed as unitary, more than and different from any sum of parts, and recognized by means of patterns of behavior.

I certainly agree with Chinn that nurses seek "to embrace the whole."¹(p287) However, I think it is very important that each one of us is clear about what we mean by the whole, what notion of holism we embrace. One notion is not any better than another but they are different, and they lead to very different approaches to theoretical and empirical scholarship and to practice.

—**Jacqueline Fawcett, PhD, FAAN**
Professor, College of Nursing and Health Sciences
University of Massachusetts at Boston

REFERENCES

1. Chinn PL. From the editor. Physiology and the idea of holism. *Adv Nurs Sci*. 2005;28:287.
2. Fawcett J. From a plethora of paradigms to parsimony in worldviews. *Nurs Sci Q*. 1993;6:56-58.
3. Parse RR. *Nursing Science: Major Paradigms, Theories, and Critiques*. Philadelphia: Saunders; 1987.