

A Unitary Participatory Vision of Nursing Knowledge

W. Richard Cowling, III, PhD, RN, APRN-BC

This article responds to the calls by Margaret Newman for clarifying and expanding the nature of nursing knowledge. The unitary worldview proposed by Newman and the participatory worldview of action research are explicated, highlighting their respective major elements. A synthesis of unitary and participatory worldviews, grounded in a union of the elements of each, is proposed as a vision for the development of nursing knowledge. The unitary, participatory vision described offers the potential for inclusiveness and transcendence of previous perspectives of nursing knowledge. **Key words:** *knowledge development, Newman theory, nursing science, nursing theory, participatory research, participatory worldview, unitary-transformative paradigm*

THIS ARTICLE poses a potential course for revisioning nursing knowledge based on a synthesis of unitary and participatory views of knowledge. The proposal is in response to calls by Newman¹⁻³ for clarifying and expanding the nature of nursing knowledge. Representations of nursing knowledge by Newman¹⁻³ and representations of action science by Reason and Bradbury^{4,5} provide the foundation for the proposal.

Newman has argued for the necessity of clarifying the nature of nursing in general, and more specifically, for a transformation to a more inclusive realm of wholeness.³ Hers is a call to “move to a realm of nursing that *includes and transcends* all of the realms that have gone before,”^{2(p6)} using patterning as the dimension that brings everything together. Reason and Bradbury⁴ assert that the purpose of knowledge making, consistent with action research, is liberation of the human body, mind, and spirit and the making of a better world for everyone—also a purpose of nursing. Referring to Skolimowski’s⁶ work,

they suggest that a style of inquiry that supports such knowledge making requires “the courage to imagine and reach for our fullest human capabilities.”^{4(p11)}

A UNITARY VIEW OF NURSING KNOWLEDGE

Newman² identifies the focal points of nursing knowledge evolution as physical and environmental factors, actions to stabilize and assist patients, interpersonal processes of the nurse-patient relationship, behavioral correlates of health (defined as absence from disease), nursing diagnosis, nursing paradigms and conceptual models, and integration. Newman represents the evolution of nursing knowledge against the backdrop of evolving epistemologies of knowledge, including a science of observables and valid observations. She portrays an evolution in nursing knowledge toward inclusiveness, with each realm of nursing knowledge incorporating prior realms of knowledge. Furthermore, she views these prior realms as special cases of the “patterning of the whole,” which she saw as the realm bringing all aspects together.

Newman’s¹⁻³ views are associated with the science of unitary human beings, the conceptual system from which she developed

From the School of Nursing, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC.

Corresponding author: W. Richard Cowling, III, PhD, RN, APRN-BC, School of Nursing, University of North Carolina, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402 (e-mail: richardcowling@uncg.edu).

her theory of health as expanding consciousness. This conceptual system portrays human beings as fields of energy, entirely whole—not becoming whole, in mutual process with the environment. Each human field has a unique identity or individuation that expresses itself in the form of a pattern. Patterns are not directly observable, but their manifestations are conveyed in objective and subjective ways in a variety of human phenomena—physical/material, emotional/mental, social/cultural, and spiritual/mystical. These manifestations are facets of the wholeness and pattern of human beings or groups of human beings. Wholeness cannot be reduced to any one of these manifestations, but each provides a clue to wholeness and pattern. Newman emphasizes meaning as a critical expression of wholeness and pattern.

Newman² cites Wilber's⁷ description of the evolution of theory as support for her perspective. Wilber proposed a vision of the evolution of theory as moving "from *matter* to *body* to *mind* to *spirit* with each subsequent realm of knowledge *transcending and including* the realm that preceded it."^{2(p3)} His view has been described as a holarchy, rather than a hierarchy, with each of the realms being at once whole and a part of a larger whole. *Hierarchy* implies levels of evolution that are distinct, whereas *holarchy* implies levels of wholeness embedded in previous levels of wholeness. Newman characterizes nursing knowledge as a holarchical progression that "has moved from emphasis on *physical* care to *interpersonal* process to an *integrative* approach to a *unitary* perspective" in which "each succeeding level *transcends and includes* the previous ones."^{2(p3)} In Newman's view, the unitary perspective does not discard physical, interpersonal, and integrative knowledge but accounts for it in the patterning of the whole, which is its primary focus. The unitary perspective accomplishes a current task of nursing, according to Newman, which is "to reconcile the seemingly contradictory points of view"^{2(p3)} existing within nursing's knowledge domain.

Newman³ has built the case for a unified perspective on the discipline. She also calls attention to the tendency of scientists within and outside of nursing to dichotomize things. Wilber,⁸ influenced by Eastern philosophical thinking, described a typical manifestation of solving the problem of opposites as eradicating one, for instance, disease. Newman³ uses the example of fluctuating body temperature as a manifestation of unitary patterning and the process of health *and* disease in one. She argues that there are no boundaries between art and science and between research and practice. In addition, she notes the convergence of various nursing theories, such as caring and health as expanding consciousness, as an indication of movement away from distinct boundaries in conceptualizing nursing knowledge. Newman has suggested further development in this direction, asking, "What is the transcendent unity of theories of nursing?"^{3(p241)}

To answer this question, Newman argues that "the process of emerging nursing knowledge is one of including and transcending that which has gone before."^{3(p243)} She grounds her point of view in the work of Wilber,⁸ who suggested that schools of thought in science are complementary approaches to the various levels of individuals and opposites are complementary aspects of the same reality. Newman emphasizes that literature supports "the synthesis of caring and health with the underlying concepts of wholeness, pattern, mutual process, consciousness, transcendence, and transformation."^{3(p243)} She has compiled a comprehensive statement from authors holding a variety of theoretical convictions to illustrate the transcendent unity of theories of nursing.

Newman¹⁻³ advocates a coherent message to society about nursing that flows from a clear disciplinary perspective. She argues for breaking with a paradigm that focuses on the other as object, fixing things, and hierarchical 1-way interventions. A unitary transformative perspective directs nursing toward the we in relationship, the meaning of the whole, and mutual process partnering,

revealing a transforming world in process.¹

The picture of nursing knowledge that represents Newman's view is emergent and evolving. It can be characterized as follows:

- nursing knowledge grounded in wholeness;
- nursing knowledge focused on patterning;
- nursing knowledge aimed at inclusiveness and transcendence; and
- nursing knowledge open to reconciliation with no boundaries.

Nursing knowledge grounded in wholeness

Newman emphasizes the importance of grounding nursing knowledge in wholeness.^{2,3} She describes her own theoretical and methodological journey in seeking to understand wholeness as the basic concept of the discipline of nursing, consistent with the unitary-transformative paradigm of the discipline.⁹ Newman's perspective is clearly ontological. "Unbroken wholeness is what is real—not the fragments we devise with our way of describing things."^{1(p37)} Cody has insisted that "we are compelled to apprehend, describe, and explain the full breadth of human diversity"^{10(p98)} guided by discipline-wide emphasis on the wholeness of the human being. Consistent with Cody,¹⁰ Newman¹ supports the ideal of a nursing mandate to address the wholeness of the human being, encompassing all its dimensions. Likewise, she acknowledges that recognition of and appreciation for inherent wholeness are critical aspects of the experience of healing.¹¹

Nursing knowledge focused on patterning

Newman has spent much of her career developing the concept and process of pattern recognition as a central focus of her theory of health as expanding consciousness.² She has expanded her underlying conceptualization of patterning as a focus of the discipline

of nursing and a distinguishing characteristic of nursing knowledge. "Attention to *pattern* constitutes the unitary grasp of knowledge the discipline seeks."^{2(p2)} With the focus on patterning, there is a shift in the development of nursing knowledge, which includes and transcends previous dimensions and provides a more encompassing understanding of wholeness. A patterning focus in knowledge development decreases the tendency to perpetuate false dichotomies of the sciences, capturing the dynamic nature of the living process.

Nursing knowledge aimed at inclusiveness and transcendence

Newman's^{2,3} desire for nursing knowledge grounded in wholeness and focused on patterning lead to an agenda aimed at inclusiveness and transcendence. The inclusiveness and transcendence proposed by Newman relate to a progression of nursing knowledge. Knowledge progresses in an expansive way, incorporating previous realms in current realms, and thus creating the content of the discipline. The unitary perspective proposed by Newman² does not discard physical, interpersonal, and integrative knowledge. Furthermore, this unity of nursing knowledge cannot be understood by an integration of parts. The unitary view includes and transcends the integrative view. According to Newman, holography and holoarchy are more consistent explanations of a world of wholeness—the parts contain and reflect the whole as dimensions of wholeness and the unbroken movement of reality.²

Nursing knowledge open to reconciliation with no boundaries

Newman³ has proposed a liberation of boundaries between art and science, research and practice, and nursing theories. She calls for an exploration of no boundaries to prevent alienation of human beings from themselves and their world and to create a context for nursing knowledge that avoids fracturing

human experience. As an aspect of liberating boundaries, Newman advocates a reconciliation of dichotomies in conceptualizing phenomena of concern to nursing science and art. In addition, she advocates a reconciliation of theoretical persuasions in nursing, acknowledging the convergence of various theories of nursing. This reconciliation flows from aims of inclusiveness and transcendence, and suggests the possibility of unity among theories of nursing such as the one she proposes.

A PARTICIPATORY VIEW OF ACTION RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

With the burgeoning interest in participatory action research to address problems and concerns of nursing, participatory research methods have been used in a wide variety of research projects. Descriptions and reports of the research have given some attention to the underlying assumptions that support a participatory and action-oriented method, and the connections between epistemology and the method chosen for particular research concerns, questions, and problems have been addressed. Often, participatory action research and related methods have been linked to feminist, emancipatory, and postmodern ideologies. These ideologies have been portrayed as consistent with the kinds of knowledge sought for the particular research agendas of the projects reported. Making these connections between researcher aims and epistemological assumptions has been valuable in evaluating the knowledge claims of research projects. However, there has been little attention to the broader issues associated with a participatory vision and the advancement of nursing knowledge in line with Newman's perspective.^{2,3} The emphasis here is on a synthesized unitary, participatory vision of nursing knowledge that responds to Newman's call for distinguishing and clarifying the nature of nursing knowledge.²

The participatory worldview that grounds participatory action research has been con-

ceptualized and articulated by a number of scholars. A variety of perspectives have been presented, reflecting the rich tradition of participatory action research and a participatory view of the cosmos. However, for the purposes of this article, the presentation of Reason and Bradbury⁴ has been chosen because it represents a broad synthesis of these views. In addition, Reason and Bradbury have developed a case for a participatory view that "competes with both the positivism of modern times and the deconstructive post-modern alternative"^{4(p7)} while acknowledging that it "draws on and integrates both paradigms."^{4(p7)}

Reason and Bradbury associate the participatory worldview with an emergent worldview that is fundamentally participatory—"our world does not consist of separate things but relationships that we co-author."^{4(p6)} The participatory worldview complements feminine, holistic, systemic, relational, and experiential perspectives within an emergent worldview. The participatory worldview has been described as having 5 dimensions that characterize⁵:

1. the nature of the given cosmos;
2. practical being and acting;
3. the nature of knowing;
4. relational ecological form; and
5. purpose and meaning: spirit and beauty.

The nature of the given cosmos

The cosmos that we inhabit and cocreate and whose form is relational and ecological is fundamentally participatory. "We live in a participatory world."^{5(p207)} The human body and mind exist within a primordial givenness of being, actively participating "in a cocreative dance that gives rise to the reality we experience."^{5(p207)} There is subject and object interdependence. Participation is fundamental, being an ontological given.^{12,13} "Because we are a part of the whole, we are necessarily actors within it, which leads us to consider the fundamental importance of the practical."^{5(p207)} "A participatory worldview sees human persons and

communities as part of their world—both human and more-than-human—embodied in their world, co-creating their world.”⁴(p7) Reason and Bradbury⁴ suggest that a participatory worldview asks that we be both situated and reflexive. This implies that it is important for any discipline of inquiry to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created. Newman’s work is an exemplar of this explicitness in perspective.^{2,3}

Practical being and acting

Human beings are engaged and thus are acting, as an aspect of the elemental given of participation.¹⁴ In action research terms, “practical knowing is the purpose, the consummation, the fulfillment of the knowledge quest.”¹⁵ Citing Macmurray,¹⁶ Reason and Bradbury⁴ point out that most of our knowledge arises from activities that have practical purposes. Activities also involve the development of theory that illuminates, guides, and provides meaning to action. Mind and body are always in action. *Action* “is a full concrete activity of the self in which all our capacities are employed,”¹⁶(p86) inviting “us to articulate further the nature of knowing.”⁴(p8) All ways of knowing support our skillfulness in being-in-the-world, enhancing “our ability to act intelligently in the pursuit of worthwhile purposes.”⁵(p207)

The nature of knowing

The notion of reality as both subjective and objective that is associated with the participatory worldview requires an extended epistemology of diverse forms of knowing. Four interdependent ways of knowing are described by Heron and Reason¹⁷: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. “*Experiential knowing* is through direct, face-to-face encounters with a person, place, or thing; it is knowing through empathy and resonance, the kind of in-depth knowing that is almost impossible to put into words. *Presentational knowing* grows out of experiential knowing and provides the first form of

expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement, and dance, drawing on aesthetic imagery. *Propositional knowing* draws on concepts and ideas, and *practical knowing* consummates the other forms of knowing in action in the world.”⁵(pp207–208) Several other forms of knowing have been linked to the participatory worldview, including relational, reflective, representational, and feminist.⁴ All of these extended epistemologies subscribe to multiple ways of knowing that arise from a relationship between self and other, involve participation and intuition, and assert the centrality of sensitivity and attunement at the moment of relationship.

Relational ecological form

The participatory worldview is more than a theory of knowledge—it is a political statement. This worldview implies democratic peer relationships affirming “people’s right and ability to have a say in decisions that affect them and that claim to generate knowledge about them.”⁵(p208) The participatory agenda includes liberating voices that are muted because of social restrictions resulting from poverty, sexism, racism, homophobia, class structures, and neocolonialism. In the generation of knowledge, connections between power and knowledge are illuminated. Relationships considered important in a participatory worldview extend beyond human to what is termed “more-than-human.” For instance, as pointed out by Bradbury and Reason,⁵ the systemic character of the planet’s ecosystem and humanity’s role in natural processes are emblematic of participatory concerns.

Purpose and meaning: Spirit and beauty

The development of knowledge is centered on the flourishing of life, including the life of persons, communities, and the “more-than-human.”⁵ The participatory worldview asks us “to inquire into what we mean by ‘flourishing’ and into the meaning and purpose of our endeavors.”⁵(p208) The participatory

worldview also encompasses the spiritual, enhancing consciousness toward a resacrilization or reenchantment of the world.^{6,18,19} Ferrer²⁰ considers the participatory vision as a cornerstone for revisioning *transpersonal theory*, a developmental psychological theory having to do with transcending the sphere of the individual, in relation to human spirituality. "Sacred experience is based in reverence, in awe and love for creation, valuing it for its own sake, in its own right as a living presence."^{5(p209)} In the participatory worldview, the practical response to human problems is placed in a wider spiritual context—"Human practice inquiry is a spiritual expression, a celebration of the flowering of humanity and of the cocreating cosmos, and as a part of sacred science, it is an expression of the beauty and joy of the cosmos."^{5(p209)} Reason and Bradbury⁴ propose that the purpose of human inquiry is to heal the alienation that characterizes modern experience.

A SYNTHESIS OF UNITARY AND PARTICIPATORY VIEWS OF KNOWLEDGE

The unitary view of nursing knowledge and the participatory view of knowledge provide complementary perspectives that offer insights and a potential vision to clarify and expand nursing knowledge.² Newman has noted the complementary nature of the unitary and participatory worldviews, acknowledging that "research in a paradigm characterized by pattern and process is participatory research."^{1(p38)} She suggests that knowing a reality of wholeness and pattern requires experiencing it and engaging with it through the process of practice. Participation in research aids participants in understanding their situations and the potential for action.

Newman's¹ views concerning participatory research are consistent with the major philosophical assumption of most participatory research, which emphasizes the shortcomings of attempting to study something from the outside. However, Newman's con-

ceptualization of participatory research methods is grounded in the ideal of seeking to understand the meaning of the whole through its pattern—a pattern that is constantly unfolding. For Newman, participatory research is a requisite of unitary science and the development of nursing knowledge because it provides the means for "entering into" the pattern as it is unfolding, rather than attempting to understand it from the outside.

The perspective on nursing knowledge that synthesizes unitary and participatory worldviews is characterized by the following elements:

- the nature of the cosmos as participatory, wholeness;
- patterning as the focus of practical being and acting;
- unitary knowing encompassing extended participatory epistemologies;
- a unitary, relational ecological form of inclusiveness and transcendence; and
- purpose and meaning opening to reconciliation with no boundaries.

The nature of the cosmos as participatory, wholeness

The proposed unitary, participatory view of nursing knowledge would be grounded in an ontology of the cosmos as participatory, wholeness. Laszlo has put forward a provocative image of the cosmos as a "whispering pond" with scientists, wherever they look, seeing nature "acting and evolving not as a collection of interdependent parts, but as an integrated, interacting, self-consistent, and self-creative whole."^{4(p7),21} Ferrer²⁰ considers a participatory vision a way of explaining transpersonal, spiritual events, and argues that participatory refers to the "ontological predicament" of human beings. "Human beings are—whether they know or not—always participating in the self-disclosure of Spirit by virtue of their existence."^{20(p121)} In the unitary, participatory version of ontology, this given participatory worldview is extended to all phenomena. Ferrer²⁰ proposes that the participatory predicament he describes is also

the ontological foundation of other forms of participation, implying that all phenomena are participatory in nature.

Patterning as the focus of practical being and acting

The practical being and acting associated with participatory action research would be broadened to encompass a patterning focus. The referent point for the practical would be the unitary patterning of individuals and communities or any groups of individuals in concert with the environment. Theories could be generated that would illuminate patterning-based action, guide it, and provide it with meaning. This would assist the nursing community in articulating further the nature of knowing and a body of knowledge associated with wholeness and patterning—one that has practical consequences. The focus on practical being and acting based on patterning amplifies nursing's longstanding value concerns—our relationship with others and the environment, our questions about what is worthwhile for the human condition, and our pursuit of purpose and meaning.

Unitary knowing encompassing extended participatory epistemologies

A unitary, participatory ontological view requires extended epistemologies, which have been developed and continue to be developed in the field of participatory inquiry. A multiplicity of modes of knowing is drawn upon to reveal participatory, wholeness in its varied patterning forms. Potential extended epistemologies that would support inquiry into phenomena of concern to nursing from a unitary, participatory perspective would include the representational, relational, and reflective forms of knowing described by Park.²² These forms of knowledge are viewed by participatory researchers as extending beyond objective knowledge. They address the need for broadening "existing epistemological horizons to include forms of knowledge associated with various human

concerns"^{22(p83)}—and not dealt with through objective forms.

Representational knowledge can be either functional or interpretive. *Functional knowledge* is the portrayal of one entity or experience as a variable related to another; for example, "powerlessness is a function of poverty."^{22(p82)} *Interpretive knowledge* "manifests itself as understanding of meaning and requires that the knower come as close to the to-be-known as possible."^{22(p83)} This involves taking into account backgrounds, intentions, and feelings in seeking to understand human affairs and creations. *Relational knowledge* is a kind of knowing that comes from knowing another human being affectively. This type of knowing is infused with relational meaning that can bring people together. "It resides in the act of relating and shows itself in words, expressions, and other forms of doing relationship."^{22(p85)} *Reflective knowledge* is associated with the critical tradition incorporating the notion that human knowledge must move beyond understanding to changing the world. This form of knowledge involves change-producing activity through conscious reflection. It embraces the dignity of human beings as autonomous beings capable of acting on their own behalf.

The core forms of knowing associated with participatory research would be a starting point.⁴ *Experiential knowing* would serve as a primary mode of entering into the field of wholeness and appreciating the nature of patterning from the standpoint of direct encounter with the person, place, or thing. *Empathy and resonance* would be skills developed to facilitate in-depth knowing. *Presentational knowing* offers a way of creatively and meaningfully expressing wholeness and patterning through story, picture, sculpture, movement, dance, and other types of aesthetic imagery. *Propositional knowing* would be based upon previous forms of knowing and would provide theoretical understandings of wholeness and patterning. *Practical knowing* would consummate the other forms of knowing, providing for the development of skills of inquiry and ways of

living that are grounded in wholeness and focus on patterning through knowing participation in change.

A unitary, relational, ecological form of inclusiveness and transcendence

The unitary perspective has an implied political agenda that accompanies a theory of knowledge. The unitary, participatory view, as with any worldview, will find its expression in political structures and organizational forms. The relational and ecological form of the participatory worldview will find expression in political structures and organizational forms that integrate the unitary values of inclusiveness and transcendence. The political dimension of participatory wholeness asserts the primacy of people's right and ability to be involved in generating knowledge about them that is not fragmenting, alienating, and restricting in the manifestation of their human existence and experience. The notion of participatory, wholeness extends to groups and communities as well as individuals, implying the need to include muted voices and respect the richness and infiniteness of human patterning. From this perspective flows the potential for the fullest exercise of the power of people to produce their own knowledge that serves their purposes.

Newman, in a world of no boundaries, characterizes a liberated person as transcending "opposites, like good and evil . . . moving to unity consciousness."³(p241) Furthermore, she advocates release of rights and wrongs as a basic dichotomy pervasive in our society. While these statements may appear to stand in counter distinction to the emancipatory aims of participatory research, Newman's overarching value of nursing as a transformative enterprise supports human liberation and advancement. For instance, she advocates that nurses take several actions to release themselves from boundaries in constructing nursing knowledge and practice. These include (1) fulfilling one's purpose in society by "letting go of imposed, external values and allowing one's inner voice to emerge"³(p244);

(2) "reaching out to others who hold values contrary to one's own and support their action potential"³(p244); and (3) creating caring communities exemplified by transformation.

Purpose and meaning opening to reconciliation with no boundaries

According to the participatory worldview, the purpose of human inquiry is the flourishing of human life.⁴ This worldview calls for a participative consciousness that embraces sacred experience and recognizes the mystery that entails seeing the world as a sacred place. Beyond searching for truth, there is a desire to heal alienation in the human experience and condition. Rather than the notion of healing to make whole, the participative, wholeness perspective accepts wholeness as inherent in all beings. Thus, a conceptualization of healing that would serve the purpose and meaning of the participatory, wholeness worldview is one that appreciates wholeness.¹¹ This appreciation occurs from being open to the ideals of reconciliation and envisioning a world with no boundaries. Ferrer²⁰ described participatory knowing in a way that suggests congruence with unitary knowing. His description demonstrates reconciliation with no boundaries. This knowing "refers to a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings."²⁰(p121)

SUMMARY

Newman,² using Bernstein²³ as a source of support, argues for integration of knowledge to frame nursing science—one that would assimilate empirical, interpretive, and critical dimensions to create a theoretical orientation aimed at practical activity. This view might be held as impossible, or at least highly flawed by empiricists. In addition, the overwhelming hegemony of empiricism in nursing and

medical science that such an integrative approach might face in competing for funding could prevent significant advancement of unitary, participatory research programs. Yet, the unitary participatory vision of nursing knowledge, with its participatory approaches aimed at capturing the patterning of wholeness that underlies human life and relationships, clearly adds to the repertoire of methods that can address societal concerns. Just as community-based participatory research has gained prominence in scientific funding, approaches grounded in the unitary, participatory perspective will be valued as extensions of research.

In the conclusion of her essay on a world with no boundaries, Newman portrays her work as an "effort to open our hearts and minds to the boundaryless nature of nursing knowledge."²(p244) She depicts the profession of nursing as positioned to facilitate the transformation of the world—attributing to it a ripeness that is even more prominent today. "We must cease the binding conflict that exists in a struggle to protect false boundaries. As we explore a world of no boundaries, we will experience the compassion of and creativity of unity consciousness."²(p244)

Reason and Bradbury⁴ call attention to the paucity of debate about the purpose of knowledge making. They note the primary value placed by academia and institutions of science on the knowledge-making process of pure research unburdened by practical concerns. They view action research as lacking interest in the production of academic theories based on action, theories about action, and theoretical or empirical knowledge applied in action; rather, its primary purpose is "to liberate the human body, mind, and spirit in the search for a better, freer world."⁴(p2)

Ferrer calls for a participatory vision of human spirituality that positions scientists and practitioners to talk about knowledge of a more liberated self and world, a central purpose of nursing, "not so much in terms of 'things as they really are,' but of 'things as they can be' or even 'things as they should be.'"²⁰(p177) In line with a world that can be or should be, Bradbury and Reason⁵ call researchers to both search for and develop a world worthy of human aspiration. The unitary, participatory view of nursing knowledge represents the vision of such a world.

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