

Unitary Appreciative Inquiry

Evolution and Refinement

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Unitary appreciative inquiry (UAI), developed over the past 20 years, provides an orientation and process for uncovering human wholeness and discovering life patterning in individuals and groups. Refinements and a description of studies using UAI are presented. Assumptions and conceptual underpinnings of the method distinguishing its contributions from other methods are reported. Data generation strategies that capture human wholeness and elucidate life patterning are proposed. Data synopsis as an alternative to analysis is clarified and explicated. Standards that suggest enhancing the legitimacy of knowledge and credibility of research are specified. Potential expansions of UAI offer possibilities for extending epistemologies, aesthetic integration, and theory development. **Key words:** *life patterning, methodology, nursing science, nursing theory, science of unitary human beings, unitary appreciative inquiry, unitary science, wholeness*

THE purpose of this article is to present the evolution and refinement of the unitary appreciative inquiry (UAI) method as previously described and explicated in 15 articles and book chapters since 1990.^{1–15} The refinements have arisen from the use of UAI by a number of researchers who have sought to address challenges and concerns that have occurred in planning and implementing research.^{16–23} There has also been a need to clarify assumptions and conceptual underpinnings of the method distinguishing its contributions to an evolving nursing science of wholeness. In addition, certain aspects of UAI have been wanting in explicitness in such areas as data generation procedures, data synopsis, and credibility and legitimacy of findings. The further elaboration of UAI and clarification of its refinements are es-

sential for researchers who are seeking methods that purport to offer a window into human wholeness.

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

In studying the science of unitary human beings, it became evident that the conceptual framework had potential for offering a wholeness-focused path to nursing care. However, there seemed to be a huge disconnection between the conceptual system with its assumptions of wholeness and its theoretical tenets of unique human patterning, and the available practice approaches and research methods for those seeking to apply these ideas and concepts. In addition, if there were attention to be given to the development of theories derived from the conceptual system, there would need to be methods consistent for generating and testing such theories.

Unitary appreciative inquiry grew from conceptual development aimed at creating a practice approach centered on human field pattern as explicated by Rogers²⁴ rather than on disease or diagnosis.^{13,15} One of the critical questions addressed in this conceptual

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development work was differentiating unitary knowing from other forms of knowing in practice.¹⁴ This work evolved toward a conceptualization of pattern-focused practice called first unitary pattern appraisal¹⁵ and later unitary pattern appreciation, wherein the goal of practice was to appreciate fully the wholeness of human life as a reference point for care consistent with the science of unitary human beings. Unitary knowing was differentiated from systems knowing offering guidance in how to interpret data through a synoptic rather than analytic lens. This was derived from the notion of synopsis as considering various aspects of human experience that might not be generally linked together to try to get at an underlying integration. There was a gradual evolution toward bridging science and practice using unitary pattern appreciation.¹¹

The intent and focus of unitary pattern appreciation were described as “perceiving, being aware of, sensitive to, and expressing the full force and delicate distinctions of [energy field pattern] while sympathetically recognizing its excellence as experienced in gratefulness, enjoyment, and understanding.”^{11(p130)} Unitary pattern appreciation was specified to have a particular process, orientation, and approach. The process was described as reaching for the essence of pattern through its manifestations of experience, perceptions, and expressions including all realms of information or data. The orientation outlined guiding assumptions and characteristics as well as elements related to the implementation for science and practice. In addition, the synoptic, participatory, and transformative features of unitary pattern appreciation were explicated.

A transition in the use of unitary pattern appreciation occurred in the development of a case study method called unitary case inquiry^{1,5,10} and eventually into a research approach that could be integrated into practice as a praxis approach. Praxis was used to denote the synthesis of research, theory, and practice similar to participatory action research. It was also intended to convey the

potential use by both researchers and practitioners. Unitary appreciative inquiry is essentially a praxis approach that can enable knowledge to be generated in both practice and research enterprises.^{3,6} However, this is an area that warrants further clarification because of the potential confusion about how UAI can be used and broader conceptual disagreements about what praxis really means.

Unitary appreciative inquiry evolved into its current form through application of the approach in a variety of studies described in the literature review section of this article. Knowledge gained from research aided in the refinement of UAI specifying:

- clarification of aim of inquiry as life patterning of individuals, groups, families, and communities;
- conceptualization of life patterning as an indicator of unitary energy field patterning that integrates human-environment mutual process;
- elaboration of 3 major strands of inquiry as appreciative, participatory, and emancipatory;
- suggestions for data generation and data management procedures that create the most complete picture possible of the wholeness of life patterning;
- consideration of data in synthesizing and synoptic ways as an alternative to analysis that might enhance possibility of fragmentation of information;
- delineation of credibility and legitimacy standards and procedures; and
- representation of findings that express the wholeness of life patterning that include experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical adopted from cooperative inquiry.²⁵

Unitary appreciative inquiry draws upon a history of development that included a general description and conceptualization of unitary pattern appreciation, an explanation and differentiation of unitary knowing and systems knowing, and specification and delineation of unitary pattern appreciation as an orientation, process, and approach. Unitary appreciative inquiry in its current version

grew out of unitary pattern appreciation as a case study approach that provided a means of systematically implementing pattern-focused care and reporting the results of these endeavors. In its present state of development, UAI provides an opportunity for researchers to generate knowledge relevant to answering research questions, generating or testing theories, or exploring approaches that have as their major concern of capturing the wholeness of life patterning in individuals, groups, families, or communities.

UNITARY APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY RESEARCH

Research using UAI is presented through a review of published studies available in the literature. The original 3 studies on despair in the lives of women using UAI^{5,6,8} are discussed, as well as 5 other studies found through a search of PubMed, CINAHL, and EBSCO completed in August of 2009 and a recently completed dissertation. Consistent with a unitary-participatory paradigm, evaluation of research is not based on predetermined outcomes. These studies occurred while legitimacy and credibility standards were under development.

Initially developed as a case method for research and practice,^{12,13} UAI was further expanded in a series of 3 projects exploring the life patterning of women experiencing despair.^{2-5,8} These 3 projects resulted in the development of a "...unitary healing praxis model for women in despair."^{3(p128)} The initial project was a case study method involving 6 women who explored despair in their lives. Data were collated synoptically from participant drawings, dreams, and narratives; from researcher experiences with the participant; and from the unfolding dialogue that reflected the expression and experience of despair in the lives of each of these women. The researcher developed narratives called pattern profiles that synthesized major patterns within each woman's life story. The profiles integrated metaphor, images, and music

and became a focal point for helping these women better understand their lives within the context of a larger life story reflecting their unique patterning. It also created an opportunity to explore alternative ways of approaching life.³

Given critical assumptions of a unitary participatory paradigm, expectations of particular changes or outcomes were suspended.⁸ The *desire* for positive changes existed without a need to *expect* specific outcomes. The researcher sought to capture the wholeness of the life patterning as a reference point for both the researcher and the participant to consider what was and what could be. This process was aimed at capitalizing on the phenomenon that Rogers described as "knowing participation in change,"²⁴ which was further conceptualized as a theory of power by Barrett.²⁶

The appreciative orientation of the researcher allowed for an unconditional regard for the uniqueness of each participant's life patterning suggesting a case study perspective. The unitary appreciative case study approach created time and space in the research process for reflection without judgments about how the participants wanted to change their life situations. The process allowed for the participant to be self-determining. The unitary appreciative case study approach resulted in a natural unfolding of a participatory-appreciative-reflective process without the researcher or practitioner projecting outcomes that might limit the exploration.

The second UAI project⁵ was a qualitative, participatory study of despair in 14 women within the context of 10 life situations: major depression, addiction, sexual abuse, child abuse, homelessness, loss of a loved one, terminal illness, spinal cord injury, infertility, and chronic illness.^{3,5} The design did not limit the gender of participants; however, all respondents were female. Ten described some history of abuse (verbal, physical, sexual). Interviews were conducted focusing on descriptions, features, and contexts of despair, transformational processes, if any, associated

with despair, and what was helpful personally and with healthcare experiences. The researcher created 4 documents from the data collection process: (1) the original transcript of the interview; (2) a researcher-developed synopsis of despair using the participants' words written in the first person for the participant; (3) a pattern profile using metaphor, images, and music from the themes and content of the transcriptions in a story format; and (4) a summary document including general information about despair from the individual participant's perspective. These were shared with participants to determine whether the documents represented the participant's life patterning as they experienced and understood it.

By shifting the focus of the study of despair to study of the life patterning of women in despair, the richness of despair was found to be a transformational opportunity for appreciating wholeness in all of its complexity in the lives of these women. Pattern profiles helped the participants move toward a journey of self-discovery and knowledge. While some common features of despair were described, the contextual features of despair remained unique to each woman and distinct from any generalizability. Shifting from a symptom-based model of praxis in nursing research to a pattern-based model added to the richness of individual experience and guided the clients toward self-knowing.^{3,5}

The third UAI project by Cowling,^{2,3,5} used to develop the unitary healing praxis model for women in despair, evolved from the prior 2 studies and was a cooperative inquiry group that focused on the connection between despair and abuse. Six women in a community domestic violence program, a staff member, a graduate nursing student, and the researcher comprised the study group.^{2,3} Meeting for six 3-hour sessions over a 10-week period, the group discussed the relationship of abuse and despair. In contrast to a phenomenological approach that would have looked at the lived experience of despair, the researcher used a patterning focus to generate "unitary knowledge

concerning despair as experienced by abused women and their perceptions of ways to improve their chances for self-determination and life enhancement."^{3(p128)} The exploration included general discussions both about the context of despair in relation to abuse in life patterning and on the specific focus of living in despair.

The study findings were synthesized into an appreciative pattern profile that was developed by participants and used as the foundation for a study report shared with the funding agency.³ There was a clear benefit from working cooperatively with other women who had experienced both abuse and despair. Positive effects occurred through the use of artistic expressions such as poetry, music, stories, and movies to represent the nature of despair. Words, images, and stories were successfully used to convey feelings of vulnerability, fragility, and anger experienced by the women. Practical knowledge was generated by developing strategies that ameliorated feelings of despair.

Extending Cowling's ongoing research with women abused as children, 11 women participated in a UAI study exploring a facilitated waking dream process called participatory dreaming²¹ as a method of unitary healing.²⁰ The focus of this study was on the appreciation of healing in the lives of the women subsequent to their abuse as children. Over 2 full days in a retreat-like setting, the women participated in repeated cycles of imagery, journaling, group discussion, and art that focused on healing from the abuse. Using both synoptic and analytic processes, a group patterning profile was created using music videos developed by the researcher that described healing in the lives of women abused as children. The study findings, validated by the participants, suggested that healing from abuse is a lifelong process described as a journey taking them more deeply into themselves and potentiating their process of self-discovery and empowerment. Participatory dreaming was a unitary process that was ideal for informing, illuminating, and

transforming the appreciation of wholeness in the women's lives and suggesting practical skill development.

Rushing²² explored the unitary life pattern of serenity with 9 participants from 12-step addiction recovery programs. Following individual interviews, a data synthesis method was used to develop a matrix of manifestations of serenity shared among the group of participants. Common experiences, perceptions, and expressions of participants led to the identification of 4 pattern facets. These included addiction, turning points, early sobriety, and serenity. The researcher prepared a unique appreciative profile using storytelling in a creative format for each individual participant. Serenity was "... a way of living and being, an orientation to life, and a transformation of personality ... a healing quality that seemed to emerge as each experienced a spiritual awakening or a transcendence of experiences."^{22(p204)}

In a UAI study of the life patterns of 8 persons who had experienced a spinal cord injury at least 2 years prior to the study, 3 shared pattern manifestations were identified.¹⁶ Despite what were considered "good" physical outcomes, each participant with spinal cord injury shared the 3 pattern manifestations of profound depersonalization, loss, and hopelessness.

Cox¹⁷ conducted a study grounded in UAI emphasizing the participatory strand of the research. His innovative research engaged 8 bedside nurses in the development of appreciative profiles of their experiences of professional caregiver despair related to health-care financing.¹⁷ The impact of insurance risk transfers (managed care, cost shifting, diagnosis-related groups, and healthcare financing) on RNs and the care they provide to clients was explored using UAI. An a priori theory of professional caregiver despair related to insurance risk transfers (cost shifting) was supported by the data synopsis and analysis. Strategies were identified to reduce professional caregiver despair and improve working situations.

Kemp¹⁹ explored the life patterns of women who returned from deployment during the first war in the Persian Gulf, using a UAI methodology emphasizing pattern appreciation. The researcher and the participants cocreated metaphorical stories of the women's lived experiences of being deployed. Data synopsis and analysis highlighted postdeployment life patterning associated with social limitations, military sexual trauma, and a loss of trust in persons and institutions. Prospective pattern profiles for future hopes and dreams were codeveloped by the participants and the researcher.

Nursing presence was studied from both the patient and the nursing perspectives, using the UAI methodology.¹⁸ A combination of data synopsis and analysis were used to identify patterns and to extract themes from interviews. Nurse participants were included in the synopsis/analysis process. Nurse themes included knowing the patient, responding to needs, nurse/patient attitudes and beliefs, bonding between nurse and patient, influencing others, and relationships. Patient themes included knowing me, bonding, supporting me, encouraging me/others, accessibility, and healing. The study findings suggested that nursing presence was felt to be more important than technical care by patients and that healing as a theme evolved spontaneously without researcher suggestion.

Unitary appreciative inquiry was used for a community assessment project in a small southern town by RN-BSN students and their faculty.²³ Because of a lack of unitary framework for community assessment in the nursing literature, the authors/faculty engaged the UAI process to appreciate the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the community field pattern under study. A pattern profile of the community was developed using a creative distillation process. Poetry, stories, and photography were used to capture the "feel" of the town and made into a music video shared with community members. The culmination of the pattern profile led to a community action project codeveloped by students

and community members that aimed at smoking prevention education for middle-school children and diet and exercise classes for the community at large.

Reported research occurred over several years while the method was being developed and refined by Cowling. These studies, with the exception of the community assessment, were dissertation studies. They reflected the current thinking regarding the method and its potential use to answer a variety of research questions. These studies attempted to capture field patterning through its manifestations by creating profiles providing a picture of wholeness. Unintentionally, some of the studies leaned toward essentializing phenomena rather than giving the fullest attention to the patterning associated with these phenomena. The shift by Cowling to the level of abstraction delineated as life patterning was intended to bring greater clarity to the focus of research. These studies added incrementally to the refinement of the method and provided an opportunity for the originator to consider critical issues related to the intent and implementation of UAI.

THE PROCESS OF UAI: PRAXIS OF APPRECIATION, PARTICIPATION, AND EMANCIPATION

The process of UAI was intentionally developed to provide flexibility in uncovering life patterning through innovative approaches in a praxis context. Inquiries can be initiated by either a researcher or participants seeking a researcher to undertake a study project of mutual concern.³ Sampling is purposive and done by linking the researcher(s) and participants who are interested in a unitary understanding of the research topic. Participants are considered coinquirers or coresearchers consistent with the tenets of participatory research.²⁷ The primary mode of data generation is mutually engaged dialogue, reflection, and action among individuals and the researcher(s) or as a group process.³ Participants are invited to participate in dialogue,

reflection, aesthetic expression, and action as indicated by the participant-researcher dyad or the group of participant-researcher. Cycles of reflection and action may be used similar to the processes associated with participatory action research.²⁵ However, the reflection-action cycle is not essential to all projects as determined by the aims and purposes of the inquiry. The reflection and action can occur in either an individual or group format and between dialogue sessions. The data include dialogue, experiential descriptions, expressive products, journals, and whatever is determined by participants to be reflective of life patterning.³ Borrowing from cooperative inquiry designs, a study may have an informative or a transformative aim or a combination.²⁵ Some research projects provide an opportunity for participants to explore strategies focused on desired changes in life patterning. Depending on the particular project, participants are involved to varying degrees in design and implementation of the study, including data collection, interpretation of data, evaluation of the study, and preparation of the final report. Participants may be involved in coauthoring manuscripts or other publications. This section provides an explication of the elements of the UAI praxis process.

Description of the unitary design as praxis

The ability to enter into an evolving patterning process with clients over time is viewed as particularly relevant to nursing because it seeks to integrate the empirical, interpretive, and critical dimensions of a practically oriented theoretical foundation for nursing science.²⁸ Unitary appreciative inquiry has been described by Newman²⁸ as praxis because it is an active synthesis of theory, research, and practice. As praxis, UAI creates opportunities for participants to open themselves to new unitary understandings of their lives in process with an appreciative stance toward what is, rather than what should be,³ all the while providing a context for discovering what could be. Emancipation

occurs with the freedom from a preconceived set of expectations, allowing the energy of transformation to be creatively mobilized toward practical ways of doing and being in the world that support growth. Inquiry projects that encompass reflection and participation support "generative theorizing" wherein action and knowledge are simultaneously informed.^{3,6} The reflection inherent in UAI requires a critical and appreciative examination of one's own practices as well as an awareness of what maintains the status quo.³ This is participatory both within the individual and within the collective. The generative capacity of praxis³ allows for the development of propositional knowledge (theory), experiential knowledge (group encounters and endeavors), presentational knowledge (imaginative and creative ways of comprehending life patterning and illuminating new possibilities), and practical knowledge (actions or practices that evolve from the first 3 ways of knowing and that advance change and transformation).²⁵ The foundation of UAI as praxis lies in the core process components of appreciation, participation, and emancipation.¹

Appreciation

Appreciative knowing incorporates "perceiving, being aware of, sensitive to, and expressing the full force and delicate distinctions"^{11(p130)} of life pattern[ing] through an attitude of gratefulness. Appreciation implies an empathy or resonance of the perceiver with the pattern perceived as it manifests in its entirety.^{6,8} As a healing practice, the focus is on appreciating the wholeness within this pattern. In UAI, pattern is appreciated through the intimacy of the encounter with self and other.^{5,6}

Appreciating is the antithesis of essentializing.⁶ Essentializing implies stereotyping or generalizing, whereas appreciation in UAI refers to the deliberate process of seeking out of that which is unique for the individual or group. Essence, the root of essentializing, is a static phenomenon. This

is in direct contrast to the appreciation of life patterns as ever-changing and fluid in their relationship between the individual and the cosmos. When essence is referred to in UAI, it implies the dynamic flux of patterning expressed through one's life versus a more static dimension of phenomena.⁷

In the work of Cowling^{5,6} with despairing women, the appreciation as praxis evolved in 4 directions. Describing what worked, reflecting on adversity and power, envisioning possibilities, and contemplating life patterning as an informational resource for change were the foci of appreciation for participants because they reflected upon wholeness in their lives. These 4 dimensions have become the structural framework for the development and sustainability of a healing process that potentially exists within UAI projects.

Encouragement and support through journaling, dialogue, and creativity are provided to illuminate the ways in which participants have known or felt personal power, made positive life changes, or influenced others.^{5,6} Individual and/or mutual reflection provides opportunities for understanding the relationship between personal power, life choices, and personal sustenance in the midst of adversity. Dreaming or imaging of new possibilities is accomplished through creative expression, collages, imagining, imagery, writing, and dialogue. Goals or desired outcomes may be written, expressed, drawn, or performed. Outcomes are not static representations of what is expected to occur but rather a suggestive delineation of the possibilities of what could occur. Contemplation of life patterning through these techniques can provide a source of information for both individuals and groups about what currently exists and the desire for knowing transformation and change.

Unitary appreciative knowing is distinct but informed by an understanding of appreciative knowing in organizational life described by Cooperrider and Srivastva.²⁹ Appreciative knowing is distinct from critical knowing. Appreciative knowing assumes a stance of mystery that can never be fully

known. Critical knowing seeks to answer a question or problem. In UAI, the mystery is something to be caught up in rather than a problem to be solved. Knowledge cannot be categorized with diagnoses or language. The researcher is an inquirer who comes into relationship with the coinquirers through an act of affirmation based on mutual trust in the absolute integrity of universal wholeness. Thus, UAI as praxis is a theoretical precept of wholeness, a research method centered on the appreciation of inherent wholeness in human life as expressed in patterning. Unitary appreciative inquiry has as its primary agenda to discover and explore human wholeness through appreciation aspiring to find practical ways of transforming life patterning through knowing participation in change.

Participation

The concept of participation in UAI is as much a metaphysical stance as a method of inquiry.^{7,4,27} There is the assumption of a participatory consciousness in which each person has a personal relationship with the universe in UAI.⁷ As an inquirer-participant, each individual is a direct participant in the cocreation of the cosmos. In unitary nursing and research, this is reflected in mutual relationship, an openness to discovery without preconceptions, negotiation of process, and the release of predicted or proscribed outcomes.^{8,7} The human capacity for knowing participation in change and patterning is a central tenet of unitary theory. The participant is considered as the expert on and the author of his or her own life in UAI. Change may be the outcome of knowing participation; however, the researcher/practitioner releases the *expectation* of change for the participant.^{8,7}

The relationship of pattern, participation, power, and praxis to knowledge generation was elaborated in a matrix model by Cowling.⁶ Participation is described as engagement, shared reflection, cooperation, and dialogue that contributes to sensemaking through experiential knowledge.⁶ The mutuality of participation inspires and encourages

imagery generation and creative expression for presentational knowledge. Propositional knowledge arises from and is grounded in the mutual reflection inherent in a participatory design. Also, practical knowledge is developed as skills through participation in the inquiry process.⁶

Participation can be between individuals and the researcher or between groups and the researcher. A number of studies focused on experiences in women's lives, including despair and abuse, have demonstrated the capacity for UAI to create a participatory context for women to share life experiences, examine the wholeness of lives, discover life patterning, and consider and, in some cases, experiment with practical strategies for change. Individual and group inquiries require the creation of time and space that offers safety and comfort to share experiences. In a group encounter, there is opportunity for dialogue and creation of social space that leads to clarification and elaboration of information, formulation of both common and individual impressions and perceptions, and the consideration of collective action based on shared understandings.^{5,27}

Emancipation

Cowling⁷ makes a case for UAI as both interpretive and emancipatory. Hermeneutic inquiry is the exemplar of the interpretive paradigm of nursing science. The ontological assumptions of both UAI and the interpretive paradigm include a complex, holistic, and contextual reality.³⁰ However, the goal of UAI is not to understand and interpret the meaning of human experiences. Rather, it seeks to illuminate the inherent wholeness and uniqueness of human life through discovering and understanding the patterning that expresses that life. The purpose of this illumination, discovery, and understanding is to provide a referent point for nursing knowledge development that is both theoretical and practical. Human life is meant to encompass the wholeness of individuals, groups, families, or communities. Emancipation arises from the

praxic nature of UAI as a potential, rather than as a specified, end point similar to what is seen in critical inquiry approaches. However, the agenda of UAI is distinctive from the critical inquiry paradigm, although sharing common interests and concerns. Emancipation is also a function of newly perceived possibilities, visionary innovations, and personal explorations that emerge from fully engaging others in the appreciative process.

Praxis through power is also a feature of emancipation.⁶ Power is experienced through the experiential component of UAI as a result of being in process with other(s) in the inquiry. Power lies in the creative expressions of an appreciated life. The propositional or theory generating capacity of UAI lends power to participants through expanding knowledge and also creates a venue in which their voices are heard through research and activism within the community. And finally, through the UAI process practical skills are developed that support emancipation.

CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES: REFINEMENTS

Several concerns and challenges have arisen during the evolution of UAI over the past decade. These have led to significant refinements in the UAI method associated with assumptions and conceptual underpinnings, data generation approaches, data synopsis, and credibility and legitimacy standards.

Assumptions and conceptual underpinnings

Unitary appreciative inquiry is grounded in the science of unitary human beings²⁴ and was developed to offer a method for researchers interested in generating and testing theories derived from that conceptual system. The linkages to the unitary conceptual system have been made explicit through the pattern appreciation, case study, and UAI stages of evolution. The developments and refinements of UAI have consistently been shaped considering the compatibility of method choices with the assumptions and

conceptualization of a unitary perspective. The assumptions and conceptual underpinnings need to be made more explicit reflecting current theoretical developments in unitary science.

The 4 general assumptions and conceptual underpinnings derived specifically from the science of unitary human beings on which UAI is based are as follows:

1. Humans are essentially and inherently whole unified beings—derived from humans as energy fields.
2. Human life coexists and emerges through its relationship and participation with the environment—derived from human-environment mutual process.
3. Human life expresses itself in patterning that can be known through its manifestations, some directly and some indirectly sensed—derived from human as energy field pattern.
4. Human life has infinite potentials for expansion, growth, health, and well-being—derived from pandimensionality and unpredictability as the nature of change.

The assumptions and conceptual underpinnings refined and specified to serve as a broader foundation for UAI are as follows:

1. Individuals, groups, families, and communities are characterized by inherent wholeness that takes the form of a unique patterning.
2. The patterning of human wholeness is reflected in a variety of phenomena that provide information about the patterning but cannot singularly represent fully the nature of patterning. These phenomena include those labeled as physical/physiological, mental/emotional, social/cultural, and spiritual/mystical.
3. The patterning of human wholeness is signified by experiences, perceptions, and expressions of human life conceptualized as life patterning.
4. The unitary appreciation of life patterning involves the elucidation,

affirmation, comprehension, and representation of the factors and forces within individuals and groups that serve to nourish human living and well-being.

5. Unitary appreciation of life patterning is a form of knowing participation in change that leads toward transformation and emancipation of those involved.
6. Unitary appreciative inquiry creates a participatory context from which to launch and sustain projects that seek to answer questions, address issues and concerns, and generate and test theories regarding human wholeness and life patterning. It also creates the context for the exploration of strategies that use a unitary appreciation of life patterning as a reference point for promoting health and well-being for individuals and groups.

In addition to providing a research method that is compatible with unitary science, the method might serve researchers seeking to understand life patterning from a perspective of wholeness. These assumptions and conceptual underpinnings are meant to clarify the relevance of UAI for directing and guiding projects. These also serve to differentiate UAI from other qualitative and participatory methods such as grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and participatory action research.

Data generation

Data generation methods are chosen on the basis of the purpose and research questions of the study as with any research approach. Previous researchers using UAI have relied heavily on dialogical engagement with participants in interviews or group encounters as a source of generating data. These dialogical engagements have been focused on the primary research question and related content with varying degrees of structure. For one of the studies on despair in women, the advertisement for recruiting participants set the stage by having as the lead: "Despair: Your

Story?"⁵ Participants were interviewed individually and engaged in a dialogue with the interviewer. The initial interview question was, "What is it like to have despair in your life?" A series of suggested questions was used as a guide. These questions included topics related to the experience of despair, how it manifested itself in the life of the person and in their relationships, the ways in which despair may have enhanced or limited the person's life, things learned from having a life in which despair was central, remedies and treatments of and challenges of a despairing life, experiences in the healthcare system, and life changes and transformations that might have occurred in association with despair. These questions were grounded in the purpose of the study that explored the life patterning of women with despair.

In addition to the dialogical engagement, researchers have used a variety of approaches for generating data relevant to the life patterning of individuals or a group. In some cases, researchers have asked participants to create aesthetic products that reflect their life patterning, to write a chapter representing what might transpire in their lives,¹⁹ to engage in a guided dreaming experience,^{20,21} to create a collage storyboard that shows their life experience, to identify a character from a play, novel, or movie or a piece of music that reflects their life patterning, and to create a symbol, image, or photograph or share an object that represents the way life is experienced. In many cases, researchers have combined data generation strategies. Although thus far all data generation strategies have been qualitative in nature, depending on the purpose of the project, quantitative data may offer information highly relevant to life patterning.

Some guiding principles for data generation include the following:

1. Ideal sources of data are ones that have the greatest potential for capturing the fullest and richest picture possible of life patterning.
2. Given the perspective of the uniqueness of life patterning for those experiencing it, approaches that rely

on the perspective of the person or group of people are most desirable.

3. Critical to the efficiency of data generation is the need to explore sources of data that are most parsimonious in providing the linkages necessary to portray life patterning, that is, building a compelling case for data as indicators of life patterning.
4. Data generation approaches that synthesize life patterning information (such as narratives and symbolic representations) will assist in the movement from data to interpretation of data in a synoptic format.
5. Involving participants in identifying data sources and approaches to securing data is advantageous, considering the strong participatory strand within UAI and the attempt to reach an appreciative understanding of life patterning.
6. Data generation to portray life patterning relies upon an inclusive stance of what counts as pattern information and often goes beyond what is observable or directly sensed.

Data synopsis

Unitary appreciative inquiry relies on a synoptic perspective for considering information generated in projects. The synoptic perspective is derived from the idea of synoptic empiricism³¹ described by Murphy³² in his groundbreaking work synthesizing knowledge related to human transformation. According to Broad, "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."^{31(p8)} Recently, Purnell³³ and Schoenhofer³⁴ have referred to synoptic knowing as a defining feature of the discipline of nursing reflecting its unitary nature. They cite the work of Phenix, which describes the integrative function of synoptic meanings that creates a pathway to "uniting meanings from all the realms into a unified perspective, that is, providing a single vision."^{35(p235)}

Unitary appreciative inquiry employs synopsis as the primary approach to considering the various data generated in a project. The goal of synopsis in UAI is to sense an emerging pattern that reflects the wholeness and uniqueness of human life.^{5,6} Thus, data such as experiences, perceptions, and expressions of the participants as well as phenomena that are categorized as physical/physiological, mental/emotional, social/cultural, and spiritual/mystical are viewed together in an inclusive way. It is not necessary to collect all these types of data, but these data may provide indicators of human life patterning. In many cases, data generation approaches themselves are synoptic, such as asking a person to write a story that reflects their lives or create a collage of images and words.

While data may be collected across the spectrum of forms of phenomena, the critical feature of synopsis is to search for the connections, themes, commonalities, and relationships among the data.⁷ In 1993, Cowling¹⁴ differentiated systems knowing and unitary knowing. This differentiation was recently updated conveying how a systems perspective and unitary perspective are contrasted in gathering and using information. In a systems perspective, the focus is on the parts (physical/physiological, emotional/mental, spiritual/mystical, social/cultural) to make sense of the whole. In a unitary perspective, the focus is on considering all observations and information as unique expressions of the life patterning of human wholeness. This requires that the researcher appreciate "each area of information and observations as an expression of wholeness—not as an expression of subsystems or parts."^{1(p85)} Researchers are challenged to develop approaches that give a greater emphasis to synopsis and synthesis rather than analysis. This will require "creative ways of organizing information and observations to be able to see the patterning beyond the parts."^{1(p85)}

Credibility and legitimacy

Issues of credibility and legitimacy were addressed in the early stages of unitary pattern

appreciation following general tenets of qualitative research such as member checking, auditing, and peer review.¹¹ Later, in describing UAI, standards of credibility of research and legitimacy of knowledge were suggested using the perspective of Ford-Gilboe and her colleagues³⁶ because they were described as transcending paradigm boundaries. They identified 4 issues in evaluating the quality of research: "(1) quality of data; (2) investigator bias; (3) quality of the research process; and (4) usefulness of the study findings."^{36(p23)} Since UAI has interpretive and emancipatory strands, interpretive phenomenology and critical inquiry standards were considered and modified because UAI is clearly not the same as these 2 methods. The gold standards for each of the methods were presented and then approaches to achieving these standards in UAI were provided.

While the standards and approaches originally provided remain relevant, additional refinements have occurred from using UAI for a variety of projects. These refinements relate directly to enhancing the unitary, appreciative, participatory, and emancipatory strands of UAI:

1. The quality of data is considered in terms of how well the data chosen give the fullest and most comprehensive picture of wholeness as expressed in life patterning, whether the data provide inclusive and synoptic information for researcher appreciation of the life patterning, the degree to which the data generation incorporates the perspective of the person or group that is the focus of the research, and the extent to which the data bring clarity to the potential in life patterning for greater freedom.
2. Investigator bias is considered in terms of how well the researcher prepares himself or herself to sense patterning within human wholeness, how sensitive the researcher is in appreciating all that is uncovered, how vigilant the researcher is in using and integrating perspectives of participants, and how attentive the researcher is in

generating data that identify the oppressive and liberating qualities of life patterning.

3. Quality of the research process is considered in terms of the use of design and procedures developed to capture life patterning in human wholeness, use of data generation processes that create an appreciating orientation to sense life patterning in individuals and groups, use of research protocol that enhance participation of coinquirers across all stages of the inquiry process, and use of strategies aimed at creating an inquiry that is responsive to the liberating inclinations of the participants.
4. Usefulness of findings is considered in terms of the ability of the research to elucidate life patterning to provide information for desired change, the capacity of the research to generate knowledge that expands the appreciation of life patterning, and the potential of the research to explicate the ways in which participatory knowing supports development of important knowledge and skills relevant to transforming life patterning.
5. The emancipatory intent of UAI requires attention to the support and promotion of the liberation of participants. Findings are considered on the basis of the possibilities of the research to illuminate the ways in which knowledge of life patterning can lead to emancipatory changes in the lives of the participants. Standards might include the capacity of the design to release constraints on the fullest self-expression of participants and the potential of the research to support and sustain conditions of human uplifting.

CONCLUSIONS AND EXPANDING POTENTIALS

The development and evolution of UAI since 1990 has provided for the exploration of life patterning and human wholeness in

the context of a number of nursing studies. The use of UAI in these studies, the dialogue among UAI scholars, and the ongoing examination and critique of UAI have led to further elaborations and refinements. Three areas of potential future expansion are in the realm of extended epistemologies, the integration of aesthetics into the process of inquiry and representation of human wholeness, and the development of a unitary theory of healing.¹

One of the primary aims of UAI is to generate multiple forms of knowledge relevant to human wholeness and life patterning. Unitary appreciative inquiry employs unitary, appreciative, and participatory ways of knowing that take shape and form in synoptic knowing reflecting the patterning of the whole.⁶ Recently, the examination of emancipatory knowing in nursing offers the potential for integrating more precisely this way of knowing into UAI processes. Borrowing from participatory research in general and cooperative inquiry in particular, several UAI researchers have used experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical forms of knowledge to organize findings from their studies.²⁵ The major challenge for future development is the construction of findings into forms of knowledge that describe and explain the dynamic nature of life patterning and wholeness without resorting to categorical representations. One potential resolution is for researchers to convey the interrelatedness of the forms of knowledge used to present the findings. Another is to rely upon aesthetic representations such as plays, digital and other forms of storytelling, dances, performances, and exhibits.

Unitary appreciative inquiry researchers have relied heavily on aesthetic forms of data generation as well as aesthetic representations of human wholeness and life patterning. There is an apparent and compelling ar-

gument for the inclusion of aesthetics into UAI, given its potential to obtain more unitary information from participants and its ability to portray the unitary nature of life patterning. There is need for further consideration and expansion of aesthetics into the design of UAI projects. A recent dialogue among students and staff at the University of Bournemouth generated expanding potential and examples of aesthetic approaches that could be used in UAI to reveal wholeness in human life patterning. Critical reflection and examination are required to explain and clarify the relationship of aesthetics and unitary knowing.

Finally, researchers and participants have alluded to transformation and healing that are often observed and experienced in the conduct of UAI projects. Early explication of healing as appreciating wholeness recognized this potential within unitary pattern appreciation.⁸ More recently, a unitary healing praxis model for women in despair was formulated on the basis of completed UAI projects.³ An evolving unitary theory of healing that goes beyond any single group or population was suggested as having potential for general nursing practice.¹ According to Cowling and Repede, "Unitary healing is viewed as appreciating human wholeness through participating knowingly in emancipatory change and transformation."^{1(p87)} The descriptions of UAI experiences by researchers and participants indicate that there is a realization of potentials for change and transformation through participating in the inquiry process. Perhaps unwittingly, UAI researchers, regardless of intent, may have unleashed the potential for unitary healing by the construction and conduct of their studies. This warrants further exploration as a benefit of participation in UAI studies.

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