

Letters to the editor

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To the editor:

Newman, Sime, and Corcoran-Perry correctly maintain that "a discipline is distinguished by a domain of inquiry that represents a shared belief among its members regarding its reason for being."⁽¹⁾ They go on to present an interesting and potentially compelling argument for a new focus statement for the discipline of nursing: "Nursing is the study of caring in the human health experience."⁽²⁾

Their argument is, however, flawed. First, although the term caring is included in several conceptualizations of the discipline of nursing, it is not a dominant theme in every conceptualization.² In fact, caring reflects a particular view of nursing and a particular kind of nursing.³ Furthermore, caring behaviors may not be generalizable across all national and cultural boundaries.⁴ Thus, the concept of caring is not necessarily a shared belief among all members of the discipline.

Second, although the authors claim that their statement integrates "concepts commonly identified with nursing at the metaparadigm level,"⁽³⁾ and although they identified the metaparadigm concepts as person, environment, health, and nursing,⁽²⁾ their statement does not include environment. Thus, their statement is not sufficiently comprehensive to serve as the focus statement for the discipline.

Third, Newman and her colleagues end their treatise by maintaining that caring in the human health experience can be most fully elaborated only through a unitary-transformative perspective.⁽⁵⁾ This perspective, however, reflects just one approach to the study of nursing phenomena and is not part of a shared belief about nursing research.

I believe that the focus of the discipline of nursing continues to be best summarized in the statement offered by Donaldson and Crowley in 1978. They stated: "Nursing studies the wholeness or health of humans, recognizing that humans are in continuous interaction with their environments."⁽¹⁾

REFERENCES

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Authors' reply:

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the major points made by Jacqueline Fawcett regarding our recent article in *ANS* 14:1. Dr Fawcett rejects our proposed disciplinary focus statement of caring in the human health experience on the grounds that (1) "the concept of caring is not necessarily a shared belief among all members of the discipline," (2) the "statement is not sufficiently comprehensive to serve as the focus statement for the discipline," and (3) a unitary-transformative perspective for knowledge development is "not part of a shared belief about nursing research."

Dr Fawcett bases her objection to caring as part of the focus statement on the fact that "caring is not a dominant theme in every conceptualization" of the discipline. It was not our intent to suggest that caring was a theme of every conceptualization. Our statement that "a discipline is distinguished by a domain of inquiry that represents a shared belief among its members regarding its reason for being"