Three Landmark Symposia on Theory Development in Nursing

Celebrating the Golden Anniversary of Publication of the Proceedings in Nursing Research

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Nursing theory arose with collective self-awareness amidst vigorous debate among early nursing scholars that, over the years, produced metatheory, grand theory, and middle range theory for nursing research and practice (Henly, 2016). Position statements of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) have emphasized the established centrality of theory in nursing research, scholarship, and PhD education (AACN, 1998, 1999, 2010). Publication of texts on nursing theory into as many as six editions (e.g., Meleis, 2012; Reed & Shearer, 2011), along with a recent proposal for reorientation of the philosophical context in which theory is situated (Risjord, 2010), is evidence of continuing interest in theory in nursing.

Three symposia held at the Case Western Reserve University Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing and the University of Colorado School of Nursing in 1967 and 1968 were “landmarks” in the development of theory in nursing for two reasons (Nicoll, 1986). First, the symposia brought “together a unique group of people” who described the meetings as “electrifying,” “stimulating,” and “challenging,” as it seemed “that everyone at these conferences recognized the importance of the events” (Nicoll, 1986, p. 92). Second, the proceedings were published in Nursing Research in a series of issues in 1968 and 1969. As the first journal to have as its dedicated mission the publication of original research in nursing, Lucille Notter, Editor in 1968, took on the task of ensuring that papers from the conference proceedings underwent rigorous and objective peer review to ensure they were of the highest quality. The success of the efforts of authors, reviewers, and the Editor is obvious from the vast and lasting impact of the papers on the development of nursing as an academic discipline.

In the 50 years since publication of the proceedings, lively dialogue documented in the academic, professional, and scientific literatures in nursing reveals a wide range of opinion about theory—in fact, so broad have the viewpoints been that DeKeyser and Medoff-Cooper (2001) asked the question “Is nursing theory dead?” even as they argued that the basis of all nursing endeavors lies in theory! Today, changes in the health—illness profiles of people across the globe, changes in nursing practice, and advances in technology and the sciences relevant to nursing science are together pressing against theory as it has developed and theorizing as it has been done in nursing. Globalization, reemergence of infectious diseases, chronic illness in aging populations, shifts in settings for nursing services that change the dynamics of point-of-care interactions, and new roles for nurses are examples that call out for reconsideration of theory. Emerging areas of nursing science (Henly et al., 2015) offer new directions for philosophy of science in nursing (Risjord, 2014). If it’s true that nursing as a profession is at a crossroads (Grace, Willis, Roy, & Jones, 2015), then surely it is true that theory in nursing is at a crossroads. Thoughtful and reasoned appraisal of past theorizing and a critical look to the future of nursing theory and theorizing are warranted.

In celebration of the golden anniversary of the publication of proceedings from the three landmark symposia, Nursing Research invites submission of papers for a special focus issue on Theory and Theorizing in Nursing Science. Papers should address theory for nursing science, practice, or the research—practice link. Topics to be considered are wide-ranging and include (a) philosophy of science for nursing; (b) history of theory and theory development in nursing; (c) commentary evaluating theoretical endeavors in nursing; (d) issues in the incorporation of biological perspectives including omics into nursing theory; (e) big data and nursing theory; (f) multilevel and longitudinal theory; (g) theory in light of personalized healthcare; (h) normative and idiographic theory; (i) theory and methods—quantitative, qualitative, computational, or mixed methods; (j) cross-cultural and international issues in nursing theory, theory development, and theorizing; (k) post-colonial theory, nursing theory, and health equity; (l) nursing theory and the point-of-care; (m) theory in nursing education; (n) theory and the goals of nursing as a profession; and (o) other topics not included on this list. Illustrations of novel uses of theory in research, using data, are also relevant. Unlike most papers published in Nursing Research today, however, the nature of the topics in the special focus issue is such that most submissions are not expected to be data-based.

As you consider submission of a manuscript for the Special Focus Issue: Theory and Theorizing in Nursing Science, take some time to peruse the seminal papers. The proceedings
of the three landmark symposia are now freely available in a special collection on the Nursing Research homepage: www.nursingresearchonline.com (click on the Collections tab, then select “Proceedings from Three Landmark Symposia on Nursing Theory, 1968.”

The deadline for submission of papers for the Special Focus Issue is November 30, 2016. Submit papers at: www.editorialmanager.com/nres/. Corresponding authors should indicate that the paper should be considered for the Special Issue: Theory and Theorizing in Nursing Science. Accepted papers will be published in the March/April 2018 issue of Nursing Research—50 years from the publication of proceedings from the three landmark symposia.

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REFERENCES


