

# Nurturance: Concept Clarification and Theory for Nursing Administration Practice

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## Introduction

The presence of stress and the absence of nurturance in the healthcare work environment are phenomena of significant concern. Given that excessive levels of stress contribute to employee turnover (Edwards & Burnard, 2003), job dissatisfaction (Jamal & Baba, 2000), and decreased organizational commitment (Lee & Henderson, 1996), the study of stress and nurturance in the workplace should be a research priority on every nurse leader's agenda. Empirical data to explain the dynamic of stress and nurturance should provide the foundation for theory development and guide the design of nurturance-based interventions to mediate stress in the workplace.

The purpose of this paper is to describe an analysis of the literature on nurturance. Since the stress literature establishes a relationship between social support and the ability to adapt to stress in the workplace (Underwood, 2000), nurturance, a concept underlying both social support and caring, provides the middle range theory to connect the variables. The nurturance literature suggests that the ability to both give and receive comfort and support is a potent force in times of stress (Taylor, 2002). Instead of running from or fighting stress, nurturance from an individual's social group is known to provide long-lasting benefit to health, well-being, and survival (Taylor).

Selection of nurturance as a concept is consistent with the belief that leaders have an obligation and a duty to cultivate the nursing leaders of the future. Leaders who nurture another's potential, play a crucial role in keeping nurses motivated, vested in nursing as a career, and retained within the

profession. Nurturance, however, is more powerful a concept than is mentoring. Nurturance encompasses a broader dimension of the human being to value wholeness and the interrelation of mind, body, and spirit. Unlike mentoring, nurturance has a psychobiological explanatory foundation with scientifically documented benefit to health and well-being. Given the inadequacy of mentoring as a concept, nurturance was selected for exploration in this paper.

## Literature Review

The nurturance literature set selected for this review included nine publications mostly found in the parenting and psychology literature. The literature set includes five empirical studies, two theoretical papers, and two theoretical books. Findings from the literature suggest nurturance to be useful in two ways. First, nurturance can develop and empower individuals to thrive personally and professionally (Nemcek, 2003). Second, nurturance is a key component of successful work environments and is known to facilitate career progression and instill passion in the workforce (Boverie & Kroth, 2001).

The book by Boverie and Kroth (2001) introduces the notion of occupational intimacy that includes a nurturing workplace, meaningful work, and loving one's work. The authors view the workplace to be a family structure consistent with family dynamics. The book by Taylor (2002) refers to nurturance as a "tending instinct" that is essential to survival as a species. The author suggests nurturing to be hardwired into our genes, incorporated into our brain chemistry, and biologically influenced to be most apparent in females.

Two empirical studies use quantitative methods to demonstrate a positive correlation between parental nurturance and self-

esteem (Buri, Murphy, Richtsmeier, & Komar, 1992; Hopkins & Klein, 1993). A third empirical study using qualitative methods establishes an association between parental behaviors of nurturance, connectedness, and the role of family in the academic success of high achieving African Americans (Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998). A fourth empirical quantitative study explores the psychological well-being of adults with acute leukemia in remission (Evans, Thompson, Browne, Barr, & Barton, 1993). The authors found a significant correlation between the components of social support, of which nurturance is an element, and psychological well-being and longevity in leukemia patients. The fifth empirical study involves the psychometric evaluation of a tool, the PRQ85, to measure social support and nurturance is a dimension (Weinert, 1987).

Two journal articles from the nursing literature provide a theoretical framework for nurturance. Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2001) conceptualize nurturing and caring from a holistic perspective. Nemcek (2003) explores the concept of self-nurturance within the adult wellness and occupational health framework and reviews 19 studies to provide support for the concept's empowering value.

## Concept Clarification

### *Concept Exploration: Origin, Model, and Contrary Cases*

The term "nurture" comes from the Latin word for nursing (Boverie & Kroth, 2001). To nurture or to nurse is to nourish, feed, educate, and rear (Webster, 2002). Nurturance generally involves an interchange of nourishment between individuals within the context of relationships. Nurturance is also evident in the workplace and is known to be a characteristic of passionate work environments (Boverie & Kroth). Although the term nurturance derives from the word nursing and the concept reportedly exists in work environments, limited empirical literature on nurturance

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exists in both the general and specialty nursing literature. In fact, since the first study in 1987, only 19 studies pertaining to self-nurturance are available in the nursing literature (Nemcek, 2003). The majority of the non-nursing nurturance literature to date

is found primarily in the parenting and psychology specialties.

When dealing with concepts that are reasonably new to a researcher, Walker and Avant (1995) recommend the development of a model case first in the concept analysis process.

Table 1 represents real-life model and contrary cases to illustrate what nurturance from a nursing leadership perspective could or could not be. While the model and contrary cases provide a framework for analysis, it is the validation of critical attributes

**Table 1**  
*Nurturance: Model vs. contrary case*

Definition	Model Case Represents instance of what the concept is	Contrary case Represents an instance of what the concept is not
Theme	Nurturance as it relates to professional development of nurse leaders	
Person	Real-life example of Leader 1	Real-life example of Leader 2
Behaviors	<p>Genuine—What you see is what you get Caring and expressive; allows self to get close to people Straightforward Mentor—Works to develop self and others Willing to expend/share emotional time commitment required of a mentor Provides opportunity for others to advance Honest—Offers full, consistent messages that are nonchanging with situations Focus on balance of whole person as demonstrated by own behaviors i.e., Has a life outside of work Concerned with growth and development of self and others and willing to invest money to cultivate self and others One can be completely open and share concerns without fear of retaliation—tell leader what leader needs to hear</p> <p>Office represents sanctuary of healing i.e., Less formal and inviting Recognition and reward of others with promotions; extensively praises work of stars; i.e., Promotes others who work above and beyond expectations to excel on unit</p> <p>Not personally threatened by success of others Engaged for growth and development. (I will help you to get what you seek) Values self and others Provides frequent opportunities for face-to-face feedback Know where you stand with this leader Makes you feel important, valued, and cared for</p> <p>Promotes sense of worth in others Boosts your self-esteem and confidence through ongoing feedback</p> <p>Shares information/empowers others Encourages employee reflection, growth, and dreams—Sparks career potential and passion Able to attract and retain best and brightest who strive for innovation and creativity</p>	<p>Fake—Can put on a “show” at the drop of a hat and appear convincing Aloof and “poker faced;” does not allow self to get close to people Hidden agenda Nonmentor—Works to promote self and develop self Unwilling to expend/share emotional time commitment required by a mentor Withholds opportunity for others to advance Less than honest—Uses partial messages that are changing with situations and conditions Lacks balance of whole person as demonstrated by own behaviors i.e., Work is this leader’s life Concerned with growth and development of self and willing to invest money and time to cultivate self One cannot be completely open and share concerns; past use of previous comments against you makes you fear retaliation—tell leader what leader wants to hear Office does not represent sanctuary of healing i.e., Formal and uninviting Recognition and reward of others without promotions i.e., Praises work of stars in limited way without showcasing them (not managing up). No promotion of those working above and beyond expectations within organization Afraid of making others look too good and thus better than self Nonengaged, nonpartner for growth and development. (You get what you get on your own) Values self Does not provide frequent opportunity for face-to-face feedback Never know where you stand with this leader Does not make you feel important, valued, nor cared for, i.e., nothing is ever enough Does not promote sense of worth in others Lack ongoing feedback; creates and perpetuates lack of self-esteem and confidence Withholds information/purposely not empowering others Inhibits employee reflection, growth, and dreams—Stifles career potential and passion Retain employees with myopic visions who settle for status quo</p>
	Passion renewal	“Living Dead” Passion extinction Loses up and comers
	Capable of friendship with colleagues/able to separate role of leader	Incapable of friendship with colleagues/not able to separate role of leader

in the literature set that provides confirmation of the elements of a concept.

**Concept Analysis: Attributes, Antecedents, and Consequences**

Figure 1 represents a synopsis of attributes, antecedents, and consequences for the concept of nurturance found in the literature set. This synopsis is consistent with the model case, the author's personal and professional notion of what nurturance should be, and the humanistic perspective espoused in caring theory (Watson, 1999; Watson, 2002). This consistency in conceptualizations strengthens the adequacy of the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of nurturance.

Based on identified recurring themes, the defining attributes of nurturance fall into a typology of three categories: emotion, relationships, and dimensions. The emotion category includes the critical attributes of caring, intimacy, attention, and encouragement. The relationships category includes

reciprocity, commitment of time, social integration, and acceptance. Lastly, the dimensions category includes wholeness, an attribute that incorporates the mind, body, and spirit connection within an assumptive basis of growth and development.

Antecedents of nurturance are respect, trust, and a willingness to engage in and be vulnerable within a relationship. For nurturance to exist, humaneness must be present to recognize people as individuals worthy of investment and as contributors toward a future mutually desired outcome. To facilitate nurturance involves the ability to recognize disharmony in any component of the relationship, and the honesty and effort to address and correct such disharmony.

Before an individual can nurture others, the individual must first be able to nurture self. Other antecedents of nurturance include knowledge, ability, capacity, and resourcefulness as a means to facilitate growth inherent within the nurturance concept. Parental behaviors of determination, en-

gagement, discipline, and affection also represent antecedents of nurturance.

Consequences of nurturance include a sense of unity, community, and connectedness. The individual experiencing nurturance has a sense of meaning, purpose, and satisfaction with life. This sense of well-being is inclusive of enhanced self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy, and a feeling of being cared for and valued. A nurtured individual exhibits an "arena of comfort" evidenced by an ability to cope with uncertainty and the wherewithal to tolerate or master areas of discontinuity in life (Buri et al., 1992). The outcomes resulting from nurturance are thought to positively impact affect, problem solving skills, health, and creativity.

**Concept Boundaries**

A synopsis of the literature set provides the framework for identifying concept boundaries. The boundaries of nurturance are the contextual influences, dimensions (objective/subjective, physiological/psycho-

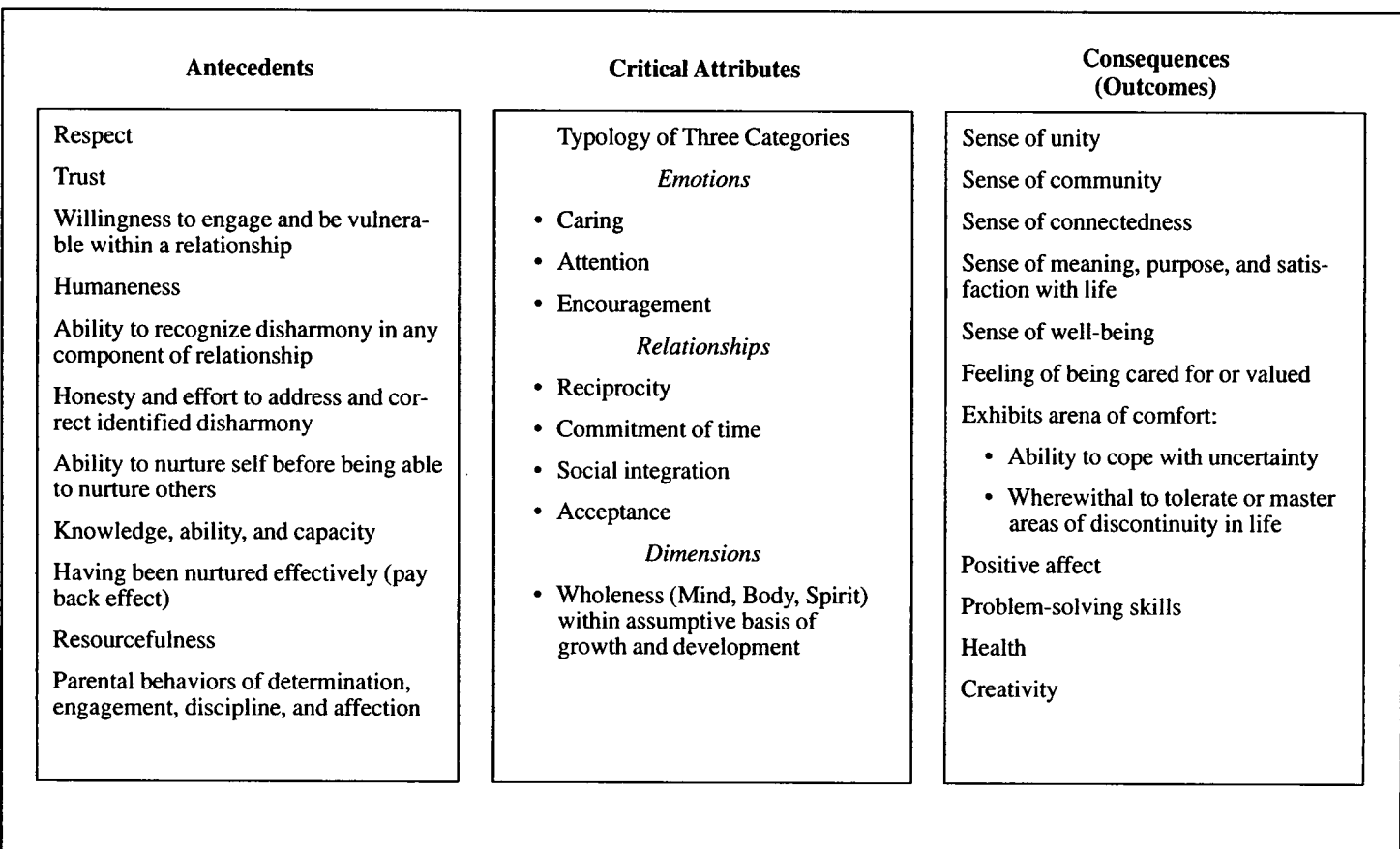


Figure 1. Nurturance concept analysis.

logical), and assumptive basis for the concept.

Ten contextual influences affect the concept of nurturance: family, environment, timing, social hierarchy, physiology, demographics, social support, acute versus chronic illness, personality, and culture. First, nurturance exists within the context of families inclusive of the parent-child relationship and in the community of peers, friends, and colleagues. Parental behaviors of determination, engagement, discipline, and affection promote nurturance despite negative influences of neighborhood, peers, schools, and society (Maton et al., 1998). The positive involvement of community and extended family in engaging youth and recognizing individual accomplishments serves to potentiate nurturance (Maton et al.). This observation validates the notion that not only does it take a village to raise a child, but also the power of nurturance coming from the family seems to have the strength to mediate inherent forces within the environment.

Second, nurturance exists within the changing complexity of the environment. The impact of nurturance is most significant during the protected social environment of childhood yet nurturance remains a robust influence throughout the independence of the high school years and the freedom of the college years (Buri et al., 1992). Although there may be a sustainable effect derived from nurturance over time, certain environmental influences such as conditions of war and physical separation may cause an ebb and flow in nurturance (Taylor, 2002). The inherent stressful conditions of a relentlessly changing and complex healthcare work environment may mimic conditions of war. From the work environment perspective, if nurturance is viewed as an organizational resource and allowed to exist as an integral part of the workplace, passionate work and desirable corporate and individual outcomes may ensue uninterrupted (Boverie & Kroth, 2001). Individuals receiving nurturance at work are more inclined to nurture others and thus perpetuate

meaningful organizational norms. Maton et al. (1998) suggest that individuals who experience nurturance and subsequent success in life have an intrinsic motivation to give back to others. This phenomenon suggests a "payback effect" that appears to transcend environments.

Third, timing in which nurturance is given has implications for its future benefit. Nurturance is best provided in the younger school years as the sustaining benefits of nurturance appear to be greatest when nurturance begins early (Buri et al., 1992). Nurturance does not disappear in later years, however, over time, a process known as "supportive allegiance" occurs (Buri et al.). In supportive allegiance, nurturance continues within healthy relationships yet the primary provider of the nurturance no longer is the parent but rather the spouse or significant other. This overall sense of timing implies a continuum quality exists within the nurturance concept.

The parenting literature seems to confirm a "pulling away" from parental nurturance in adolescence. While the literature does not clearly explain why this occurs, the pulling away appears to be consistent with a natural developmental progression toward adulthood and a quest for individuality. Erikson (1950) in his classic work identified this developmental evolution. In adolescence (12 to 18 years), teenagers begin to establish a sense of personal identity. Beyond age 19, personal identity culminates in the development of intimate relationships beyond those with parents (Erikson) and dovetails with the supportive allegiance phenomena described by Buri et al. (1992).

Fourth, higher position in the social hierarchy leads to increasing social support, access to nurturing or tending, reduction in stress, and improved well-being (Taylor, 2002). Membership in an integrated and dynamic group allows individuals the opportunity to share similar interests and values while simultaneously benefiting from the nurturance that comes from belonging to the group (Weinert, 1987). This reality, however, can be altered through leadership behaviors. For

example, servant leadership transcends social hierarchy to ensure desirable outcomes for all. Servant leadership sets the vision, defines the model values, creates the follower environment, and moves to the bottom of the hierarchy with service in mind (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003).

Fifth, physiology influences an individual's nurturance potential particularly under conditions of stress. Until recently, existing stress research assumed the classic fight or flight stress response applied to males and females alike. Prior to 1994, most stress research involved the study of stress responses in male rats (Taylor, 2002). Since 1994, however, the National Institutes of Health has mandated that both genders be broadly represented in government-funded medical research. This mandate has resulted in recent scientific data clearly establishing that a female's biological hardwiring and subsequent response to stress differs from the male fight or flight stress response (Taylor). Under conditions of stress, neurocircuitry in females results in the release of oxytocin, estrogen, and progesterone through the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical system (HPA). Oxytocin release has a sedating effect that combines with estrogen and progesterone to enhance maternal responsiveness. The combination of these hormones contributes to nurturance and what Taylor refers to as "tending" (protection of offspring) and "befriending" (turning to the social group during times of stress). Males, on the other hand, release androgens during times of stress. Androgens work to antagonize the calming effects of oxytocin. This hormonal milieu produces aggressiveness and the characteristic fight or flight syndrome not associated with tending or befriending (Taylor). The tending and befriending theory, however, does not appear to address the role of learned behaviors in nurturance. Under this framework, men may not be biologically hardwired for nurturance, however, this does not imply that men are incapable of nurturance and thus cannot learn nurturing behaviors. The parenting literature clearly documents the potentiating

effect of nurturance from both parents (Hopkins & Klein, 1993).

Sixth, demographics play a role in actual and perceived nurturance. Hopkins and Klein (1993) examined the relationship between parental nurturance, self-perception, and gender difference in 207 college students (106 men and 101 women). Study findings established a positive relationship between parental nurturance and self-worth. Gender differences in the nurturing dimension were seen with parental support and participation significantly correlated with self-esteem for women. Parental control, but not support and participation, correlated significantly with self-esteem for men. Overall, mothers were viewed as more nurturing than fathers by both males and females in the study. This finding coincides with the socially held belief that females genetically may have a greater tendency toward nurturance. Maternal nurturance in the Hopkins and Klein study, however, was significantly correlated with parental nurturance. This finding implies that behavior of one parent may rub off on the other, possibly potentiating the nurturance effect from both parents.

Seventh, social support and nurturance are interconnected. Independent of age referents, the concept of nurturance occurs within the context of relationships (Weinert, 1987). Individuals with support from others with similar interests and values benefit from nurturance and the related affirmation of self-worth. Association with successful peers also potentiates the nurturance effect and enhances individual goal attainment (Maton et al., 1998). Nurturance, however, may diminish under conditions of increased job strain and conditions in which nurturance is not rewarded. In high strain jobs, an individual's ability to establish social contacts may be limited by virtue of the demands of the job and lack of exposure to nurturance (Taylor, 2002). Similarly, when society does not economically reward tending or nurturance, those in the traditional tending professions such as nursing, teaching, and motherhood are inclined to consider career alternatives. While one assumes

the personal role of mother is one not likely to be relinquished, certainly the professional roles of nurse or teacher are ones that could be traded for more lucrative roles.

Eighth, acute versus chronic illness may play a role in an individual's interest in and acceptance of nurturance. In a study of acute leukemia patients in remission, individuals with chronic illness scoring high in the "fighting spirit" dimension were reportedly disinterested in nurturance (Evans et al., 1993). Individuals with "fighting spirits" were described as those who had been dealing with cancer for some time and who demonstrated a "positive/confronting" coping style. Well-being in the chronic patient apparently was related to the strength of the person's personality and not the nurturance available. Individuals with a "fighting spirit" were described as those who were optimistic, persevering, and who also had a desire for information aimed at fighting the illness. Individuals in the acute phases of illness (i.e., newly diagnosed), however, were thought to benefit most from nurturance. The findings of this study raise three questions: Is it through experienced nurturance that one gets the "fighting spirit"? Is there the possibility that both nurturance and a fighting spirit can work together to enhance outcomes in illness? and What is the relationship between nurturance and locus of control?

Ninth, personality appears to play a role in a person's receptiveness to and aptitude for nurturance. Certain personality types such as the "fighting spirit" previously described may not be receptive to nurturance. Similarly, individuals incapable or unwilling to open their hearts to others may be incapable of human exchanges within nurturing relationships.

Lastly, culture has an effect on nurturance. An individual's willingness to donate time, as is needed in nurturing relationships, varies according to that person's socialization (Taylor, 2002). Cultures that train their members in tending from an early age favorably influence the likelihood for those early behaviors to be repeated in later life.

The literature indicates the boundaries for the concept attributes fell mostly within the subjective and psychological dimensions. All authors except Taylor (2002) used self-reported questionnaires to measure nurturance. Objective validation of empirical referents through direct behavioral observation or physiological measures of stress were absent. The assumptive basis for concept attributes overwhelmingly centered upon the growth concept. This was not surprising given that the majority of the nurturance literature appears within child development frameworks.

### Definitions

Each definition of nurturance identified in the literature set was critiqued using the Hinds (1984) six criteria as follows:

1. Must give essential, not accidental attributes of that which is to be defined.
2. Must not be circular. That is, it must not directly or indirectly contain the subject to be defined.
3. Should preferably be in positive, not negative terms. The definition must state what the concept is, not what it is not.
4. Should not be expressed in obscure or figurative language.
5. Should reflect a variable, a continuum along which various amounts of the concept can occur.
6. Should contain reference to the context within which the concept is embedded.

All definitions were critically reviewed and not one definition was found to meet all the six criteria. The inability of any of the definitions to meet the specified criteria justifies the need to create a new definition of nurturance. For purposes of this paper, a definition of nurturance that meets the Hinds (1984) criteria was developed:

Nurturance is a reciprocal and dynamic process involving the extent to which provision of necessary substances such as warmth, caring, attention, acceptance, and encouragement enable indi-

viduals to grow and thrive along a continuum. Nurturance occurs within the context of supportive relationships that exist within a connected community of family either in the home or work environment. Nurturance is concerned with investment of time, balance, wholeness, wellness, and protection of individuals.

### Statement Clarification

#### *Literature Re-Evaluation*

The statement clarification discussion includes the same literature set cited in the concept clarification section and it adds one new source (Locke & Prinz, 2002) to expand upon the nurturance continuum. The previously cited literature set is kept as it adequately describes the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of nurturance.

An analysis of the literature was done to summarize the related assumptions and explain how the assumptions informed the relationships. A brief overview of the 10 attributes, assumptions, and relationships reinforce the notion that caring is valued within nurturing relationships. Wholeness (mind, body, spirit) is essential to address the multiple dimensions of nurturance that occur within the person-environment fit and incorporate the physiological, psychological, and social/spiritual components of individuals. Reciprocity in nurturing relationships involves a give and take between willing participants. A commitment to time by participants in relationships is needed for nurturance to occur. Being comfortable with intimacy and vulnerability in relationships is necessary in order to nurture self and others. Since nurturance occurs within relationships, social integration is important to create the sense of unity and community nurturance is thought to produce. Attention, acceptance, and encouragement by parents are essential elements of the nurturance concept. The three nurturance attributes of attention, acceptance, and encouragement incorporate engagement and selflessness to yield that "arena of comfort" that comes from unconditional

love and the assumption of an individual's inherent worth.

### Relational Statements

A summary of 19 key relational statements generated from the literature were diagrammed using the Gibbs (1972) framework, the Baron and Kenny (1986) moderator-mediator variable distinctions, and the Walker and Avant (1995) general propositions. For this discussion, the relational statements are incorporated into the previously cited summary of the nurturance literature. An analysis of similarities and differences among relationships, variables, and theories within the literature set was also completed. This analysis yielded seven significant observations.

First, the literature establishes nurturance as either a treatment (independent variable) or mostly an outcome (dependent variable). When used as a mechanism of social support, nurturance is primarily used as a main effect (independent variable). No apparent testing of nurturance as either a moderating (buffering) or mediating effect was evident in the literature set. If nurturance were used as a subcomponent of social support, it would be viewed as a resource and not necessarily an independent or dependent variable. As a resource in affecting stress in the work environment, nurturance could be tested as a mechanism of social support with either a moderating or mediating effect. Establishing consistency for nurturance as a resource provides opportunity to contribute new knowledge in nursing.

Second, when used as an independent variable, nurturance primarily leads to success as measured by sustaining benefits in relationships (supportive allegiance), individuals (self-worth, health, well-being, stress reduction), and organizations (passionate organizations). When used as a dependent variable, nurturance entails human exchanges (acceptance, unconditional love, wholeness, involvement, support). Overall, nurturance appears to have a positive valence regardless of whether it is administered or received.

Third, the nurturance literature set identi-

fied no mediators. Three sources identified moderators of nurturance to include the ability to open one's heart (Boverie & Kroth, 2001), personality, particularly the "fighting spirit" type (Evans et al., 1993), and neighborhoods, peers, schools, community, and society (Maton et al., 1998). The absence of mediators within the nurturance literature presents an opportunity for research.

Fourth, there appears to be no consistency in nurturance theory testing in the literature. While multiple parental nurturance scales are available, not one scale appears to be used consistently. A "grand" theory of nurturance was not evident in the parenting literature or in the adult psychology or nursing literature. Conceptualizations of nurturance are not standardized particularly because a uniform definition of nurturance does not appear to exist. The one commonality of most nurturance sources, however, is the concept's assumptive basis of growth and development.

Fifth, referents evident in the relational statements identify a common theme of parental behaviors tied to emotion (caring, warmth, love). This observation is particularly profound given that social scientists have begun to realize that the concepts of stress and coping are part of a larger rubric known as the emotions (Lazarus, 1991). This observation further raises the question of whether a mediator to potentiate nurturance within stressful work environments might not just be emotional intelligence.

Sixth, personality as a variable holds in some literature sources yet not in others. While the "fighting spirit" personality fails to value or permit nurturance in chronic illness (Evans et al., 1993) in at least one source, the power of parental behaviors promoting nurturance seems to overshadow influences of personality, peers, school, and society (Maton et al., 1998).

Seventh, two conditions unique to nurturance must exist for nurturance to occur: ability for intimacy and ability for self-nurture. The literature suggests that for nurturance to exist, individuals must be able to open their hearts to others, be vulnerable in a

relationship, and allow social intimacy to happen. For individuals to nurture others, they must first be able to nurture themselves.

## Conclusions

### *Knowledge Gaps and Implications*

The literature suggests knowledge gaps exist in nurturance. These gaps may be summarized into three major categories to include the continuum, empirical literature, and instruments.

First, the continuum concept of nurturance is not fully explained. Further development of this continuum appears to provide a key to ideal timing and application of the concept. The importance of the timing component is consistent with nurturance research and its sustaining effect reported in the parent-child literature. To gain further insight into the continuum, further analysis of the continuum concept within the child development literature is necessary to identify pertinent principles with potential application to the adult context.

Second, the empirical literature was limited in its ability to address nurturance beyond childhood and adolescence. Assuming that nurturance is a growth and development concept, research on nurturance should extend throughout the life cycle. Papers such as this provide a foundation for further study and refinement to address nurturance across the life cycle.

Third, limited knowledge about nurturance in adults exists in part because instruments with adequate psychometric properties to measure nurturance in adults do not exist. While one could argue that existing nurturance measures could be duplicated for adult populations with removal of age referents, this argument is flawed in that it fails to capture the unique stages of development and inaccurately assumes that adults are merely "big children." To validly and reliably measure nurturance in later stages of development requires further exploration of nurturance to better determine its empirical referents. Although instruments to directly measure nurturance were not found, 21 in-

struments that measure caring, a key attribute of nurturance, were found in the literature (Watson, 2002). Instruments that measure caring offer potential ideas for the future development of nurturance instruments.

## Synthesis

Based on a review of the literature and personal professional experience, nurturance appears to be a most powerful concept not currently exploited in nursing leadership practice, in the healthcare work environment, or in society. Support for this argument may be seen in three key explanations.

First, the word to nurture derives from the Latin word "to nurse." Nurturance, however, does not appear to be a consistently observable concept in today's healthcare work environment. This inconsistency is seen in the limited articles available within the nursing literature. Few empirical articles on nurturance were evident in the general nursing literature with the articles found particularly focusing on the nurse-patient context (Geissler, 1990). Zero studies were found within a leadership context in nursing administration sources. Lack of nurturance is prominent in the mechanistic, profit-seeking nature of most hospitals today. While these institutions may have mission statements and nursing philosophies that profess caring for patients, these values do not consistently translate to caring for employees. If institutions claim to be humanistic and thus advocate care for others, words need to be consistent with actions and formal nurturance programs need to sprout and flourish within institutions. Once nurturance programs are plentiful and instruments to measure nurturance in adults are available, reports of empirical work and program successes will likely become increasingly evident in the literature.

Second, significant parallels exist between nurturance in parent-child relationships and leader-subordinate relationships. If administration of nurturance can be demonstrated to be such a robust indicator of personal success in the parent-child relationship, then similar types of benefits

could potentially occur in leader-subordinate relationships. In the 1990s, there was a move in nursing administration to "take the mama out of management" (Manthey, 1990). Given the profound and sustainable impact of and benefit from nurturance in the development of children, it would seem that the presence of caring behaviors in management are needed more today than ever. The undesirable dependence and victimization consequences of "mama management" no longer should play a role in nursing leadership. Combining the desirable caring behaviors in management with the empowerment frameworks of shared governance models and adult-adult relationships, however, presents a more integrated framework that could strengthen today's nursing practice environment.

Third, current research demonstrates a new paradigm in gender differences within the stress response framework. Given that nursing is a female dominated profession and the profession is in the midst of a major nursing shortage, it becomes evident that organizations need to establish new interventions to address stress in the work place. Nurturance-based interventions offer potential to mediate stress in today's complex healthcare work environment. Development of nurturance-based interventions, however, is limited as research in nurturance lacks the adequate instruments to measure nurturance in professional practice. This concept clarification paper presents a beginning foundation for research on nurturance to better connect theory and practice in nursing. Nurturance as a concept offers particular promise for nursing administration practice. Further development of nurturance as a concept, however, rests with the ability to create and psychometrically test appropriate instruments to measure nurturance within a stress and coping, social support, and caring framework.

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