

If Not Us, Then Who?

A Focused Ethnography Exploring Critical Caring Among Planetary Health Nurses

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Abstract

Planetary health can be seen as the thriving state of natural ecological systems, ones in which human health is interdependent. This article discusses an ethnographic study of nurses actively involved in adapting to and mitigating environmental challenges to support people and populations rendered vulnerable now and in the future. By exploring patterns in nurses' journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities, a reflexive thematic analysis is presented in relation to critical caring theory. An embodiment of planetary health nursing is conveyed through metaphorical images of identified themes, which illustrate how nurses can be, know, choose, and do (act) critically in response to local, regional, and global environmental challenges.

Key Words: Planetary, Health, Critical, Caring, Ecological Nursing

Introduction

This ethnographic research explores nurses' perspectives on responding to planetary health challenges with the goal of identifying broad implications for the future of nursing education, research, practice, and policy. Grounded in a comprehensive review of existing literature, this research builds on a growing body of nursing knowledge related to planetary health challenges and impacts, nursing awareness, professional values clarification, reconceptualizing nursing's foundation, nurses' perspectives on the concept of environment, and nursing action. By exploring the journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities of nurses who exemplify caring for both the environment and human health, this study is significant in understanding how nurses can embody planetary health as a way of being, knowing, choosing, and doing nursing and thereby expressing critical caring theory in action. Raising

awareness and knowledge among nurses to challenge the status quo within the profession and to see nursing as a vehicle for planetary health in action can inform a larger social and environmental mandate in the minds of nurses.

Background

Nurses, by virtue of their roles, are increasingly confronting the health implications of social and economic inequity for people and populations that are further compromised given the imperative to adapt to and mitigate environmental changes. Nurses are uniquely positioned within their communities to understand and intervene locally on how human health is interrelated to planetary health. However, nursing has traditionally focused primarily on supporting the immediate environment of a patient's surroundings (Bender, 2018; Lausten, 2006), centered in a dyadic relationship between nurse and patient, rather than engaging in a broader environmental

perspective. Likewise, nursing education has largely neglected human health as coexistence with nature, dependent on natural systems, such as the atmosphere, land, and water (Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018; Lausten, 2006). Given this context, Beck and Dossey (2019) reflect on Nightingale's history to reclaim nursing's role in "informing and educating for healthy people to be living on a healthy planet" (p. 258). Similarly, planetary health, as defined in Faerron Guzmán and Potter (2021), has catalyzed a shift in thinking among researchers within the health and environmental sciences. Furthermore, the Canadian Nurses Association's (2024) position statement on planetary health emphasises the need to integrate the concept of planetary health as a fundamental determinant of health and a critical concern for the nursing profession. This statement reflects a growing sense of urgency to shift nursing practice, education, policy, and research towards the existential risk of exceeding planetary health boundaries.

A consistent call throughout nursing literature on planetary health is the recognition of historically relevant professional values to engage in ecologically minded practice including fairness, advocacy, and social justice. Absent, however, is the centring of caring and its relevance to a broadening perspective of engaged nurses who consider the interrelated needs and value of all life forms on the planet. Human caring is an experience within all of us; it transcends time and space and offers a foundation from which an evolving critical social consciousness can occur (Watson, 2008, 2018). By highlighting the experiences of registered nurses as social actors involved in planetary health, this research has the potential to transform the social significance of nursing work as caring for the planet. Critical caring theory integrates and extends Falk-Rafael's earlier work in relation to Watson's caring science and provides a disciplinary focus for nursing that integrates concepts of caring, social justice, and advocacy (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Falk-Rafael, 2005, 2020). It is relevant to this study as a perspective for the conceptualization and enactment of nursing that advocates for the enablement of individuals and

communities to reach their full potential (Falk-Rafael & Betker, 2012).

Falk-Rafael describes four tenets of critical caring as a way of being (ontology), knowing (epistemology), choosing (ethics), and doing (praxis). These tenets are expressed through seven carative health-promotion processes derived from Watson's original 10 carative factors. The seven carative health-promotion processes are referred to as ontological competencies that emphasize caring as a relational way of being (Falk-Rafael, 2005). These seven processes include (i) Preparing self; (ii) Developing and maintaining a helping-trusting relationship; (iii) Using a systematic reflexive approach to caring; (iv) Engaging in transpersonal teaching-learning; (v) Providing, creating, and/or maintaining supportive and sustainable environments; (vi) Meeting needs and building capacity; and (vii) Being open and attending to spiritual-mysterious and existential dimensions.

In summary, the seven processes of critical caring theory put forward capacity building, consciousness raising, supportive environments, trust, and self-preparation as requisite ingredients to shift caring from the traditional sense to an empowered, holistic approach (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018). These processes have helped to inform this research with a critical caring perspective in the interpretation of registered nurses engaged in planetary health.

Materials and Methods

The following section outlines the study design, sample, data collection, and analytical methods, along with measures taken to ensure rigour.

Study Design

This research emphasizes interpretive design, which is more likely to give voice to participants in their own context using verbatim quotations and rich descriptions. I chose focused ethnography because it is well-suited for

research questions that are context-specific, time-limited, and conducted among a small number of participants (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Opara & Petrucka, 2024). Focused ethnography emphasizes a natural triangulation of investigative approaches, including participant observation, informal interviews, and examination of documents (in this case, artistic reflections) regarding the same phenomenon (Roper & Shapira, 2000).

Sample

Participants included 14 registered nurses ranging in age from 23 to 65, with an average age of 37 years, all of whom were deeply involved in environmental issues and organizations including local nursing interest groups and regional and national professional nursing associations focusing on environmental health issues. All were comfortable being named as planetary health nurses for the purposes of this study. Thirteen participants self-identified as white and one as Jewish. Twelve participants identified as female, and two as male. Five nurses worked in community health, two in intensive care, two in sustainability, one in education, two were retired volunteers, and two were graduate students. The educational levels of participants included two with doctoral degrees, four with master's degrees, six with Bachelor of Science degrees in nursing, and two graduate students (one doctoral and one master's). Nine participants were from Canada, with four from Ontario, four from British Columbia, and one from Alberta. Five participants were from the United States of America, with two from Washington State, and one each from Minnesota, North Carolina, and Virginia. Quotations and excerpts from

participants in the research were attributed to self-selected pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Collection

The study was guided by the following research questions:

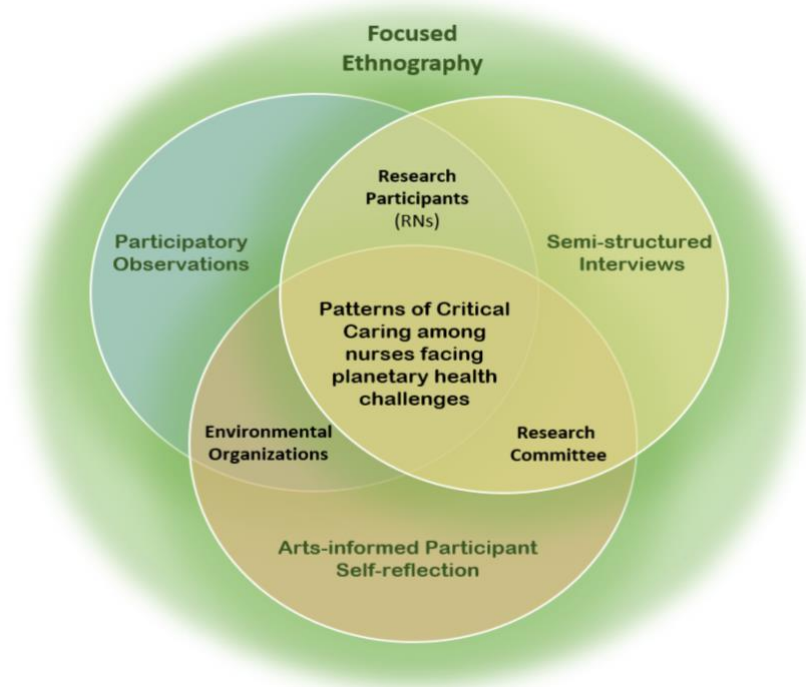
1. How are nurses involved in planetary health experiencing their journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities for action concerning planetary health?
2. In what ways can/do nurses embody their participation within organizations focused on issues of planetary health?
3. How do the participants view themselves as nurses and the work of planetary health within an arts-informed participant self-reflection?

Data were collected episodically and employed a combination of partially structured interviews, participant observations, and arts-informed participant self-reflections between October 2021 and October 2022.

The research framework and methodology diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the triangulation of data collection that informed this focused ethnography. The intersection of the three circles highlights the importance of the research participants, their affiliation to environmental organizations, and my supervisory committee members as centring influences of this research project. The centre of the diagram represents the integration of this research to emphasize patterns of critical caring among nurses engaged in planetary health challenges.

Figure 1

Research Framework and Methodology Diagram



Guided by the research questions, 14 individual interviews were conducted via Zoom. I then observed six research participants during environmental nursing group meetings, including two local, two regional, and two national meetings. Finally, I invited participants to further express themselves and their work as nurses in the context of planetary health through an arts-informed self-reflection. Five participants accepted. The arts-informed participant self-reflection contributed to the validation of this research and provided a sense of meaningful closure to the research participants.

Analytical Methods

The six phases of thematic analysis, as described by Braun & Clarke (2021), were employed which include familiarization, coding, theme development, refinement, naming, and write-up. Meticulous organization of initial handwritten codes drew from the entire dataset of participant transcripts, observation fieldnotes, and arts-informed self-reflections. Typical of the

ethnographic approach, I repeated the review of data sets to identify what appeared significant from each of the data sources. Moving within participant descriptive words, I began to define categories of codes that grouped similar subcategory ideas together in relation to my research questions. I continued my analysis to identify the nature and character of potential themes using a non-linear process and revisited the data to extract implicit meaning at higher levels of generality (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). I utilized schematic drawings and artistic reflections to support the development and naming of themes and sub-themes, seeking to create an accurate representation and facilitate a compelling and coherent way of telling the participants' stories. Themes and sub-themes were refined to clarify, define, and express a focus for each, building a rich analytical narrative. Deep consideration about theme names and identified compelling data quotations assisted in developing theme definitions and descriptions.

Rigour

During the entire research process, deliberate attention to each of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) components of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and addressing bias. Participant check-ins and an independent review added validity and credibility to the data. Providing three different data sources supported a coherent justification for identified themes and a convergence across different data collection methodologies contributing to the credibility of this research. I maintained dependability through consistent transcribed interview questions, observations, and arts-informed participant self-reflections. A confirmability audit included examples of coding, theme development, and data reduction within the analysis of this research. I sought to recognize the centrality of my identity as a researcher, my bias, and how my background and privileges shaped the lens through which I viewed this research inquiry. Furthermore, the study was subjected to the York University

Faculty of Graduate Studies Ethics Review Board protocol process before research activities began (York University REB Certificate # STU 2020-117).

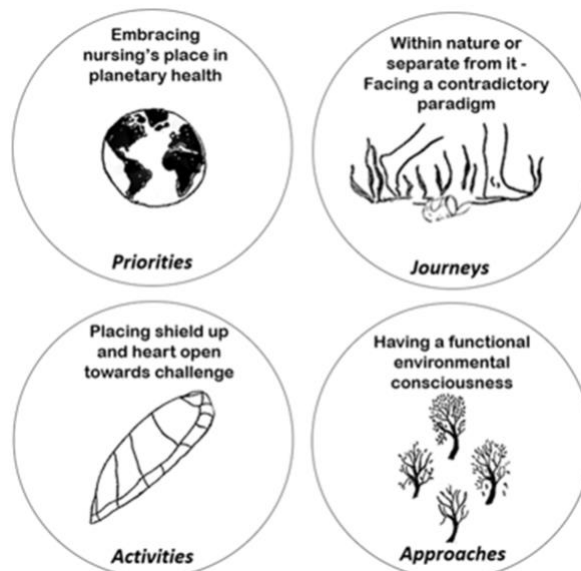
Findings

The interviews, participant observations, and arts-informed self-reflections provided a collection of contextually rich data sources. I developed findings through repeated cycles of review, which allowed me to become familiar with the participant data as units of analysis.

As I reread and compared the entire data set of participant transcripts, observation fieldnotes, and arts-informed self-reflections, my interpretations approached a deeper level of abstraction to achieve a thematic analysis. Through this process, I identified four main themes and eleven sub-themes for which I created the artistic representation shown in Figure 2. It aims to provide a deeper consideration of the layers of meaning and characteristics of my interpretation of the research findings.

Figure 2

Artistic Representation for Main Themes



**Theme 1: Within nature or separate from it:
Facing a contradictory paradigm**

The theme “Within nature or separate from it: Facing a contradictory paradigm” describes a connection among participants within nature, a bond often formed in childhood yet experienced in contradiction to an anthropocentric paradigm of human separation from nature, a superiority to nature, and the exploitation of nature. Eric exemplified among participants reclaiming a sense of belonging within nature,

Being in nature, that’s where I get spiritually renewed. Being out in beautiful places and just appreciating the scenes and the connection I have touching the water or smelling the scent in the air. I feel so blessed to live here that I get to smell the pine and the cedar and if I need an ocean fix, I go down and breathe in some salt air. That is a religious experience for me.

The characteristics of this theme express the journeys of participants to reclaim their connectedness to a shared humanity within nature (not separate from it), to reconcile their personal values and nursing identity, and to examine socially and economically unsustainable human practices that privilege some at the expense of many. Indeed, being within nature as a conceptual paradigm informed an ecological justice perspective and guiding ethical principle among participants as they felt challenged to be their authentic selves amid dominant paradigms that reinforce a false sense of separation between humans and nature. Sally shared,

We are made of nature as human beings and so we actually don’t have to go anywhere to connect, we live in it. So that’s been a huge influencing factor in my understanding of the natural

world and my passion in protecting it as well.

Participants expressed a genuine desire to value a sense of belonging within nature and sought to embody that value in all aspects of their lives. Some participants described working to reclaim the deep connection they had experienced during childhood. Other participants commented on their efforts to live authentically as a work in progress, a day-to-day practice to strive for, and a part of their professional identity as nurses. To be true to their authentic selves, several participants transitioned into new roles, such as education, making more time for advocacy or consulting work, engaging in hands-on community resiliency work, or stepping away from clinical nursing practice. Several frontline nurses involved in direct patient care identified themselves as environmental advocates who happened to be nurses. All participants related challenges to being their authentic selves in the practice of nursing within health care systems.

This theme highlights the inherent contradiction that participants faced when attempting to prioritize sustainability in societies with unsustainable social and economic systems. Participants acknowledged what Brigham (2021) referred to as the important work required to centre human interconnection within nature, rather than prioritizing humans at the expense of planetary health. In this study, participants did this by reclaiming their sense of belonging within nature, confronting the social and economic paradigms, and examining their privileges and vulnerabilities. Jen’s words expressed how they make sense of the world while facing a contradictory paradigm:

So, we’ve defined these imaginary concepts of progress and growth, what is healthy, what is normal and balanced. We have shifted away from what we actually need as humans on the planet to something really dangerous and so making sense of that for me is

thinking about how these narratives really drive how we operate as humans.

Jen's comments refer to shaping consciousness, so nature is not taken for granted. Being centered within nature encourages deeper conversations about the structures and systems of human society that separate and dominate nature rather than connect and sustain humans within it.

Theme 2: Having a functional environmental consciousness

The theme "Having a functional environmental consciousness" describes how participants applied their informed understanding and awareness of environmental issues and translated it into meaningful and effective planetary health action. The theme's title stood out while speaking with Climate Nurse who exemplified a proactive and practical approach toward planetary health and set limits for herself. She explained, "I don't go to extremes, which are wonderful, and I wish I had it in me to do it, but I don't. I live more of a functional environmental consciousness." Participants effectively demonstrated functional, practical approaches that promoted environmental awareness and understanding. Both Hannah and Jen emphasized the importance of "finding my people," referring to individuals who are action-oriented within environmental nursing organizations. They demonstrated a motivation to mobilize and amplify nursing toward integrated solutions, such as addressing the social determinants of health, advocating for a just transition away from fossil fuels, and supporting community-based food security initiatives. Mabel's comments reflect the practical necessity of nurses becoming involved,

We start to realize how the food that's around us is not the food we're going to have in the future, and if we're not able to engage in that, then

we're going to struggle even more. So those kinds of basic survival skills, I think, are part of what the nursing role ends up being and helping people ensure they have access to food and basic security.

Participants consistently expressed the link between planetary health and human health as a basis of awareness from which nurses could most easily relate and advocate. Hannah stated,

...human health is so intricately linked with planetary health that I saw this coming together that we, that nurses as a collective, could effect change on this policy-wide and in the public on understanding what climate change really means for health.

Within the nursing profession, moving from collective awareness towards planetary health action makes practical sense, and Eric's comment represents the power of a functional environmental consciousness in how nurses prioritize their actions:

...incentivize these changes, we've got to get people spending on the social determinants of health. Improving air quality, water quality, that kind of thing. That is going to have a larger impact than me recycling a cup in the hospital. It's finding a way to impact larger systems than just my patient that night.

Theme 3: Placing shield up and heart open toward the challenge

The theme "Placing shield up and heart open toward the challenge" was inspired by Eric, a nurse who is raising awareness of the public health crisis by meeting with legislators and

helping other nurses make the connection between health and the environment. Eric highlighted a challenge faced by many participants who risked putting themselves in harm's way by participating in public meetings and engaging in political advocacy. He said, "I use an example of the warrior who's got a shield up, but his heart is open. You have to protect yourself and yet you have to open yourself to be vulnerable." Eric's reference to a shield and heart prompted reflection on how participants demonstrated perseverance to advocate for planetary health, sometimes under difficult personal and professional circumstances, while offering kindness and empathy toward others in their approach.

The theme is illustrated by a turtle shell used like a shield to represent the tension between self-protection and the burden of knowledge participants associated with planetary challenges. Jen's comments help illustrate this point:

It is just a paralyzing reality doing the work [of planetary health] if every single hour of every day, and every interaction I had was spent in that awareness of reality that we're really in a bad spot. So emotionally, there is a burden when I allow myself to go there, when I allow myself to think about what I understand to be a likely reality of some major, major changes.

The physical and emotional demands on nurses' well-being cannot be confounded with contemplations of planetary health. Participants proactively defend their time and energy to seek balance, concentrating their planetary health-related activities on what is meaningful to them, their family, and their community.

The turtle shell is positioned upward, representing participant vulnerability and boldness in addressing planetary health challenges. Contrary to the shield of a warrior, the shell represents a protective measure without an expression of reciprocal violence. While most participants demonstrated a conviction in their values and beliefs about planetary health, I did not witness any harmful or threatening approaches. Betsy's comments express how they approach politically charged environmental topics:

You have to walk gracefully when you discuss the term climate change... if I could avoid talking about it [climate change] in some discussions, then I wouldn't shut some people down. I think that term is connected with a lot of philosophies on life and government. So, I just want to make sure nurses are staying with the health focus, that's why this is so important, but it's like you're dragging that political chain with you when you are diving into the realm of climate.

The politicization of planetary health issues weighs heavily on people seeking common ground from which to influence change. Nurses like Betsy seek to navigate politically charged language, de-escalate confrontation, and protect themselves from becoming targets on social media.

Participants demonstrated capacities, such as self-awareness, flexibility, and inclusivity of perspectives, that informed their resiliency for active involvement in planetary health initiatives and community conversations.

Theme 4: Embracing nursing's place in planetary health

The fourth theme, "Embracing nursing's place in planetary health," describes participants' collective potential in expressing nursing's

unique voice and social position to make a difference. Throughout the nursing profession, participants noticed an increased receptiveness to conversations about planetary health, as well as calls for action. This embracing of nursing's place in planetary health is a theme that expresses how participants envisioned themselves as part of a growing movement among healthcare professionals concerned with the planetary health impacts. Indeed, connecting the bigger picture of human and planetary health is a powerful driver for nurses' engagement. Hannah summarized how climate change effects were coming into focus through her experience as a nurse:

This understanding that nursing could be part of a bigger picture of planetary health, the understanding impact of climate change on health, that for me has all come together recently. I understood those things before, but I never saw how nursing fit into that picture.

Participants recognized the global tension of climate-related events and the need to get to the root causes of greenhouse gases, which are predominantly produced by Western nations. Anne Rodgers shared, "this is a western problem of saviourism, and it shouldn't just be these westerners going to save the world, but approaching the structures of capitalism, the structures of globalization." They also reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic as an early warning sign for planetary health, which should be viewed as a public health emergency, where nurses are on the frontline. Anne Rodgers described,

None of us know how many years left we have of easy adaptation. When does it come to a point that it's a lot harder to adapt to what's going on, so there's this urgency that we need to be planning and changing our global systems, changing our

national systems, and our local systems.

Ultimately, this theme highlights participants' awareness of their unique knowledge, experience, and social position as nurses who can make a meaningful difference. Participants saw themselves as part of a growing movement and embraced the priority of urgent action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, to protect the health and welfare of those who are most vulnerable. Hannah exemplified nurses who are empowered to get involved in educating the public:

I see the vision to be all health care professions speaking one voice about climate change and to educate the public about the health risks and to help not only prevent the worst damage from happening, but also to mitigate the damage that's already here and will continue to happen. So, helping the public to adapt to a new world where their home may not be safe for their children, we need to prepare to deal with these issues. That's how I think nursing and health professions fit into this.

Participants demonstrated confidence in their understanding that human health is closely tied to planetary health, making the connection between the two highly relevant to nurses. In finding and using their nursing voice, they connected with people individually and through groups to share their message in clear, meaningful, and non-threatening ways.

Discussion

This discussion is a summarized interpretation of how the identified themes relate to an embodiment of planetary health nursing and as an expression of critical caring theory in action. Implications for practice, policy,

education, and research are shared as practical recommendations.

The Embodiment of Planetary Health Nursing

The merging of the four theme images, shown in Figure 3, embodies the participants'

journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities as a reflection of planetary health nursing. The study's findings inform this artistic reflection, showing that life's journey within nature is intentional, with ancient roots and new challenges.



Figure 3

The Embodiment of Planetary Health Nursing

At numerous junctures, participants reiterated that we are within nature, not separate from it. Their feet are on the earth, navigating the risk of human-made obstacles. Sally said,

Being ecological to me is walking lightly on the earth, recognizing interconnectedness between all living things, and understanding that the connection is just like a spider web. It can be tugged on one end and affects the other end. The awareness of that [is a] delicate balance.

The proximity of seasonal trees as arms represents the power of nature to express itself through nurses who, in caring for the planet, approach planetary health advocacy by moving

toward the challenge. In this way, nurses are nature's resistance to anthropocentrism. Blue Bird illustrated this point by saying,

No matter where I'm connecting to nature and the trees and then whatever it is, so ecological knowing is almost like a sense I can feel things I don't know starting to happen or change...as nurses you sense it with people you sense it with nature as well.

With hearts open, their resilience protects and sustains their efforts like a shield against the consequences of inaction or lost hope. As a challenging future comes into focus due to planetary health issues such as climate change, so too does the need for nurses to

mobilize support for everyone who will suffer its consequences. Charlie expressed this idea by saying,

My hopes for nursing action is [*sic*] just knowing that there are nurses that care about the communities I work with, people of colour and marginalized communities, people who are disabled. Giving them more of a way to voice their concerns and also seeing what [nurses] are doing right now to help and expand that [adaptation and mitigation of climate change] in nursing practice.

Earth, as the head of the image, with the southern hemisphere pointing up, represents nurses' global concern and priority to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Mabel said,

We struggle with considering the root causes of social determinants of health, despite that being central to our practice and our philosophy and what we broadly see as our role ... we talk about it in such a normative, conservative little bubble as opposed to radical change ... because maybe that means we're not fitting

into the professional mold? Maybe it means we're not fitting into what is expected of us, and we ignore the signs of needing something radically different.

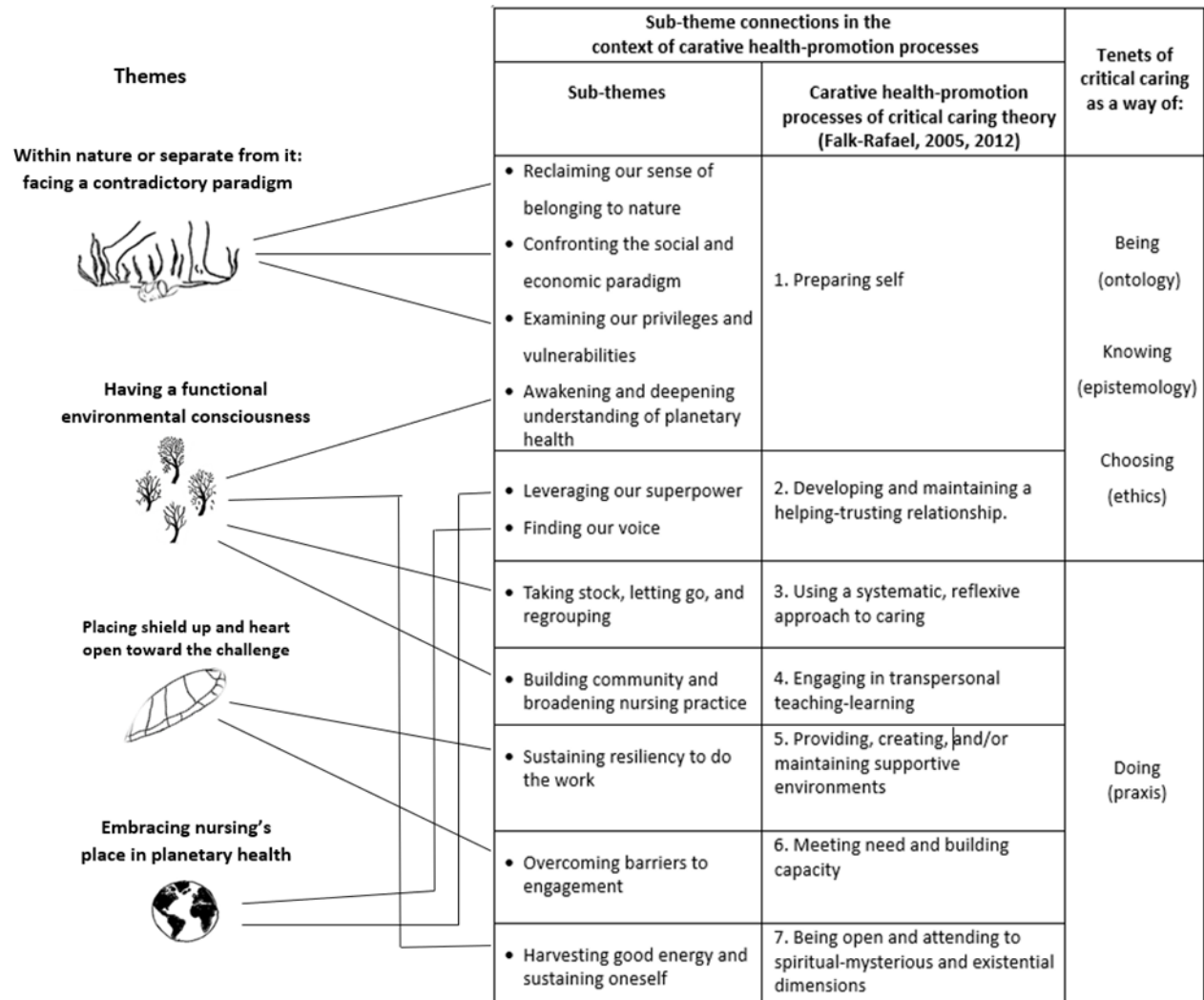
The merged theme artistic reflection tells a story of interconnecting themes that are embodied among participants and may serve as an illustration of planetary health nursing. I refer to planetary health nursing as a reflection, not a definition. I see it as a feeling or a value that is expressed in the moment when nurses connect caring and compassion for the environment within their practice in ways that are inclusive of all life on earth. Planetary health nursing is not a representation of a specific group of nurses; it reflects the potential for all nurses to respond to global challenges through everyday choices and actions.

Planetary Health Nursing as an Example of Critical Caring

Through the analytical lens of critical caring theory, the goal of this research was to explore the journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities of nurses engaged in planetary health in order to identify nursing perspectives on how adaptation and mitigation efforts are experienced by nurses to inform the knowledge and practice of nursing. My interpretation of how the themes and sub-themes identified in this research align with Falk-Rafael's (2005) seven carative health-promotion processes and the four tenets of critical caring theory are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Theme and Sub-Theme Connections in the Context of Critical Caring Theory



The participants' efforts regarding climate change mitigation serve as an example of caring that is grounded in social justice and advocacy. Indeed, the journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities outlined in this research serve as an example of patterns of caring that are considered critical.

Importantly, participants critically reflected on the dominant administrative hierarchies within healthcare that inhibited their expression of planetary health within their nursing practice. Working within the system required a delicate balance, while working outside it lacked financial viability. Participants

demonstrated epistemological tension as people who embody planetary health within an anthropocentric society. Critical caring offers a theoretical perspective that can help make visible to nurses how they can redefine nursing practice in relation to planetary health (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018). Expressing social and environmental justice in the language of nursing from a critical caring perspective can empower nursing advocacy and influence how nurses perceive their role in social change. Gaining and maintaining a sense of empowerment was not an easy process for participants. Many struggled with the convergence of exploitation and neglect

of more-than-human elements of nature while also advocating for equal consideration of all life forms within the practical realities of daily life. Understanding their planetary health work as nursing work provided participants with a strength of purpose. Considering their disciplinary knowledge as critical caring may contribute to broadening the scope of practice to include planetary health among nurses worldwide.

Critical discourse in nursing calls on the nursing profession to deliver just, equitable, and sustainable nursing practices while questioning the latent anthropocentric, gendered, and colonialist thinking that has continued to be emphasized within nursing (Dillard-Wright et al., 2020; Howes & Warwick, 2023; LeClair et al., 2021; Potter, 2022). The post-human critique of nursing by Dillard-Wright et al. (2020) poignantly asks, “Have we ever been nurses?” (p. 142), echoing my participants’ questions about nursing identity in general. In considering what a nurse truly is or should be, Dillard-Wright’s provocative question also captured the participants’ questioning of their own positionality within normative privileges that centered White settlers on colonized land and provided nurses with choices that enabled them to be less directly impacted by climate change. In the literature, researchers who aimed to deconstruct and disrupt patterns of oppression within nursing were often informed by influences such as racism, colonialism, institutional hierarchies of westernized medical thinking, and gendered violence toward women (Cipriano et al., 2021; Dillard-Wright et al., 2020; LeClair et al., 2021; Potter, 2022). I observed an awareness among participants and nursing environmental groups to question patterns of dominance within society and to use their position of influence as nurses to support and advocate for social and environmental justice.

Implications and Practical Recommendations

This research highlights several implications and practical recommendations for

practice, policy, education, and research that are relevant for nurses, administrators, educators, and researchers in their own work at all levels.

Practice

A key recommendation from this research is to encourage nurses to intentionally access nature and gain the benefits of understanding life, health, and well-being within nature, rather than separate from it. Cultivating a mindfulness of nature can help practicing nurses remain grounded in any healthcare environment (Hansen-Ketchum et al., 2009; Howes & Warwick, 2023). Furthermore, reimagining the scope and impact of nursing practice as environmental stewardship (e.g., restoration work) and outdoor therapy (e.g., therapeutic gardening) has a positive effect on the environment, patient care, and the practice experiences of nurses (Kalogirou et al., 2020a; Zuzelo, 2016).

This research also supports nurses redefining their practice for themselves in ways that reclaim intuitive, artistic, and community-minded approaches to nursing practice within and outside of health systems (Brigham, 2021; Kerr & Demorest, 2021). By supporting nursing practices that address planetary health challenges, nurses can become part of the solution and transform how healthcare is provided.

Policy

This study highlights the importance of prioritizing planetary health within healthcare and regulatory policies, as well as decision-making processes within interdisciplinary healthcare teams. Healthcare policies that aim to support a cultural shift toward planetary health could benefit from implementing educational initiatives, such as the Planetary Health Education Framework (Faerron Guzmán & Potter, 2021; Astle, 2021). This framework supports individual health care providers in their role as global citizens and can be used to create learning opportunities and inform policy and procedure working groups. Promoting activities, such as Nurses Drawdown, Health Care Without

Harm, and Planetary Health Clubs, can increase the visibility and coordination of environmental health among nurses and other health care providers, leading to more effective policy development.

Healthcare sustainability policies that incorporate integrative and holistic approaches to sustainable community-based healthcare delivery would enable institutions and organizations to promote nursing advocacy regarding climate change and its impact. These policies could include sustainable and healthy food policies in health care facilities that support the production of locally grown food and on-site community garden co-operatives; and greenhouse gas reduction policies that encourage safe and reliable active and public transportation options to and from health care facilities (Drake et al., 2021; Roden & Lewis, 2021). Nurses have a unique disciplinary perspective, and it is essential to involve them in making decisions to solve the problems they encounter.

Education

Nurses in this research are redefining what constitutes nursing practice from an ecological perspective. Nurse educators are invited to reconceptualize the environmental paradigm of nursing, fostering classroom discussions and activities that enable students to explore ecological and climate systems, biodiversity, and the relationships between (Kalogirou et al., 2020b). With the intention of centring nursing within a planetary health perspective, nursing education that conceptualizes planetary health as fundamentally interconnected with human health would be imperative.

Nursing faculty in collaboration with nursing environmental networks should engage students to share and discuss their ideas broadly and lead to opportunities that could influence practice change (LeClair, 2021). Moving beyond the classroom and into immersive experiences in nature can lead to transformative experiences for students (Cupelli, 2021). Several participants in this study are resisting external pressures to conform to traditional roles and are seeking

more opportunities to be involved in nature-based health promotion activities. Both factors represent opportunities for critical environmental justice approaches among educators and catalyze the development of an environmentally astute, next generation of critical, caring nurses. (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; LeClair et al., 2021).

An excellent resource to address current practice and education gaps in nursing knowledge is the recent and comprehensive Planetary Health Education Framework (Faerron Guzmán & Potter, 2021). This framework, in combination with the insights from this study, supports individual health care providers in general, and nurses more specifically, in their role as global citizens and can be used to create learning opportunities.

Research

This study may serve as a useful example for others investigating focused ethnographic research questions within a multi-methodology approach. Other directions for further research include examining nurses' nature-based spirituality and how activism is defined and experienced among nurses to understand how or if these experiences intersect with the professional practice of nurses and impact patient outcomes. This research suggests that a critical caring lens offers a unique disciplinary perspective on nursing that should be included in multidisciplinary research into understanding the role of healthcare professionals who collaborate and network with each other to support planetary health initiatives.

In summary, this study values the active role nurses can and do play in shaping advocacy for humanity's response to planetary health challenges, from a local to a global context.

Limitations

As the primary researcher, my social location in this work as a White, male, middle-class nurse academic who has experienced minimal impact of climate change and injustice grants me unearned privilege and has shaped my inquiry into planetary health. Indeed, nurse researchers who experience marginalization or

environmental injustices themselves may have different perspectives on questions that guide inquiries pertinent to their lived experiences.

Furthermore, I am afforded the moral authority to conduct research in nursing while remaining dependent on fossil fuels within a social, political, and economic system that continues to impact planetary health negatively (Dillard-Wright et al., 2020). I am embedded in systems that perpetuate harm, and this unsettling contradiction informs my daily choices that seek to live in support of planetary health. I advocate for ecological justice, yet I am largely insulated from the direct, lived consequences of climate-related injustices. In taking up this advocacy space, how authentic can my voice be? And more importantly, whose voices are missing? I am not alone in trying to come to terms with the urgency for social change, and as nurses, the question is, if not us, then who? Who, besides nurses, are as uniquely positioned and respected within communities around the world to acknowledge and live in the individual and social connections that recognize planetary health as human health?

Similarly, since all but one interview participant identified as White, the perceptions and practices expressed by participants in this study may not accurately reflect those of nurses from diverse cultural, linguistic, or ethnic backgrounds. This focused ethnography employed convenience sampling to identify registered nurses, rather than targeting specific populations for participation. Studies are needed to develop further interpretations of nursing from diverse perspectives within the design and implementation of nursing research into planetary health. Specifically, a focus on diverse perspectives, such as those of Indigenous nurses, Black nurses, and gender-diverse nurses, to name a few, would support the knowledge and understanding of how planetary health is represented among nurses across cultures and through different ways of knowing (Amiri & Zhao, 2019).

The use of a convenience sample, comprised of nurses who responded to a flyer shared throughout North America via nursing

environmental groups, was designed to attract participants who were already engaged in planetary health issues. Participant perspectives may have been shaped by the priorities and language of the organizations with which they were aligned. This study referred to observations made at national and regional nursing interest group meetings; however, the comparisons risk glossing over the particularities of regional and national contexts within each meeting.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study, which examines the journeys, approaches, activities, and priorities of nurses actively engaged in planetary health, provides evidence-based guidance that is practical and relatable to nurses and other healthcare professionals. The analysis of this study identified how participants expressed a connection within nature, applied a functional consciousness to complex issues, sustained resiliency to be involved, and prioritized what needed to be done to support planetary health.

This study adds to the literature by using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and arts-informed self-reflections to explore the lived experiences of nurses engaged in planetary health issues. Furthermore, this research explored a preliminary connection between the identified themes and Falk-Rafael's (2005) critical caring theory. This theoretical perspective provides a lens through which nurses can be proactive in promoting social and environmental justice within their advocacy for those rendered vulnerable by planetary health challenges. By expressing participant experiences as an embodiment of planetary health nursing, this research hopes to inspire others to discover their own sense of meaning and purpose within nature during this pivotal moment in human history.

Caring is a value that has the power to support the transformative changes needed to preserve a sustainable planet. Nurses witness much and are well-positioned at this critical time to effect social change and challenge notions of human dominance over nature. The question "if

not us, then who?” resonated throughout this research, acknowledging the urgency for individual nurses and the nursing profession to actively engage in planetary health and adopt sustainable, nature-based health practices and lifeways.

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