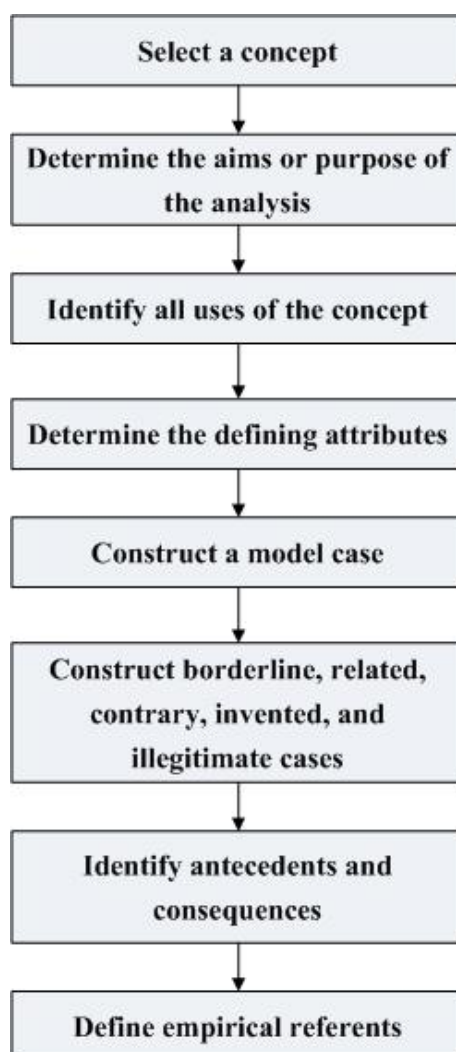**Editorial**

Comment of Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis

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Introduction

In order to promote the nursing discipline to develop independently and scientifically, nursing practice should be guided by nursing theory instead of intuition and experience of nurses [1]. Nursing theory can assist nurses to deliver individual patient's care and help to improve observation and recognition of specific patient need, be it biological, psychological or social [2]. Nursing theory has developed quickly and successfully in recent decades internationally; however, it is still in the early stage of development in China.

The theoretical framework of nursing sciences is built in a dynamic process that arises from practice and is reproduced through research, mainly by analysis of the development of concepts [3]. In other words, nursing concept analysis is closely related to the enhancement and evolution of nursing theory. Concept analysis involves the formulation and clarification of a mental construct, systematizing relevant information in ways that enable its appraisal and enhancement as an element that serves to both advance nursing theory and guide practice [4]. In clinical practice nursing concept analysis has been used in the assessment of patients' needs and they can provide nurses with frameworks for practice. For example, Roper *et al.* identified and analysed the concept of activities of daily living (ADLs) [5]. They emphasised that it was the nurses' obligation to prevent people from having problems with these ADLs. If nurses could not achieve this then they should aid the patients to regain independence in the ADLs or give them and caregivers the skills and knowledge to cope with their dependence on the ADLs. As we all know that until now ADL concept has been widely used in practice to assist many clinical nurses to assess patients' level of independence on the ADLs and then make their efforts on improving patients' independence.

Thus, we believe that a nursing concept analysis that is appropriate for practice will benefit patients and improve the working practices and morale of nurses. While the metaparadigm concepts of persons, environment, health, and nursing are central to the disciplinary perspective, it is essential for nurse scholars to draw from these four basic concepts. Once this disciplinary perspective is made explicit, it will guide further development of nursing research and professional practice.

The basic intention of concept analysis methodology is to differentiate between concepts, and therefore to make clear the relationships and the distinguishing characteristics between concepts. Furthermore, concept analysis leads to a specific measurable definition of a concept and/or identifies the gaps in knowledge and in measurement that should be undertaken in future theoretical work [4]. For example, anxiety and fear are often used interchangeably within general discourse, and in fact some of the consequences of both anxiety and fear may be the same (e.g., increased blood pressure due to vasoconstriction). Yet, the essential characteristics of anxiety and fear are not the same, and the two concepts are defined differently both in the scientific literature and in general use. For both scientific and professional practice interventions, it is imperative to precisely define the concepts that are important for understanding and interventions. Concept analysis provides the methodology for evaluation.

Unfortunately, concept analysis is unexploited and has not been applied widely in clinical practice in China. It is worth mentioning that only 22 Chinese nursing concept analysis articles could be identified in CNKI database using the keywords "护理、概念、分析" as opposed to thousands of nursing concept analysis articles in PubMed database using the keywords "nurs*、concept 、analysis" from 1986 to 2017, indicating that Chinese nurse scholars should make a concentrated effort to start analysing nursing concepts to solve the unmet needs. In fact, every day in clinical practice, nurses are exposed to phenomena influencing patient care. Sometimes such phenomena are ignored because nurses and nursing seem commonplace or unimportant. This serves as our motivation to guide the readers through the process of identifying these phenomena, naming them and finding relationships between them. This will provide insight into how readers can construct a nursing concept analysis.

Some may argue that we can learn and borrow internationally advanced nursing concepts to guide our practice. It is an undeniable fact that Chinese nursing practice is different from other countries in some areas due to the cultural and therapeutical differences. For example, the Traditional Chinese Medicine, which is very distinct from Western Medicine, has its own core concepts and theory. Concepts such as "*xi zhi*" or "xi emotion", "positive emotion" are often used in Chinese Medicine; however, the concepts have not been investigated and analysed yet in the literature. Therefore, it is evident that we should develop nursing theories with Chinese characteristics and name our own core concepts so as to define the disciplinary perspective and to practically guide our own research and practice.

Another unsatisfactory situation was the fact that we found most of the nursing concepts being presented in articles in Chinese nursing literature are not analysed based on evidence and theoretical framework. As a result, the definition of concepts is ambiguous and inapplicable in nursing practice.

The methodology for concept analysis can actually be traced back to Wilson in 1963 who believed it was an important step to gain scientific and conceptual clarity to guide research. Although there are a vast number of concept analysis methodologies described in the literature, the eight-step method of concept analysis developed by Walker and Avant (2011) is the most frequently used method in nursing and was chosen as the basis for analysing the core concepts selected for analysis [5]. Hence, a series of concept analysis articles will be published in this magazine and will follow the same structured format. To facilitate the understanding of the methodology of concept analysis a diagrammatic representation is included to describe the concept attributes, antecedents, and consequences. This visual

representation of characteristics across concepts allows the reader to make comparisons and, ultimately, to build on the knowledge base available in these articles.
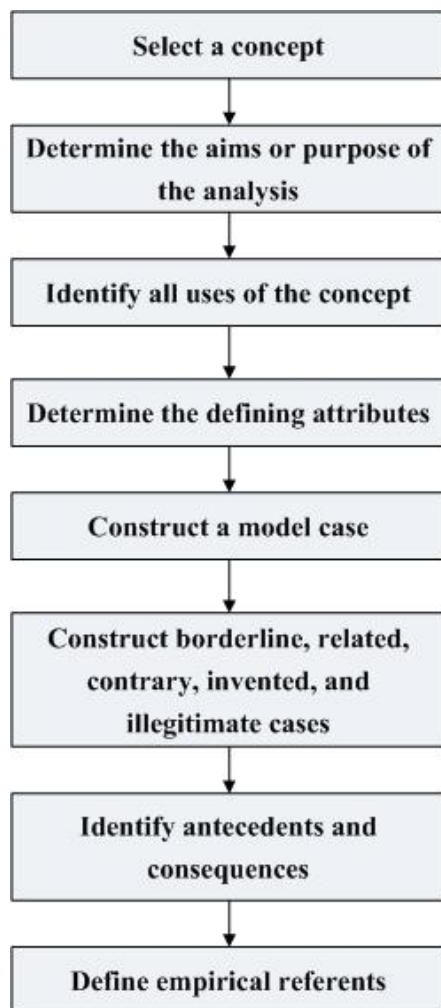
Figure 1 The flowchart of Walker and Avant concept analysis modle

A brief introduction to Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis

There are a variety of concept analysis methodologies identified in the literature, but the Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis is perceived as the most frequently used method in nursing and is chosen as the basis for analysing the core concepts of nursing. The Walker and Avant framework includes eight steps, which are described in the following session (Figure 1).

The first step is to select a concept. This is followed by a review of the recent literature to determine all of the uses of the concept. The second step is to determine the defining attributes of the concept, namely, characteristics essential to the concept. A definition of the concept is derived from the critical defining attributes. This definition includes all of the defining attributes and specifically excludes other elements related to the concept. Then, a number of cases are constructed to illustrate how the concept is used. The model case describes a real-life example of the use of the concept that includes all of the critical attributes of the concept. Contrary cases do not include any of the defining

attributes of the concept. Following the description of the various types of cases, both the antecedents and the consequences of the concept are delineated. Antecedents are those factors, derived from the literature, that precede the occurrence of the concept. The consequences also are derived from the literature and represent those factors that result from the concept. The last step in the process of concept analysis is the identification of empirical referents, or ways to measure the concept. That sums up the stages of concept analysis.

In summary, there are many advantages of undertaking a nursing concept analysis, including assisting nurse scholars to reinforce their research projects with a theoretical framework, helping them refine the concepts under study, assisting in clarifying empirical referents to measure nursing concepts, etc.   For these reasons and many others, we believe that concept analysis is a significant way to build nursing knowledge. Therefore, five nursing concept analysis articles will be published in this journal.   It is expected that these articles will help to lead Chinese nurse scholars to further develop and critique existing nursing knowledge.

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