

Fundamental care and knowledge interests: Implications for nursing science

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Aims and objectives: To characterise the intratheoretical interests of knowledge in nursing science as an epistemological framework for fundamental care. **Background:** For Jürgen Habermas, theory does not separate knowledge interests from life. All knowledge, understanding and human research is always interested. Habermas formulated the knowledge interests in empirical-analytical, historical-hermeneutic and critical social sciences; but said nothing about health sciences and nursing science. **Design:** Discursive paper. **Results:** The article is organised into five sections that develop our argument about the implications of the Habermasian intratheoretical interests in nursing science and fundamental care: the persistence of a technical interest, the predominance of a practical interest, the importance of an emancipatory interest, 'being there' to understand individuals' experience and an 'existential crisis' that uncovers the individual's subjectivity. **Conclusions:** The nursing discipline can take on practical and emancipatory interests (together with a technical interest) as its fundamental knowledge interests. Nurses' privileged position in the delivery of fundamental care gives them the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the patient's experience and illness process through physical contact and empathic communication. **Relevance to clinical practice and nursing research:** In clinical, academic and research environments, nurses should highlight the importance of fundamental care, showcasing the value of practical and emancipatory knowledge. This process could help to improve nursing science's leadership, social visibility and idiosyncrasy. © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

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