



## Contemplation on the Symbolism of Whales

Seo, Seung Hee<sup>1</sup> · Kim, Soo Jin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Gwangju Woman's University, <sup>2</sup>Professor, College of Nursing, Chonnam National University ·  
Chonnam Research Institute of Nursing Science, Gwangju, Korea

The archetypes that exist in the human mind and soul, combined with raw materials of meaning and imagery, form symbols. Symbols have a powerful energy and are a source of vitality for human consciousness. Therefore, we need to ensure that our consciousness is not detached or disconnected from the depths of unconsciousness and understand symbols in our mind and soul to enrich our lives. Whales that appear in the client's trays on various ages are predators of the aquatic world and are mysterious beings that arouse a sense of awe. They are highly intelligent, use their own language to communicate, and breed and raise their young by suckling them. They transformed themselves from terrestrial to aquatic creatures through a long evolutionary process. With these unique characteristics, whales have been a source of inspiration for a variety of literary works. This study examined the ecological characteristics of whales and their symbolic meanings represented in myths, legends and literary works of the East and the West as well as in the Holy Bible. Whales are symbols of absolute beings like monstrous creature that are: audacious and ideal, voyage guides and saviors, and messengers that mediate between deities and humans. In addition, whales symbolize maternal instincts, good luck and obsession with aggression over the cruel killing of other animals. The various symbolic meanings of whales elucidated in this study suggest that humans' instincts can promote a positive energy flow in their mind through a connection with the symbolism of whales.

**Key Words:** Symbol, Whale

### Introduction

The archetypes that exist in human mind and soul is the collective unconscious with primitive and universal contents. They form symbols, combined with the materials of meanings and imagery in a high mental dimension. Symbols are an element of communication that make it simple to represent or display complex concepts regarding human beings, objects, or groups. They have powerful energy as they include figures or events that represent or suggest something other than them. As symbols function as a storage or a source of energy that invigorates consciousness, when human consciousness is detached or disconnected from the depths of unconsciousness, it becomes deplete of energy and experi-

ences a serious mental crisis [1]. Spirituality reveals its presence through symbolic acts such as dreams or day-dreams so that consciousness can notice the messages from the human mind and soul [2]. Therefore, the understanding of symbols through the contact with myths and folktales enriches human life by connecting consciousness and unconsciousness [3].

From a long history, symbols are represented by meaning and story that contain culture, and they are manifested as subconscious dreams to individuals and they are known to exist, and after the analysis of the dreams of Freud, various psychotherapy techniques I saw it as meaning [1]. Animals in folk tales, fables, works of art, dreams, etc., which contain the collective unconscious mind, should not be construed as animals but should be

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**Corresponding author:** Kim, Soo Jin, College of Nursing, Chonnam National University, 160, Backseo-ro, Dong-gu, Gwangju 61469, Korea.  
Tel: +82-62-530-4951, Fax: +82-62-227-4009, E-mail: [pinehillkim@naver.com](mailto:pinehillkim@naver.com)

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interpreted as a symbol, a projection carrier of mental elements [2]. These symbols not only make awareness of consciousness and unconsciousness, but also have the function of deformation [4].

Among these, whales are linked to diverse aspects of spirituality due to their mysteriousness as veiled marine creatures, their hugeness beyond imagination, and their way of breeding and feeding their young [5]. In various myths and legends, whales are regarded as monstrous creatures belonging to gods or as beings helpful to humans [6]. Whales are considered as representing maternal instincts because of their ecological habit of taking care of and living with their young for their lifetime [7]. In addition, it is overwhelmed by the size beyond imagination, and it is regarded as the power, the ideal and the air of the human life, and the story which saves people from the legends of the world is the same as the navigator and the savior.

The researchers were interested in understanding how to apply psychology and how to apply nursing, and for many hours focused on Jung's analytical psychology and on the basis of sandplay therapy. Especially, in the sandplay therapy, the presence of the therapist and the psychological state are important for the element of hat integral. This is similar to the important concept of psychiatric nursing as explained by Peplau [8], and it can be seen that the aspect of helping self-awareness and growth is also connected with the characteristics of mental nursing. It is necessary to study various theoretical and practical approaches to expand the scope of independent nursing to meet the tendency of convergence of interdisciplinary approach and most of the disciplines. The understanding of the human mind through the symbol helps the understanding of the human being, which is the object of care and the subject, in a deeper understanding. In addition, understanding of universal and individual symbols can provide individuals with the knowledge to provide individualized, culturally integrated nursing. Understanding universal and individual symbols

can also provide knowledge that can provide individual, cultural, and integrated nursing to the subject.

In sandplay therapy, a variety of clients invited whales to decorate their boxes, perform performances, and others dreamed about dreaming whales, wondering about their interpretation, and seeing whales in their minds. The researcher also noted that the familiar and cute look of the whale seen at the dolphin show and the sympathy with the trainer remained in the mind for a long time and that it is a creature that lives in the water but has extreme maternity to the baby, I was more interested in.

In order to this study, I searched Naver, Daum, and Google with the keyword 'whale, symbol' to identify the symbolic meaning of whales in symbols of biological characteristics, legends in various cultures, myths, and literary works from February 10 to March 30, 2019. In order to confirm the research data, more than 15 domestic DB sites including Riss were searched and the literature. As a result, Naver and Daum had 45 encyclopedias, 348 knowledge articles, 38,600 blogs, 86,000 web pages, 5,047 news articles, and more than 3 million web pages on Google. In DB site search, DBpia 4,772, e-article 3, KCI 26, Kiss 15, KMDb (Whale) 23, NDSL 19, New nonmun 205, riss 110, Scholar 5, National Central Library 5, National Assembly Library 5, Knowledge Summary Service 2, Britannica Online 2211, Moajin (Whale) 3,405, and Environmental Digital Library 77 were searched to examine the symbolism of whales. Most studies on symbols have been conducted in various psychotherapies such as sandplay, dolls, oral literature, reading, arts, children's play, analytical psychology, and history, humanities and sociology. There were no study of the relationship between symbolic studies and nursing science. Then the purpose of this study is to examine the symbolic meaning of whales in the biology of whales and legends, myths and literary works in various cultures.

## A Consideration of the Symbolism of Whales

### 1. The Ecological Characteristics of Whales

Whales are marine mammals including whales, dolphins and porpoises. In Latin, the word "*cetus*" means "a whale" or "a big marine animal". Ancient Koreans have called whales "*gyeonge*" or "*gyeong*", which means "a big fish". Whales have passed through a very unique evolutionary process: they were even-toed ungulates that walked on land like hippopotamus before. Pakicetidae, the primitive cetaceans, are now found as fossils, and they turned into marine animals in about less than 10 million years [9].

Cetaceans, currently known to include more than 90 species, are largely divided into toothed and baleen whales. Whales with a body length of about 4 meters or more are called whales, and those with a shorter body are referred to as dolphins or porpoises. Toothed whales have developed a long mouth and sharp conical teeth for efficient underwater feeding activities, and they usually live for about 15 to 20 years, except for sperm whales that have a lifespan of about 65 years or more [10]. Baleen whales show traces of teeth in the lower jaw during the fetal period. But they degenerate as they grow, and baleens grow from the upper jaw instead. Most of them are large whales, reaching 33 meters in length. Being the target of whaling, many species are now in danger of extinction while there are only about 13 surviving species. Baleens allow them swallow large quantities of tiny zooplanktons at a time [11].

Whales come up on the surface of water to breathe after a long dive, and they can be observed only for this short period of time. Because they are mammals, they must come to the surface of water and breathe through their blowhole(s) on the top of their head. Toothed whales have one blowhole but baleen whales have two. After taking a deep breath, whales stop breathing and

dive under the water again; while smaller ones can only dive for a few minutes, bigger ones can stay underwater without breathing for about an hour [10]. Baleen whales swallow a large amount of fish including squids at once without chewing them and digest them for a long time. Therefore their stomach is divided into several sections. Whales have a very weak or hardly functioning smell, but has a highly developed hearing. All whales use different kinds of sounds to communicate with each other. Toothed whales make sounds at high frequencies and use the reverberations of the sounds to distinguish objects and navigate [6,11].

Baleen whales live alone except for during the breeding season, but toothed whales live mostly in groups formed based on family relationships, ages, or sexes. Whales in a small group swim separately but gather when they are frightened or have to move quickly. Whales show altruistic behavior, helping other whales in difficult situations. They protect wounded and sick whales and stay with them. Females help each other when they give birth to their young, and mothers protect and nurture their cubs with much care [6].

Whales breed mainly from spring to autumn. Their pregnancy period is usually 11 to 12 months, while sperm whales have 16 months of gestation period. After birth, the mother pushes the young to the water surface to let it breathe its first breath. Baleen whales take care of their young for 7 to 10 months, while toothed whales keep them near them for a longer period of time. Also, toothed whales maintain their mother-child relationship for years, and even fully grown whales return to their mothers in an emergency. Most of baleen whales migrate from feeding places to breeding places season to season, traveling over 4,800 km, but most toothed whales do not travel a long distance. Whales can swim very fast: porpoises swim at a speed of 38 km/h and whales at a speed of 56 km/h [6,12].

## 2. The Symbolism of Whales in the East and the West

### 1) Absolute Beings: The Strong Power of Deities, Nature and Society

In Greek mythology, the Queen of Aethiopia, Cassiopeia, had a daughter named Andromeda with King Cepheus. As she was an arrogant woman, she boasted that her daughter was more beautiful than all the Nereids, the nymphs of the sea. This enraged Poseidon because his wife Amphitrite that he could marry with much effort was one of the Nereids. So, Poseidon sent the sea monster Cetus to Aethiopia to attack it. Saddened by this, King Cepheus consulted the oracle of the sun god and was told to sacrifice Andromeda to Cetus [13]. In this myth, Cetus is a powerful being that cannot be avoided or defeated with the power of humans and thus symbolizes nature controlled only by deities and the power that human power cannot rival [7].

Another example where a whale has the symbolic meaning of divine power is the story of Jonah in the Old Testament. Jonah was swallowed by a whale on his way to Tarshish, refusing to accept God's call to go to Nineveh and his providence of salvation [14]. The whale that God sent to him to lead Jonah, who was full of disobedience and his own will, back to the path of a prophet and obedience is interpreted as an absolute and undefeatable divine being [15]. In "The Tale of Sim Cheong" in Korea, the underwater palace of Dragon King (the god of the sea) that Sim Cheong reached after she threw herself into the sea for his father is depicted as supported by pillar made of whale bones. The description of the god of the sea and his palace also evokes the image of a whale. It was six dragons that moved Sim Cheong who fell into the sea to the underwater palace. But these dragons are sometimes interpreted as whales. In this tale, whales are not only mysterious beings as dragons, but also a symbol of gods or divinity [7].

The Ulch of Siberia perform rites for the god Tsemu to

pray for prosperity. This god is the spirit of water and a killer whale. To the Ulch, whales are not just a part of nature, but gods that provide food to them and maintain the balance of nature. However, when the balance of nature breaks, these whales turn into an object of fear that act in an unpredictable way [5]. In Southeast Asian countries, there are people who worship whales as deities or their ancestors [9]. In the folktales of the Maori in New Zealand. Their ancestors are portrayed as riding whales when they first appear on the earth. So, the people have long worshiped whales as gods [16]. These myths show that whales have long been worshiped by humans as sacred totems.

The Book of Job in the Old Testament referred to Leviathan, a sea monster. It was an object of terror among sailors during the Age of Exploration. At that time people thought that Leviathan was a gigantic monster looking like a whale that would swirl around a ship, make water spin around it, and then keel over and crash the ship [7]. In modern times, Leviathan symbolizes great social power that influential people or large corporations have [17]. The whale named Moby Dick in Herman Melville's novel is a sperm whale that arouses a sense of fear with its white, wrinkled forehead and a bump as huge as a pyramid which distinguishes it from other whales. In this novel, the whale represents nature against which human beings struggle, but also symbolize a great evil that individuals cannot defeat or an ineluctable destiny [18].

The huge size and unique appearance of whales are reminiscent of the oceans that are an unknown world beyond human imagination. In other words, they are the sea animals that can best represent the enormous ocean waves and the vast, magnificent seascapes. When whales swim together, water around them swirls and form huge waves. These waves created by whales sway high and low following the vigorous moves of whales and are very dangerous. Inspired by this magnificent view, poets have expressed big, rough ocean waves and voyages filled

with dangers using the symbols of whales. The rough sea with swaying waves is not a romantic place anymore, but an obstacle that humans must pass through at the risk of their lives, and thus symbolizes the hardships of human life [5,19].

In summary, in the Bible, Greek mythology, legends and literary works, whales symbolize an absolute being and an object of fear and terror that human beings cannot fight against. In other words, they symbolize an absolute being such as a god, nature that humans cannot defeat, and sometimes a gigantic corporation or the power that ordinary people cannot oppose.

## 2) Audacity and Ideals

The act of hunting a whale is like an act of captivating the top predator of the sea—the king of the ocean—and thus gives an ultimate sense of triumph. Since pre-historic times, humans have hunted whales to obtain whale meat, baleens, oil and sperm [20]. One example is the 1975 Korean movie "The March of Fools" directed by Choi In-ho. The film depicts an attempt made by a young man to go on a journey to hunt a whale, as he has always dreamed of it. Song Chang-sik's song "A Whale Hunt" played in this film symbolizes the audacity and hope of a young man during the dark years. The young man's journey to the East Sea to hunt the whale that has fascinated him since he had a dream about represents audacious steps towards his ideals and dreams and hope [17,21]. In this film, the whale dream is a device that symbolizes the ideals of youths which make them move towards their dreams despite the dark reality and political turmoil at that time.

In addition, One of the representative remains preserving the traces of ancient whaling is the Petroglyphs of Bangudae Terrace in Ulsan [22]. It has been considered that there is no better theme than challenging whales to express adventurousness in the human mind. Whales are a source of excitement and energy for those living in the sea. The strong water streams coming out of

whales' blowholes that they can see in the midst of the sea of their hard life are like an oasis that replenish them. Though they do not always dare to challenge whales, these animals provide a strong vitality and vigor to humans living in the sea [5]. Yi Sik, a poet of the Joseon dynasty, likens a masculine way of life to exhibit boldness and courage inside that he, who lives a life as a poet, longs for to the act of hunting a whale [19].

Thus, the symbolism of the whale revealed in art and literature works as a metaphorical representation of human vibrancy and ideals, and as a symbol of the energy of life while feeling the primordial and natural energy springing up vigorously over the water.

## 3) A Voyage Guide and a Savior

The prophet Jonah encountered a storm in his way to a city in the opposite direction to which he was called to go by God, as he refused to obey him. When he was thrown into the sea, God sent a large fish to swallow him. At the moment he was almost drowning in the sea, the stomach of this large fish provided him with a safe shelter and salvation, guiding him back to the path of God's prophet. In the stomach of the large fish, Jonah newly discovered himself and learned the wisdom of life, which was to accept God's call and obey him. This event, that is being swallowed by a big fish (death) and coming out of it (rebirth) is a type of salvation, associated with Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection [15].

In the myth of Dionysus, the god of abundance, wine, and trance, as well, whales (dolphins) symbolize guides for sailors. One day, Dionysus took a ship for a travel, but the evil crew abducted him to sell him as a slave. In wrath, Dionysus transformed the mast and oars of the ship into snakes and filled the ship with vines so that it could not move. He also called leopards and lions to attack the crew. All of them, panicked, threw themselves into the sea, but as soon as they reached the water, they turned into dolphins, for the god of the sea Poseidon transformed the sailors into dolphins, so that they were

eternally obliged to guide sailors to a safe path [9]. The dolphins that people meet in the midst of the sea during their voyage are still serving their roles given by Poseidon.

In a Greek myth about Arion and dolphins, the animals symbolize a savior that one meets during hardships. Arion was one of the greatest musicians of his time who could sing in a beautiful voice playing the lyre. The king of Corinth appointed him a royal musician and favored him. The king allowed him to participate in a singing contest held on another island, but ordered him to return to Corinth after winning at the competition. However, Arion, on his way back to the kingdom on a ship, was robbed by the sailor of his all belongings who coveted his money and was about to be thrown into the sea. He begged them to allow him to sing a song before he died. Later, when he was thrown into the sea, dolphins that heard his beautiful song gathered and saved his life [13]. For Arion, dolphins are the savior of his life.

Hera, who is regarded as the best goddess in Greek mythology, but with a burning anger to Atamas who took Io as his second wife. Hera turned Atamas into a lunatic who was killing his own children. Knowing that her husband Zeus had an affair with Io, Hera made Io's husband a lunatic and drove him to kill his own children. His wife Io, to escape her mad husband, leaped off a cliff with her young son. Fortunately dolphins came to rescue them and took them to another island [13]. In addition to these myths, various stories about dolphins saving people have been told in different part of the world [9]. From this, it is inferred that whales have been recognized as a symbol of a savior and a guide for sailors in various regions.

#### **4) Messenger: Gods and Humans, and Consciousness and Unconsciousness**

As whales and dolphins were regarded as divine beings in ancient Greece, those who killed them were treated as murderers and even put to death. Dolphins were intimate friends with many gods including Poseidon,

Aphrodite, Apollo, and Galatea, and for this reason they were considered the messengers of the gods. The sea god Poseidon fell in love with Amphitrite, but she ran away from him because she wanted to keep her virginity. Poseidon, unable to find her, asked a dolphin that was his good friend to find out where she was. The dolphin found her in Mount Atlas and persuaded her to marry Poseidon and took her to him. Poseidon, grateful, created a dolphin-shaped constellation (Delphinus) in the sky in recognition of the dolphin's achievements [9]. The custom of exchanging dolphin-shaped accessories between lovers seems to be based on the belief that the love of the two will last with the help of dolphins as a messenger of love.

In the biblical tale about Jonah, God prepared a large fish for Jonah who ran away from his call and made it swallow him. The big fish here serves as the messenger of God [15]. The Maori of New Zealand had the custom of observing the body moves of whales and dolphins, which they regarded as the messengers of gods, as they believed that they let them know what would happen in the future through body language. Especially, when a person in their tribe became ill, they carefully watched how a whale or a dolphin approaching the beach acted to know whether the patient would survive or die. Cetus, the monstrous sea creature sent by Poseidon to humans is also considered his messenger [12].

The majestic movements of a gigantic whale swimming in the deep ocean and then jumping above the water surface seem to symbolize the human mind and soul rising from the world of unconsciousness to the world of consciousness. So, whales can also be interpreted as a messenger of unconsciousness and consciousness that plays the role of conveying symbolic archetypes to consciousness.

#### **5) Maternal Instincts**

One of the ecological characteristics of whales is that they breastfeed their young, take a good care of them,

and let them live with them even when they have grown up. This is a habit hardly found among other aquatic creatures. Dolphins also encourage and support injured cubs or younger dolphins and gather near a quay and cry when their family members or friends are captured by humans, as if asking them to release them [6]. The unique behavior patterns are reminiscent of warm motherly love. Also, the whale's stomach that Jonah entered symbolizes the maternal womb which holds and contains life. Jonah, who passed through this place turned into a person who obeyed God and fulfilled his mission. In "The Adventures of Pinocchio" by Collodi [23] the marionette Pinocchio that lived a lavish life turned into a complete, good human boy after spending time in the stomach of a whale, which seems to serve as the maternal womb that he lacked. In other words, the time that Pinocchio spent in the whale's stomach symbolically suggests that only motherly love and care can turn him into a complete human [21].

As such, whales are mammals that nourish and nurture their infants, carry a herd in family units, return to their mother, caring for their injured mother, passing through a whale's stomach, it reveals the same meaning as the mother's womb.

## 6) Good Luck and Dreams

The ancient Greeks considered dolphins animals bringing good luck. They regarded whales as gifts of gods and the beings that invigorate and enrich human lives. Tales featuring dolphins saving humans are found not only in ancient Greece but also in every part of the world [9]. In Greek mythology, Arion, one of the greatest musicians of his time, was thrown into the sea by evil sailors; but dolphins saved him and brought him safely to his country. During the reign of Alexander the Great, the emperor took Dionysius, a boy rescued by a dolphin, to his palace and took care of him. Later, he became a priest of the Poseidon Temple and became popular as a symbol of good fortune [9]. People have few oppor-

tunities to see whales in the sea. To meet a whale, they have to wait for a long time until they reveal themselves on the surface of the water. The whale that they meet after a long wait remind them of their ideals and dreams [5]. In this way, the whale comes to exist as bringing abundance and vitality, and it is natural that this symbol is regarded as a symbol of fortune to human of course.

## 7) Aggression

The Korean proverb "A shrimp gets hurt when whales fight," which means "to suffer a side blow in a fight" is a symbolic expression that likens various situations in human life to a fight between huge marine creatures like whales. Killer whales, also called "orcas," are apex predators in the marine ecosystem and hunt their prey in a group. Particularly, they hunt even other whales, with 22 species of cetaceans known to be attacked by them. They sometimes attack whales much larger than themselves such as sperm whales or blue whales. They smash their huge bodies onto other whales and hit them with their robust mouth until they die [10].

It is also known that killer whales sometimes harass and tease dolphins and sea lions for no reason. The Yupik in Siberia call killer whales "wolves in the sea" as they believe that the whales transform themselves into wolves during winter and then turn into whales again when summer comes. This belief emphasizes the fact that killer whales do not have a mild nature [12]. Other whales also sometimes show their ferocity when they got upset or hunt their prey; they hit their gigantic body to their opponents to hurt them or harass their enemies until they are killed. This shows aggression inside whales, which are top predators of the ocean, and therefore, when whales fight each other, smaller fish cannot help running away from them and hide themselves.

The appearance of such a massive whale living with other animals shows a wild aggressive instinct, which has left the symbolic impression of aggression on the whale in the mentality of human beings, and has become

a fearful object and symbolizes fearful aggression.

## Conclusions

This study intended to enhance the understanding of the spiritual dimension of the human mind and soul that remains unknown by amplifying the symbolism of whales, which are predators living in the mysterious aquatic world, in myths, legends and literary works and the Holy Bible, as well as examine their ecological characteristics.

Whales are the descendants of terrestrial animals but have fully adapted to aquatic life. However, as they breathe with the lung, not gills, they sometimes rise above the surface of the water to breathe, spouting a huge stream of water through blowholes, and then dive back into deep water. They have a gigantic body that any creature on the earth cannot rival. Their majestic presence is enough to arouse a sense of terror and awe in all living things, including humans. Mother whales nurse and cares for their young after giving birth to them. Whales also help other whales or creatures in difficult situations. But when they hunt prey or got angry, they smash their huge bodies onto their opponents, and continue their fight until their opponents die. Some whales also harass dolphins or sea lions for no reason.

Myths, legends and literary works that have been created in various cultures over a long time and the Holy Bible depict whales as beings with different symbolic meanings. In Greek mythology, whales are portrayed as animals intimate with gods or monstrous creatures, symbolizing absolute beings that no human can compete with and the strong power of deities, nature and societies. In the novel "Moby Dick," the whale represents the audacity and ideals of humans who dare to try to capture the top predator of the ocean. A Greek myth about Dionysus features dolphins that were told to guide sailors for their life time, while the story of Jonah is about the whale that swallowed Jonah who was destined to

drown thrown into a stormy sea and then spit him out onto an island. In addition to these, many tales about dolphins saving humans found in various parts of the world depict whales as voyage guides and saviors. In Greek myths about Apollo and Poseidon, whales and dolphins act as gods' messengers that maintain a friendly relationship with the gods and sometimes punish humans in obedience to their orders. In addition to this, the belief found in some tribes that whales inform humans of the will of gods also reflects whales' symbolic image as messengers of gods. The belief that dolphin-engraved coins would bring good luck and the fact that people have to wait for a long time to see whales in the sea can be associated with the symbolic meanings of luck and dreams.

The symbolic meanings of whales examined in this study were as follows: absolute beings and the strong power of gods, nature and societies; audacity and ideals; voyage guides and saviors; messengers between deities and humans or consciousness and unconsciousness; maternal instincts; good luck and dreams; and aggression. This is the significance of this study. In addition, in the aspect of psychiatric nursing theory, based on the analytical psychological theory of human understanding, it is possible to contribute to the process of individualization of nurses and clients and to contribute to the goal of individual mental nursing [24]. In aspect of nursing practice, the therapeutic concepts of Peplau (1982) helped to provide full coexistence with the subject when the human understanding through the symbol was deepened, and the intervention program using various symbols was developed to expand the nursing practice. In the aspect of nursing research, it can be a basic research that can provide evidence - based mental nursing in mental nursing practice by applying various research methodologies that understand human psychology. And the maternity, the guide of the sailing, and the courage to bear in the symbol of the whale are similar to the important characteristics of caring, so the efforts to extend



the area and the theory of nursing can broaden the scope of nursing.

But this study was to examine how whales are symbolic by examining the literature on whales. Therefore, to apply to the care of nursing, we examine how the symbolism of whale affects the nurse, which is the subject of care, and affects the care, and check whether the meaning like maternal care, guide, The quality of research needs to be attempted. In addition, I propose a research that confirms how the inner understanding of the symbol affects the growth of nurses and subjects and changes the experience of life. This study suggests the study of the development and the effect of the program using the symbol system because it can provide the theory which can develop the therapeutic intervention program among the role of the psychiatric nurse.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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