Angels & Devils: Nursing, Representation & the Media

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Representation and images  (Dyer, 1993)

- What we see and hear affects what we think, feel and do

- How we are seen determines how we are treated

- How we are treated is a measure of our value

- Our value enables or limits what we can be in a society
“...you’re not at the Marsden now you know!”
Early ideals
Black hole theory of nursing  (Robinson, 1992)

- Despite major innovation in practice, research, education and leadership nurses have an extremely low public profile

- The exact nature of nursing work is misunderstood, key nursing issues disappear and, critically, nurses lack a voice in the main policy arena at local and national level

Nursing remains invisible, subjugated, subordinated
Prevailing images (Weaver et al, 2013)

- Historically perceived as a dependant, subordinate occupation
- Role confusion & lack of professional confidence
- Contemporary images often inaccurate
- Old, ambivalent and entrenched stereotypes prevail
- Highly influential popular media
- Direct impact on recruitment and retention
Early images
Entrenched images (Darbyshire, 2000; Salvage, 2012)

- Doctor’s handmaiden
- Ministering angel
- Good nurse, heroic nurse
- Battle-axe, harridan, hooker
- Naughty nurse, sexy nurse
- Dependable, drab nurse
- Bad nurse, evil devil

Scary Nurse!
Problematic images (Ferns & Chojnacka, 2005: 1029)

- Naughty
  - Nurse: 252
  - Dr: 13
  - Actor: 4
- Sexy
  - Nurse: 150
  - Dr: 31
  - Actor: 514
- Kinky
  - Nurse: 21
  - Dr: 2
  - Actor: 1
- Saucy
  - Nurse: 39
  - Dr: 0
  - Actor: 14
- Professional
  - Nurse: 187
  - Dr: 355
  - Actor: 320
- Caring
  - Nurse: 129
  - Dr: 237
  - Actor: 8
- Dedicated
  - Nurse: 256
  - Dr: 207
  - Actor: 16
- Hard working
  - Nurse: 82
  - Dr: 84
  - Actor: 36
What do nurses do? (Takase, Maude & Manias 2006)

- Nursing is a profession that has long been troubled with its image and identity

- The public has a stereotypical view of nursing, in which nurses may be regarded as less intelligent than doctors, dependent on doctors, powerless and underpaid

- Nurses are viewed as “feminine” and caring professionals, but they are not recognized as leaders or professionals who are independent in their practice…

They [the public] don't necessarily have an appreciation for what we actually do for patients… it is often easier to describe how we make people feel
Images matter (NHS Confederation, 2014; Sussman, 2000)

- 335, 357 nurses: 109,000 doctors
- Students could not visualize where nurses work
- Not aware of career advancement
- Saw nurses as “supporting” doctors
- Idea of "wearing a uniform" was unappealing
- Students of all ages felt nursing “is a girl's job”
- Direct impact on recruitment and retention

1,153 health-related stories in 16 newspapers only 11 referred to nurses
"Imagine how things would be if the voice and visibility of nursing were commensurate with the size and importance of nursing in health care?"
Just imagine!

Had the majority of nurses taken an intelligent interest in their own affairs, acquainted themselves with the privileges granted to them by Parliament and acted for themselves, instead of allowing themselves to be manipulated by a company of lay men, there would have been a very different tale to tell…

Bedford Fenwick (1922)
Editorial, The British Journal of Nursing

Nurses: a force for change
http://www.icn.ch/
End historical silence  (Buresh & Gordon, 2006: 11-30)

• American journalists writing about political and social movements in USA since 1960’s

• Wondered how nursing can learn from other “marginalised and subjugated” groups that struggle with public visibility

• Underestimated the complexities of nursing’s relationship with the external public world

• Nurses have thought about visibility & invisibility: now need to think in terms of silence & voice and “re-imagine” nursing
What silence?
“Re-imagined” nurses  (Buresh & Gordon: 2006: 12-13)

- Nurses as fully fledged vocal, assertive decision-makers would be listened to and respected for their views.

- People would know that nurses are key to their survival and recovery and would seek information about the qualifications, numbers, types of nurses who care for them before and after treatment.

- The public would value the importance of public health services provided by nurses and the services of specialist nurses would be recognised, valued and sought after.

- Nurses’ salaries would accurately reflect their expertise/responsibilities.

“A more complex & authentic image of the nurse would replace dated or distorted stereotypes.”
More complex & authentic images

Liv Galdas
Age 5
Empowerment. Patient advocacy. These are some of the most commonly heard words in nursing. Nurses argue that one of their primary missions is to advocate for patients. Genuine advocacy is not just about wishing the patient well…

…all too often it involves taking a risk, speaking out in public, explaining what nurses do and clearly stating why it is important for politicians and policy makers to allocate resources to support nursing care.

...and transcending popular images

The good nurse?
Enduring and mythic
Complex & paradoxical
*Not* trivial

The political nurse?
Transcending the gap between servitude, obedience, silence, an iron stomach, technical skill & intellectual astuteness
Enduring and mythic (Price & Hall, 2013; Nelson, 2005)

The problem with “good” nurse and the “virtue” script is not necessarily that they exist, but that it is the often the only way we speak about the nursing profession
Speaking about nursing  (Clarke, 2014)

5 C’s: a model for political action?

- Communication
- Collectivity
- Collegiality
- Commitment
- Challenge

Education and preparation to act politically & utilize skills of advocacy are needed

6 C’s: a model for compassion?

- Care
- Compassion
- Competence
- Communication
- Courage
- Commitment
The good nurse
Not trivial  (Gordon & Nelson, 2006)

- Knowledgeable, highly skilled professional
- Educated, critical, reasoning thinker
- Decision maker & problem solver
- Credible, influential role model
- Supervisor, mentor, teacher

Make a difference
  Responsibility
  Versatility
  Teamwork
  Compassion
  Accountability
  Innovation
  Leadership
  Political activism
For students, both theory and practice are vital to nursing education and the construction of a professional identity, although pride of place is given to clinical placements and mentors.

“The ward can be changeable, unpredictable and challenging in many ways. However it is important to keep calm and concentrate on the task in hand which she is able to do so with good effect. She has good organisational skills and has shown that she can manage multiple work items on a daily basis.

Many times she has taken over the role as coordinator which she has been able to do under the supervision of either her mentors or fellow qualified nurses. This role has given her the opportunity to build on her leadership skills which have improved to a high standard throughout this placement.

She has become a valued member of the team and has worked closely with her mentors to ensure that our service users’ needs were met on a daily basis.”
And the good student  (Morris-Thompson, 2011)

- Diversity
- Fulfilment
- Privilege
The good job (Maben, 2007)

- Sustained idealists
- Compromised Idealists
- Crushed Idealists

“If the job is sick let’s fix the job, not the nurses…”

“Care, Compassion & Ideals: Nurses Experience of Nursing”

Professor Jill Maben

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zR7gJo5fak
Saving lives... (Summers & Summers, 2015)

- Nurses must believe in themselves and project that belief to others.
- Nurses themselves must play the leading role in improving their image.
- Nurses should persuade the media to provide a more accurate picture of the profession.
...and saving images

Images play a critical role in shaping public perception, recruitment of students, recruitment of staff and even funding decisions. The image of a profession is a precious resource that needs to be preserved.

While news media about nursing is volatile, political, appealing to the mainstream, images of nursing are products that once made are permanent artefacts.

Whilst we can't censor the freedom of the press we can certainly challenge prevailing stereotypes.

(McAllister et al, 2013)
Challenging prevailing stereotypes

What is the first word that pops into your head when you hear the word “nurse”?

I nurse because....
IN MY DARKEST MOMENT A NURSE GAVE ME STRENGTH

#whyinurse
What does the modern nurse do?

- Basic and menial tasks
- Superhuman
- Workhorse
- Undervalued
- Misunderstood
- Does what a doctor does and more
- Supports the doctor
- Everything the doctor doesn’t do
- Subservient to doctors
- To care is their role
- Management
- Eats chocolate
Eats chocolate!

…however, they are mostly trying to hold together the NHS, being worked ragged yet still managing to exhibit an incredible amount of empathy and compassion

Their role is extremely variable
Tell the world what you do (Buresh & Gordon, 2000)

- Educate the public in everyday life
- Describe your work
- Make the agency of nurses known
- Deal with the fear of making doctors angry
- Learn to accept thanks
- Be prepared to take advantage of openings
- Respond
- Tell your stories and anecdotes
- Make the details count
- Avoid jargon
- Get prepared ahead of time
- Reflect your clinical judgement
- Highlight the implications of your actions
- Connect your work to pressing contemporary issues
- Respect confidentiality
- Deal with your fears!
Hello my name is...  http://suzannecgordon.com/

- Insist on equal naming practices

- Enter the circle of care, don’t position yourself in the outfield

- If you are invited to the table, sit at the table and speak!

- Know the difference between respect & reverence
When nurses express these feelings we are always surprised. We are not nurses. What we know about nursing we have learned from nurses.

We have found that when nurses talk about their experiences with confidence and conviction, it can be stimulating, sad, moving, anxiety provoking, funny, terrible, informative.

They are anything but uninteresting.
And just imagine...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsjNXWIW28w
THANK YOU!