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Role and Image of Nursing in Children's Literature: A Qualitative Media Analysis

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Purpose: Nurses' role and image as portrayed in young children's literature were described and analyzed.
Design and Methods: A total of 30 children's books (pre-kindergarten through grade two audience) written in English were chosen using progressive theoretical sampling. Included were books, both fiction and non-fiction and with varying years of publication, that mentioned nurses and/or were about general healthcare topics. The books were analyzed using the method of qualitative media analysis which is derived from the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism.
Results: Nurses were generally portrayed positively but simply and inaccurately in this sample of children's literature. The seven themes discovered were labeled as nurse characters using traits evident in the sample: nurse unlikely, nurse minimal, nurse caring, nurse subordination, nurse skillful, nurse diversity, and nurse obvious.
Conclusion: The image of nursing is socially and culturally constructed, and accurate portrayals of nurses and their roles are necessary in all media. Thus, better representation of nurses in children's books is needed as young children's literature is an important first exposure to the art and science of nursing.
Practice Implications: Future children's books authored by nurses may more closely reflect accurate contemporary nursing practice and contribute to an improved image of the nursing profession.
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MESSAGES COMMUNICATED THROUGH mass media influence socialization (Potter, 2011) and transmit attitudes, values, and perceptions (Dominick, 2009). In particular, because children do not yet have extensive knowledge of the world around them, they may be more likely to believe information received from the media (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2014). Storybooks are one form of media often used by children and values, desires, and perceived realities are transmitted to young children via those books (Court & Rosental, 2007; Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007). Children form perceptions at a young age (Dyer, Shatz, & Wellman, 2000; Howard, 2002) which, even if based on

stereotypes, influence initial occupational goals (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005). Thus, a perception of nursing formed in childhood from stories in literature may have subtle but far-reaching and important influences. The image of nursing is socially and culturally constructed by adults for children, and accurate portrayals of nurses and their roles are necessary in all elements of the media including literature.

There was a clear gap in the knowledge base on the topic of nurses' image and role in books with respect to young children's (pre-kindergarten through grade two) literature. Although Kalisch and Kalisch (1983a) included "preteen" fiction in a study analyzing the effect of authorship on nursing image presentation, the findings were not described with respect to the categories of intended audience making it difficult to determine which findings might be specific to young children's literature and even whether "preteen"

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fiction included sources geared toward young children. To our knowledge, no study has explicitly and solely examined the phenomenon of nurses' image and role portrayal with respect to young children's literature. Therefore, the research question was, How are nurses' image and role portrayed in young children's literature? This interpretation was derived from the adult nurse researchers' analysis of the books.

For the purpose of this study, the parameters for young children's literature were pre-kindergarten through grade two. We followed the same classification, ages eight and under, used for "young children" by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This age range comprises the period when young children will first be exposed to this type of media. Further, books geared toward the pre-kindergarten to grade two age range consistently feature both words and pictures, facilitating consistency in the type of media being reviewed for this study. After the grade two level, books tend to feature fewer or no pictures. Children learn to read at some point during this range, so the books could be read to them or by them. Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004) found that both story reading and storytelling increased children's comprehension and language complexity. Therefore, either approach would be appropriate for facilitating understanding in this age range. In addition, by second grade children start dreaming about future professions (Gilchrist & Rector, 2007) and they start to shape beliefs about real world occupations (Hartung et al., 2005), so we examined storybooks that would be viewed up until that age.

Noting that nurses' portrayal in media directed toward an adult audience has generally been inaccurate and negative is important since adults comprise the world of publishing and are often the authors of children's books. Adults' own perceptions could potentially be transmitted through their writing. Nurses' image in literature has been studied, most notably by Kalisch and Kalisch (1982, 1983a, 1983b) and Kalisch, Kalisch, and Petrescu (1985), with the target population being adults. Of note, it has been almost three decades since nurses' portrayal in the media has been extensively studied. There have been many changes in healthcare in general and nursing in particular (Smith, 2013) which might affect current perceptions. Historically, nurses' image in the media was positive in the 1940s and 1950s and then became more negative thereafter (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1982; Quell, 1993). Auker (2004) analyzed newspaper articles and found that nurses were portrayed as necessary and skilled, but that the language used in articles created a negative image of the nurses' working conditions and resulted in misunderstandings of what nursing practice really entailed. McNally (2009), in an editorial from New Zealand substantiated by examples of local and international media, suggested that inaccurate media portrayals were an issue worldwide.

Theoretical Framework and Method

Qualitative media analysis (QMA) (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) was the methodological framework for this study and its goal is to verify and discover information. QMA utilizes symbolic interactionism (SI) as a theoretical framework. QMA allows for analysis of both text and images, making it a particularly appropriate method for analyzing young children's books. People become social beings through interacting with others, and language is a medium by which this development of meaning can occur in one's life. In SI, people—including children—attach meanings to things and then those meanings drive their subsequent actions (Blumer, 1969). As Benzies and Allen (2001) explained, people's perceptions and interpretations of the world around them influence their behavior. While such subsequent actions and behaviors are not being examined in this study, SI provides a lens through which an understanding can be achieved regarding how nurses and nursing are portrayed in children's literature. One concept of SI particularly applicable to this study is that of role which was examined with respect to how it was portrayed to children through books. Cleveland (2009) explained that clarity of a role is necessary in order to know how to behave and respond. Although the QMA method focuses on adult perceptions of children's books, the meaning a child attaches to the concept of nursing can potentially influence that child's attitude about nurses.

Sample

In QMA, the unit of analysis is a document—in this case, young children's paper books. Progressive theoretical sampling (PTS) was used as books were selected "based on an emergent understanding of the topic under investigation" and "for conceptual or theoretically relevant reasons" (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 56). This type of sampling is appropriate in qualitative research as it leads to a deeper understanding by allowing additional specific samples to be selected based on results previously obtained. For example, as books were located, characters were noted to be described as nurses in books not specifically about nursing. Thus, via this emergent understanding via PTS (C. J. Schneider, personal communication, May 21, 2014), books about other health care careers were searched. PTS utilizes some pre-set semi-structured categories, is reflexive, and can lead to new discoveries. Books written for a young audience were obtained by using online databases such as Publisher's Weekly, searching bookstores and public libraries and hospital libraries, and utilizing personal children's book collections. Books included were geared toward ages 8 and under and were written in English. Books that were specifically about nurses/nursing were obviously included, as well as books about general healthcare experiences and books about professions/jobs that mentioned nurses/nursing. The final sample size was 30. Figure 1 provides more detail on the sampling plan.

In QMA, messages, meanings, and nuances in the documents are investigated by researchers (D. L. Altheide, personal communication, December 29, 2014). Comparisons and contrasts between and among documents are desirable and enhance understanding (Altheide &