Chapter 11
End of Occupational Segregation in the Nursing Profession:
What Has Changed for Female Nurses?

Selcen Kılıçaslan-Gökoğlu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0237-5266
Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey

Engin Bağış Öztürk
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5596-4099
Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on how female nurses make sense of their occupations as the perception of their profession changes from gender-biased to gender-neutral. Nursing is one of those rare professions with occupational segregation in favor of females, but one that is changing as more males enter the profession. While there are many occupational segregation studies to explain male and female nurses' perspectives, research on how female nurses reconsider their views about the profession is scarce. Therefore, this chapter will address this change for females by utilizing a conceptual analysis, specifically the cognitive sense-making perspective. Referring to the phases of the cognitive sense-making (ecological change, enactment, selection, and retention), this chapter examines how the meaning of the nursing profession and the meaning of work in general is changing for females.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the nursing profession in which the occupational gender discrimination is decreasing. As a result of men entering to the nursing profession, the impact and change they created is the focus of this chapter. In the nursing, which is one of the rare occupations where gender discrimination is against men, it is thought that the nature of the job is related to giving care and showing concern. Being the caregiver, relationship/people oriented, and loving can be stereotypical labels attributed to females rather than males and it causes this profession more suitable for women, not for men. Due to these reasons, there is still a tendency to see nursing as a vocation and as a matter of compassionate and caring character which signifies its spiritual predisposition rather than its professional qualities (Gillett, 2012).

Generally, the literature about male nurses focuses on experiences, workplaces, types of difficulties they face in the profession, and general complaints about male nurses. As for female nurses, there is already a comprehensive literature on the challenges of the profession, working conditions, and their work experiences with other colleagues such as doctors. However, the studies on the interactions between these two genders in the nursing profession and the changes resulting from these interactions are very limited.

The aim of this paper is to focus on how women interpret and understand the changes in their professions due to new male coworkers. Since conceptual evaluations are scarce in this field, we emphasize conceptual aspect on how to approach occupational segregation in nursing. In order to address this issue, we specifically choose cognitive sense making perspective because its main assumptions match well with interactive aspect of nursing environment (Ericson, 2001; Kristiansen, Obstfelder, & Lotherington, 2015). Thus, from the cognitive sense-making perspective, the main purpose of this paper to determine what female nurses have learned from their male colleagues' thoughts and behaviors, how they interpret male nurses' relationships with their patients and doctors, and what kind of changes they adapt in their work life after male nurses.

Cognitive sense-making perspective (Weick, 1995) is appropriate conceptual tool to elaborate on female nurses' experiences and their interactions with male nurses. Especially, the paper can highlight some important aspects of sense-making that is very relevant with the occupational segregation. First

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