


Chapter 27


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

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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

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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 of all, sense-making perspective highlights the ecological change. When female nurses start working with male co-workers they are going through an ecological change. Male existence in their profession and in their workplace is something new for them, for patients, and for hospital managers. Female dominant identity of nursing profession is under a challenge with this ecological change. There are some studies with patients' views of this new situation, but perspective of female coworkers is not considered fairly. This chapter hopes to start a discussion on this issue.

Secondly, according to cognitive sense-making, people shape their thoughts in relation with the context they live in. Within this process people are not passive observers of the environment, but they are actors that can change their environments. For example, when female nurses interact with male nurses, they also influence male nurses and in return male nurses might behave differently which can influence female nurses again. Thus, they enact, organize, interpret and even control the events happening around them. While doing so, sense-making perspective suggests retrospection. In this case retrospection is not from the profession but from daily lives of female nurses as women interacting with males regularly. This male-female interaction in daily lives will shape female nurses' narrative about male nurses.

Lastly, cognitive sense-making is a socially shared activity (Maitlis, 2005). When people interact with each other, they share their experiences, opinions and beliefs about the events. Through these conversations people can change or can begin to believe in stories that are helpful to make sense of their environment. From this aspect, female nurses might share some stories about male nurses they interact or observe, and they might begin to approve or disapprove about their beliefs and opinions. Even they can into an agreement about male nurses or their occupations. Thus, cognitive sense-making perspective is equipped with important tools to help us to understand occupational segregation for females.

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