

Contemporary Paradoxical Expectations of the Nursing Profession and Revisiting the 'Nurses' Disciplinary Boundaries: India's Historical and Gendered Perspective

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Abstract : Background: The global history of nursing is exclusively a history of deep contradictions as it seeks to negotiate inclusion in an already gendered world. Although a powerful 'clinical gaze exists, nurses have toiled to re-negotiate and subvert the 'medical gaze' by practicing the 'therapeutic gaze' to tether back 'care into nursing practice.' This helps address the duality of the 'body' and 'mind' wherein the patient is not just limited to being an object of medical inquiry. Nevertheless, there has been a consistent effort to fit 'nursing' into being an art or an emerging science over the years. Especially with advances in hospital-based techno-centric medical practices, the boundaries between technology and nursing practices are becoming more blurred as the technical process becomes synonymous with nursing, eroding the essence of nursing care. Aim: This paper examines the history of nursing and offers insights into how gendered relations and the ideological belief of 'nursing as gendered work' have propagated to the subjugation of the nursing profession. It further aims to provide insights into the patriarchally imbibed techno-centrism that negates the gendered caregiving which lies at the crux of a nurse's work. Method: A literature search was carried out using Google Scholar, Web of Science and PubMed databases. Search words included: technology and nursing, medical technology and nursing, history of nursing, sociology and nursing and nursing care. The history of nursing is presented in a discussion that weaves together the historical events of the 'Birth of the Clinic' and the shift from 'bed-side medicine' to 'hospital-based medicine' that legitimizes exploitation of the bodies of patients to the 'medical gaze while the emergence of nursing as acquiescent to instrumental, technical, positivist and dominant views of medicine. The resultant power asymmetries, wherein in contemporary nursing, the constant struggle of nurses to juggle between being the physicians "operational right arm" to harboring that subjective understanding of the patients to refrain from de-humanizing nursing-care. Findings: The nursing profession suffers from being rendered invisible due to gendered relations having patrifocal societal roots. This perpetuates a notion rooted in the idea that emphasizes empiricism and has resulted in theoretical and epistemological fragmentation of the understanding of body and mind as separate entities. Nurses operate within this structure while constantly being at the brink of being pushed beyond the legitimate professional boundaries while being labeled as being 'unscientific' as the work does not always corroborate and align with the existing dominant positivist lines of inquiries. Conclusion: When understood in this broader context of how nursing as a practice has evolved over the years, it provides a particularly crucial testbed for understanding contemporary gender relations. Not because nurses like to live in a gendered work trap but because the gendered relations at work are written in a covert narcissistic patriarchal milieu that fails to recognize the value of intangible yet utmost necessary 'caring work in nursing. This research urges and calls for preserving and revering the humane aspect of nursing care alongside the emerging tech-savvy expectations from nursing work.

Keywords : nursing history, technocentric, power relations, scientific duality

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