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978-0-521-29616-8 - From Student to Nurse: A Longitudinal Study of Socialization

Ida Harper Simpson

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of the American Sociological Association**

From student to nurse

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From student to nurse

A longitudinal study of socialization

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Prologue

The 1950s were a time when nurses questioned what their role was and tried to determine what it should be. Their uncertainty grew with the growth of new nursing functions. Some new functions were brought on by the ascendancy of large, technologically oriented hospitals, and others by the expansion of nursing outside hospitals. Patient care was increasingly implemented through large complicated machinery requiring precise procedures. Nurses feared that these technological procedures were making physical care a distinct, isolated function and that the person of the patient was often left uncared for.

Along with the increased visibility and centrality of physical care, nursing took on new functions brought on by the bureaucratization of hospitals. Hospital nursing functions were divided along lines of skill and parceled out as distinct tasks to separate occupations; most prominent were practical nurses and attendants. Nursing took on added responsibility for assigning, coordinating, and keeping account of the work of the ancillary nursing occupations. These new functions turned nurses into administrators working with hospital personnel who stood between them and patients.

At the same time that administrative and clerical responsibilities were being added to nurses' work within hospitals, nursing work outside hospitals grew. Nursing was becoming internally divided by place of work. Nursing education, public-health nursing, and psychiatric nursing emerged as strong components of nursing, supplying far more than their proportionate shares of leaders. But most nurses still worked in hospitals. Leaders felt that hospital nurses should uphold high ideals of nursing and provide care directed to the whole patient, not just physical care.

To find out what nurses were doing in order to determine what their functions should be, the American Nurses' Association voted in 1950 to sponsor five years of research. The research was spread over at least thirty-four projects done mainly by sociologists, whose findings were

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synthesized by Everett C. Hughes, Helen MacGill Hughes, and Irwin Deutscher in *Twenty Thousand Nurses Tell Their Story*. The main finding about nursing work was that “bedside care is no longer the principal occupation of the nurse and the higher the nurse rises in the hospital hierarchy . . . the less does she see of the patient” (Hughes et al., 1958: 131). The care of the person of the patient – bedside or touch tasks – was increasingly left to ancillary nursing personnel.

Nurses had long known that their work was orienting them away from direct-patient care and were already endorsing research that they hoped would give clues on how to refocus the attention of nurses on the patients themselves. They saw the answer in a redesign of nursing-education curricula. Here again, interests of nursing leaders met those of sociologists. The rapid growth of professions that could be entered only through prolonged education gave increased visibility to recruitment and socialization into professions. Nursing-school curricula concentrated on skill training and basic theory; little place was given to the systematic inculcation of the common values of nursing. Sociologists argued that if nurses were to become “professional” in the sense of serving patients and upholding the ideals of nursing, students must learn values and incorporate them into their tasks. This was the view of professional socialization current among sociologists in the 1950s.

Nursing educators endorsed research on the socialization of nursing students, hoping to learn how students became professional nurses. The research to be reported in this book was one of the projects started in the late 1950s. Members of the Duke University Department of Sociology and School of Nursing joined together in 1958 and initiated a project to follow successive cohorts of students through their education and into the first year of nursing practice. The project was funded the following year by USPHS. Observations of students were to run through 1964. It was the belief of the sociologists and nursing educators on the project that professional socialization was crucial in implementing the objectives of a profession. The sociologists saw socialization occurring through group influences. We felt that to learn what these were and how they transmitted values would serve nursing well. With the knowledge in hand, nursing educators could supplement their dominant concern with curriculum by taking fuller account of the group processes in order to instill common values centered on patient care.

A longitudinal study of six years’ duration invariably risks running

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much longer than initially planned. Data analysis extends beyond data collection; and during the longer period of study, matters do not stand still. Researchers are also involved in other studies that are compacted in time and hold the researchers' attention better than the longitudinal study. Staff turnover complicates a longtime project. For these reasons and for others unrelated to the research, more than ten years passed from the beginning of the project before an analysis of data was undertaken. In the meantime, works had been published that challenged our view that socialization was as complete or occurred as smoothly as we had conceived it to. Findings on socialization were disparate, and we felt that a fuller understanding of the state of the field was necessary if we were to understand the reasons for the disparities. Time continued to pass, and our data on the nursing school and its students became increasingly dated. Nursing education was changing and, even more, women were changing. In view of all this, the objective of the monograph was shifted from the narrow question that had guided the research operation to a broader concern. We decided to address some issues that were now apparent in the field, using the data on the socialization of nurses. On settling down to analyzing data and writing, we reread two seminal works, *Boys in White* (Becker et al., 1961) and *The Student-Physician* (Merton et al., 1957). On rereading the two books together, we did not find them as opposing as Becker et al. had stated. They spoke to different issues, and the findings of one could not contradict the other's conclusions. Both were crucial in a study of professional socialization. This realization redirected the research emphasis to try to bring together the contributions of the two. The aim was to develop a model that would deal with issues treated by each and would also deal with other questions revealed by a study of the literature and not raised in earlier research.

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From Student to Nurse uses data from a longitudinal study entitled "The Professionalization Process in Nursing," that was funded by the United States Public Health Service (NU00028). John C. McKinney was project director, and he and Kurt W. Back administered the research operation. The initial research team consisted of them and Alan C. Kerckhoff and me from the Department of Sociology and Thelma Ingles from the School of Nursing of Duke University. This group devel-

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oped nascent ideas into an ongoing research project. Many people worked on the project at one time or another. They included James C. Kimberly, Carleton Guptill, Joy Gold Haralick, Alfred Dean, Kenneth Miller, and Richard Warnecke. Their contributions to the collection and processing of data used in this study are gratefully appreciated.

The Duke School of Nursing was an unofficial but approving sponsor. Under the leadership of Dean Ann M. Jacobansky, the administration, faculty, students, and their parents welcomed the investigation. They hoped the study would benefit nursing. They cooperated fully in the research, but they are in no way responsible for this study's findings or conclusions.

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The book benefited substantially from comments on earlier drafts by Howard S. Becker, Samuel Bloom, Glen H. Elder, Jr., Norval D. Glenn, and Robin M. Williams, Jr. Their criticisms and suggestions made this a better book. Richard L. Simpson read drafts attentively. His critical judgment and editorial help were invaluable.

Ida Harper Simpson

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