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The image of you: constructing nursing identities in YouTube

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Abstract
Aim. This article is a report on a descriptive study of nursing identity as constructed in the Web 2.0 site YouTube.

Background. Public images of the nurse carry stereotypes that rely on the taken for granted gender category of the nurse as woman. Nursing images represent a form of public discourse that has the capacity to construct nursing identity.

Methods. Critical discourse analysis was used to describe, analyse and explain how nurse and nursing identity were constructed in a purposive sample of ten video clips accessed on 17 and 18 July 2010.

Results. The ten most-viewed videos depicting the nurse and nursing on YouTube offered narratives that constructed three distinct nursing identity types, namely nurse as ‘a skilled knower and doer’, nurse as ‘a sexual plaything’ and nurse as ‘a witless incompetent’ individual.

Conclusion. Nursing identities recoverable from the texts of YouTube images propagate both favourable and derogatory nursing stereotypes. To mitigate the effects of unfavourable nursing stereotypes in such areas as interprofessional working and clinical decision-making, nursing professional bodies need to act to protect the profession from unduly immoderate representations of the nurse and to support nurses in their efforts to maximize opportunities afforded by YouTube to promote a counter discourse.

Keywords: discourse, identity, image, new media, nurse, nursing, YouTube

Introduction

Public interest in nurses arises from a genuine regard for the work nurses do. It is also related to a fascination with the nurse as woman. Nursing’s own interest in its image evidences self-conscious introspection that may reflect a discomfort with professional identity that is bound with nursing’s humble origins as a form of gendered and class-bound domestic work. Scholarly interest in image arises from a genuine need to engage in a critique of ideologies that often work in subtle and unhelpful ways to determine the discipline’s course (Hallam 2000, Fealy 2004, Nelson & Gordon 2006). Despite a substantial literature, scholarship concerning image continues to have global importance for nursing. In this article, we draw on discourse theory to argue that imagery constitutes public discourses that have constitutive power; what nursing is said to be constitutes what nursing is. The power of discourse can influence how nursing meets key challenges, such as the global nursing shortage and nursing’s relationships with society and with other professions.
Varied and competing images of the nurse are found in the media of film and TV and in YouTube, the Internet’s most successful video-sharing website. These images constitute a form of public discourse that gives rise to particular nursing identities. These publicly constructed identities are the subject of this study.

Background

Identity is defined as a ‘contextually variable description that draws on cultural meanings [and] ... the kind of person that one can be is bounded by the acceptable descriptions available at a particular historical-cultural juncture’ (Madill 2006, p. 36). Identity is socially constructed through public discourses. A linguistic construction, nursing identity is created in a range of texts, including written and spoken language, photographs and film. Public narratives concerning the nurse are frequently underpinned by assumptions about class, gender, power brokerage and economics (Fealy & McNamara 2007) and function to promote the vested interests of nursing’s dominant groups and power brokers (Fealy 2004). Discursive constructions of nursing identities can achieve social and political ends, including perpetuating the status quo or negotiating change (Hallam 2000). Hence, the ‘good nurse’ image was a chimera, ‘a consciously constructed ideal that suited a range of purposes’ (Fealy 2004, p. 655).

Visual images of the nurse are the staple of TV and film, giving rise to recurring stereotypes. Prominent among these are images that associate the (female) nurse with womanhood and its attendant womanly qualities that variously include the caring mother and the object of sexual desire. The nurse’s image in the popular media has interested scholars for over thirty years (Kalisch & Kalisch 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, Kalisch et al. 1982, Aber & Hawkins 1992, Sigma Theta Tau International 1997, Hallam 2000, Lusk 2000, Ferns & Chojnacka 2001, Fealy 2004, Fealy & Newby 2005, Kasoff 2006, Stanley 2008). The image presented on the Internet has also been the subject of academic research (Kalisch et al. 2007). Film offers several nursing stereotypes, such as the ministering angel, the doctor’s loyal assistant and the naughty nurse (Bridges 1990). Cinema and TV also depict the nurse as a strong and self-confident professional (Stanley 2008).

Despite the pervasiveness of popular nursing, images is largely invisible in healthcare print coverage (Sigma Theta Tau International 1997). Moreover, images proffered by nurses themselves, especially in recruitment campaigns, often misrepresent nursing. In Nelson and Gordon’s (2006:188) view, the ‘lens of sentimentality’, which is frequently deployed to portray an image of the nurse as ‘smiling, sweet [and] virtuous-looking’, belies the true nature of the complex work of knowledgeable and highly skilled professionals.

Media stereotyping results in adverse effects for nursing (Summers & Summers 2009), having an impact on recruitment and retention and on policy decisions about resource allocation for research, education and service (Kalisch & Kalisch 1987, Darbyshire & Gordon 2005, Nelson & Gordon 2006, Summers & Summers 2009). It also affects nurses’ own self-image, undermines their self-confidence, beliefs and values, and has an impact on the effectiveness of their work (Kalisch & Kalisch 1983, Takase et al. 2006, Fletcher 2007).

Internet images

Remarkably, few studies have examined nursing images on the Internet and to date only images on centralized Web 1.0 sites, which only permit passive viewing, have been the focus of research. In the earliest study on the subject, Pierce et al. (2000) analysed the image of nursing on 101 Internet greeting cards and reported that nurses were stereotyped as young, female and white, inflicting pain in sadomasochistic imagery or providing care with sexual overtones to male patients. Kasoff (2006), analysed how nursing was represented on the websites of North American hospitals, reported evidence of little information about nursing and observed that nurses appeared not to realize the Internet’s potential as a medium for promoting a positive nursing image. From an analysis of websites in 2001 and 2004, Kalisch et al. (2007) concluded that nurses were portrayed as intelligent, educated, competent and respected individuals; however, counter discursive constructions of the nurse were evident, including one in which the nurse was portrayed as sexually promiscuous.

YouTube

Founded in early 2005, the Web 2.0 site YouTube enables interactivity, which permits users to post video content free, view content posted by others, post comments in a threaded discussion format, search for content by keyword or category and participate in discussion groups. Through the development of standardized video viewing software and the availability of high-quality low-cost digital cameras, the website has rendered video sharing, searching and viewing easy. Acquired by Google Inc. in 2006, YouTube has grown to become the world’s most popular video-sharing website and the world’s third most visited website (Alexa 2010). Revenue is generated for YouTube and its partners from pop-up banner advertisements that appear on or next to a video.
The study

Aim

The aim of this study was to describe nursing identity as constructed in the Web 2.0 site YouTube.

Design

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provided a three-layered analytical framework to describe, analyse and explain the data. CDA is a rigorous method for analysing naturally occurring texts, such as those found in everyday language, including written, spoken and visual language (Fairclough 2001). CDA aims to reveal the role of discursive practices in maintaining social relations of unequal power. A major tenet of critical discourse theory is that discourses give rise to subject positions through which identities are constructed (Coupland 2009).

Sample

Representing the text of a publicly conducted discourse, the sample was the ten most-viewed video clips for the search terms ‘nurse’ and ‘nursing’, retrieved from the Web 2.0 site YouTube in July 2010. As our aims were to investigate an extant public discourse, to describe the subject positions that inhered in that discourse and to reveal nursing identities in the subject positions, we were not concerned with reaching a point at which no new themes were observed in the data. Rather, our concern was with what the textual data in the video items could be taken to mean in particular social, political and historical conditions. Hence, data saturation that typically might be applied in determining sample size in qualitative interviewing was not applied.

Data collection

On 17 and 18 July 2010, we conducted an initial search of the YouTube database for the years 2005–2010, using the search terms ‘nurse’ and ‘nursing’. This search yielded, respectively, 209,000 and 91,900 hits. To efficiently handle the large volume of data, we limited our initial sample to 100 video items. The inclusion criterion was that items should represent the ‘nurse’ and ‘nursing’ in the professional sense and not in the breastfeeding sense. On that basis, our initial study sample comprised 96 video items, 46 for ‘nurse’ and 50 for ‘nursing’ (Figure 1). Hyperlinks to the selected items were compiled on an MS Excel spreadsheet. Data were extracted from each video clip using the available YouTube facilities, including the video link upload category, the genre and summary of content, the video generator and the volume of views.

Figure 1 Study flow chart.
hits received. On the basis that the ten most-viewed video items constituted an ongoing public discourse, we conducted our analysis on these items.

Ethical considerations

We consulted the second author’s institutional Human Research Ethics Committee about ethical issues that might arise in reporting the results of our analysis of video content posted on a publicly available website. We were advised that our use of the video clips as research data and our reporting of results of our discourse analysis had no ethical import for individuals portrayed in the video clips, and accordingly, the study was not subjected to ethical review.

Data analysis

One of the researchers independently reviewed all retrieved video clips and determined each warranted inclusion in the study and prepared a preliminary list of broad categories of nursing identities that appeared to reside in the video texts. A second researcher independently analysed a random sample of the selected video clips to verify content against the preliminary list of categories. Any lack of consensus concerning the broad categorization was resolved by mutual agreement among all three researchers. In our analysis, we observed a pattern whereby five videos for ‘nurse’ and ‘nursing’, respectively, received proportionately higher viewership than the remainder of the 96 videos. On the basis that these ten items constituted an active online discourse about nurse and nursing, we selected them for further in-depth analysis. Although the total duration of the ten items was just 23 minutes and 31 seconds, both the online content and written descriptions of each item, which we prepared as part of the analytical process, represented a substantial data set to conduct a discourse analysis. Depth analysis of the ‘texts’ and inter-rater reliability were achieved over a 3-month period from December 2010 to March 2011.

The analysis focused on particular textual constructions of nursing identity (Fairclough 2003), through the recognition and abstraction of subject positions residing in the texts (Edley & Wetherell 1997, Edley 2001). For our purposes, subject positions were ‘drawn from perspectives viewing subjectivity and identity as linguistic constructions’ (Madill 2006, p. 36). We took the online content as a form of language-in-use, which simultaneously reflected and constructed reality, and our analysis focused on the task of building identities, one of the several tasks of language-in-use (Gee 2005).

Rigour

Rigour in critical discourse analysis is ‘the means by which [researcher] integrity and competence are established and a way of demonstrating legitimacy’ whereby the reader is invited to judge the validity and quality of the work, including its authenticity and fit with the reader’s experience (Freshwater et al. 2010, p. 502). For each of the ten selected items, one of the researchers prepared a narrative synthesis that described the video’s content, including the setting and narrative agency of participants, the artistic genre, themes, tone and narrative style. These narrative descriptions constituted supplementary qualitative data that assisted in the analytic and interpretive process. To further enhance rigour, each description was then independently read by another researcher and their content agreed among all three.

Throughout the analytical process, each researcher assumed a deliberate stance of self-awareness, reflexivity and self-monitoring, to maintain the rigour and credibility of findings (Freshwater et al. 2010). In our reflexivity, we acknowledged that our analysis needed to be understood in the light of the fact that all three researchers were nurses and we each questioned our interpretations of the texts in the light of our own respective experiences and prejudices.

Findings

The ten selected videos were categorized according to their source of design and upload. Two sources were evident: nurse-generated and media company-generated. The level of viewership for the ten videos ranged from over 61,695 to over 901,439 ‘hits’ (Figure 2). The ten most-viewed video texts reflected a variety of idioms, including promotional videos, advertising, excerpts from TV situation comedy and cartoon. Some content reflected efforts to valorise nursing as a career. Some texts dramatized, caricatured and parodied nurse-patient and interprofessional encounters. In the ten videos, three nursing identities emerged; these were: nurse as ‘a skilled knower and doer’, nurse as ‘a sexual plaything’, and nurse ‘as a witless incompetent’ individual.

Nurse as a skilled knower and doer

Four of the ten selected video clips presented images of educated, smart and technically skilled nurses. The first, entitled, ‘UAB emergency room rap’, depicts a group of nurses at the University of Alabama at Birmingham using a musical rap to valorise their skills and services as ER nurses (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5Zw4ZARvNg&feature=related).
The scene is shot in the ER and the rap song lists the array of nursing and medical services that they offer at their ER department.

The second video clip, a video promoting nursing as career, also uses music, in this instance a backing track by Justin Timberlake, to promote nursing as a career at Decker School of Nursing, Binghamton, New York (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kVv2aqnEjs). Five nursing students in green and white theatre scrub uniforms sing of the virtues of nursing as a professional career, with the repeated chorus line ‘go be a nurse’ substituting for the original Timberlake lyrics. The nurses are of mixed ethnicity. The song lyrics carry an optimistic vision of professional nursing that includes the lines ‘you will be making more than fifty grand’ and ‘no men is a myth’ and the prospect of gaining a PhD.

Produced by nursing students at BU School of Nursing, another promotional video presents nursing students dancing to the Kenny Loggins song ‘Footloose’ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU0f5bgbj0s). Green scrubs and stethoscopes are much in evidence and there is one male nurse among the group. The dancing is represented as a form of unwinding after final examinations. Similar to the UAB and Decker videos, nursing is portrayed as a fun career, but demanding and with the requirement for hard academic study.

The final clip in this category is also a promotional video of ‘the nurses’ story’ at Harris Methodist Southwest Hospital (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKaqqzUGrRI&feature=related). The genre is a documentary format, comprising images of nurses at work, interspersed with short interviews with nurses speaking about their work and why they became a nurse. A slow orchestral musical score is played throughout.

The four video clips, told from the perspective of nurses themselves, present nursing as a valuable and rewarding career. The dominant discourse in the texts is that of nursing being a highly skilled profession which gives rise to an identity of the nurse as ‘skilled knower and doer’. In the clips, nursing identity is a function of the nurse’s membership of a distinct professional group working in a busy clinical hospital, where his or her knowledge and skills count. In this setting, there is gender blindness and the nurse is not only subject positioned as a savvy technician but also as a purveyor of emotional support grounded in academic training. The three music videos also convey a sense of professional solidarity and bonding in the face of nursing shortages and the burden of academic study.

**Nurse as a sexual plaything**

The identity of nurse as ‘sexual plaything’ was evident in media-generated video clips from a popular American sitcom, two advertisements and one news reportage item. With the title ‘Sexy Nurse’, a scene from the American TV sitcom Frasier presents an image of a single nurse in a low-cut, short white uniform revealing black suspender stockings being swept up into the arms of the main character (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xR1mb8p5YbQ&feature=related). The clip contains no sound.

Entitled ‘Virgin Mobile: virgin mobile yo yo hot nurse commercial’ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGGjjDHfO9k&feature=related), a video advertisement for a mobile telephone company based in a hospital room, presents a young nurse in a white figure-hugging short uniform, searching under the bedclothes for the young male patient’s mislaid ringing mobile telephone. Having failed to find the device, the nurse leaves the room, and the patient retrieves his phone from under the bedclothes and calls his fellow (young male) patient in the next room and triumphantly declares: ‘it worked!’

A lingerie advertisement produced in Belgium, entitled ‘Typical men: Sexy nurse lingerie’ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZXaVwiqcis). The devious patient is ‘revived’ by the nurse’s attention, which involves straddling him to perform chest compression and opening his eyes to reveal her branded underwear.

A ‘soft’ news item on The Young Turks, the Internet TV news show, concerned a national campaign by nurses in the
Netherlands objecting to male patients seeking ‘sexual favours’ from nurses. The two anchors, a male and a female, describe and discuss the facts of the news item in a conversational idiom that gratuitously uses salacious humour to carry the story (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekacht7GNdQ). The tone and content of the conversation suggests that the editorial line holds the news item to have little gravitas, such that the underlying issue of sexual harassment does not merit editorial attention.

The four items described here carry images of the nurse as an object of male sexual fantasy and as the playful and willing accomplice in the sexual advances of male patients. The nurse is subject positioned with reference to her uniformed body and her particular nursing ‘skills’, which include giving sexual pleasure. She is the purveyor of a particular form of comfort for the sick patient that only she as nurse and woman can bring. She is gratuitously sexualized and objectified.

**Nurse as a witless incompetent individual**

Using a rudimentary computer-generated image (CGI) cartoon format, a humorous media-generated video carries the storyline of a nurse and an emergency medical technician (EMT) in a conversation, in which the EMT is admonishing the nurse for calling him at 3 AM to treat a patient who is breathless (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6yRpnkPlzg). The scene takes place in an Alzheimer residential unit and the EMT questions the nurse in an abrasive tone about her actions prior to initiating the emergency call. The nurse admits to a series of fundamental errors of judgement in not properly assessing the patient and offers excuses that ‘I just got here’ and ‘I don’t know this patient’s history’. When the exasperated and profanity-spouting EMT finally asks the nurse ‘can you do anything on your own without doctor’s orders?’ the nurse responds: ‘I can wipe dirty ass and change diapers.’ The main character of narrative agency is the EMT, who by exposing the nurse as a dim and incompetent individual, positions himself as the skilled and savvy professional and the real life savior.

The second video clip in this category is an excerpt from an American sitcom entitled *Mad TV Hospital Nurse* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoq878U1WeWQ&feature=related). The scene depicts a nurse at the ER triage desk at ‘Sisters of Mercy Hospital’, in a short white dress and with a dumpy-blonde accent. Her first patient, an unmarried woman in labour, is turned away by the nurse, because ‘we here at the Sister of Mercy don’t condone bastard children’. The second patient, a haemorrhaging trauma victim with haemophilia, is rejected because ‘we at the Sister of Mercy don’t condone that lifestyle choice’. A third patient who presents with ‘that [contagious] flesh-eating thing’ is sent directly to the doctor’s treatment room, but only after the doctor fires the nurses from her job for her behaviour towards the first two patients and tells her: ‘we’re through!’ The nurse thanks her former lover, saying: ‘okay, so sorry it didn’t work out, but thanks for letting me sleep with you and thanks for letting me work here at Sisters of Mercy Hospital’ and she then exits the scene to canned laughter.

In the two video clips described here, cutting satire is deployed to lampoon the nurse as witless and incompetent individual. In the first video clip the satire is both cutting and direct, positioning the nurse as stupid and unable to make proper clinical decisions. In the second video, the text is rather more subtle, but it too offers an image of the nurse as a bureaucrat, unconcerned with the needs of her patients. She is uncaring and callous, prioritizing bureaucratic procedure over her nursing mission to treat the sick; this disposition gives rise to her incompetence, which is compounded by her deviousness in exposing the doctor to unnecessary risk of contagion.

**Discussion**

In analysing nursing images on YouTube, this study merely risked repeating the frequent grievance in the literature that popular nursing images misrepresent and were stereotyped; however, our starting point was the recognition that the very nature of nursing itself is problematic (Hallam 1998) and hence, examining how nursing identities are constructed is more than an expression of a grievance. By selecting the ten most-visited websites, there was also a risk that other discourses were not uncovered for analysis, and as a consequence, other identities not revealed. When sampling the texts, we did not aim to achieve topic representativeness from all posted video clips about nurse and nursing, but instead sought to uncover a publicly conducted discourse and to illustrate enduring themes in that discourse. A third limitation concerns the authors’ interpretations of the texts, where it is acknowledged that other discourse analysts might elicit and name alternative identities in the same texts.

Public discourses produce narrative forms that position social groups with particular identities (Fealy et al. 2011). The videos offer a window on the ways that discourses are used to construct specific repertoires for both positioning the nurse by others and for self-positioning by the nurse. The four nurse-generated videos were posted by nurses in universities in the United States and attempted to propagate an optimistic view of nursing and an image of the nurse as educated and competent. The videos contained images of white, black and
What is already known about this topic

- Public images of the nurse are replete with stereotypes that rely on the taken for granted gender category of the nurse as woman.
- Identities are socially constructed through public discourse, and media and online nursing images are a form of public discourse that positions nurses with particular identities.
- As a social practice, nursing is inherently problematic, with great variance between nursing image and the nursing role.

What this paper adds

- YouTube, the world’s most-visited website, presents nurses with a democratizing platform through which they can promote positive images of nursing.
- Images of the nurse in YouTube texts give rise to discourses that variously construct the nurse as ‘a skilled knower and doer’, ‘a sexual plaything’ and ‘a witless incompetent’ individual, and these identities recovered from YouTube images are consistent with those found in popular mass media.

Implications for practice and/or policy

- The relevance of nursing image and identity for nursing and clinical practice lies in the constitutive power of discourses.
- Nursing identities can give rise to nursing behaviours in interprofessional working and clinical decision-making, and identities can also influence the way the society behaves towards nurses.
- To counter unfavourable nursing stereotypes, nursing professional bodies need to lobby legislators to protect the profession from undue negative stereotyping and thereby act to support individual nurses in their efforts to maximize opportunities afforded by YouTube to promote a counter discourse.

oriental nurses and there were also occasional male nurses, thereby explicitly or implicitly challenging the white female stereotype that has dominated nursing imagery and debunking it by adopting a plurality of images (Salvage 1982, Hallam 2000). All other images in the texts that we examined constructed the nurse as young, white and female, reflecting the taken for granted gender categories (Fealy 2004).

Video content in YouTube was nurse generated in four instances, suggesting that nurses themselves are engaging with the decentralized and democratizing medium to construct nursing identities. These videos represented efforts by nurses themselves to dismantle the project of sentimentalizing nursing as ‘smiling, sweet and virtuous-looking’ (Nelson & Gordon 2006, p. 188). This was evident in the way that nurses themselves mobilized their knowledge of YouTube audience expectations of entertainment (Fealy & Newby 2005), weaving in music, dance and humour to communicate their message, and in the process, promote the image of the nurse as a ‘skilled knower and doer’. Despite this, a repertoire of other competing identities was produced and imposed on nurses through other dominant discourses (Fairclough 2001). This was evident in the objectification and subject positioning of the nurse as ‘a sexual plaything’ and ‘a witless incompetent’ individual.

Nursing stereotypes proffered by YouTube are consistent with previously reported media constructions of nursing identities (Bridges 1990). Items that were media generated tended to present nursing stereotypes constructed in discourses of white femininity (Hallam 2000). For example, the incompetent nurse is the ‘bad’ nurse who misuses her position of authority to satisfy her own needs, including material and sexual needs (Hallam 2000). Such stereotypical constructions of nursing identity have become naturalized and taken-for-granted in YouTube, due in part to their ability to entertain and to generate advertising revenue. Images of doctors and nurses seem to appeal to a particular public need, as evidenced in the proliferation of TV medical melodramas (Fealy & Newby 2005), a genre that offers a premium locus for placing advertisements. Similar to the experience of TV, the appeal of such images on the Internet offers strong revenue-generating potential through associated advertising. Hence, it is unsurprising that the advent of the Internet and its commercial potential should bring with it the continued promulgation of nursing stereotypes.

With the ubiquity and popularity of YouTube, its nursing stereotypes act as a powerful force in influencing public beliefs and attitudes in relation to nurses. It is difficult to challenge or dissolve the power of such stereotypical representations in YouTube, especially when all video content is subject to the democratic prerogative of the website users and the YouTube moderators, acting as power elites, to approve or sanction that content. It is also difficult when the power of humour is deployed to such good effect. A noteworthy factor in the images of the nurse on YouTube is their relative ubiquity and permanence on the Internet, which renders them different to cinematic and TV images, which are rather more ephemeral. In addition, images that are censured or banned in cinema and TV may be readily available on YouTube.

The images of nurses constructed by the media are, in Hallam’s (2000, p. 25) view, not value-free accounts, but have
the power to ‘mediate dominant ideas and values’, and such constructions therefore have social implications. For example, the identity as a sexual plaything or a witless incompetent individual, albeit created in the male-dominated social space of YouTube, constructs an identity that is counter to that of the skilled professional. On the basis that discourse has constitutive power, the nurse is a sexual woman and is incompetent.

Acknowledging the problematic nature of nursing as a social practice, it nevertheless lies within the nurses’ power to challenge negative stereotypes that create particular identities. As users of YouTube, they can act as moderators in the online community and seek to redress the balance of power in the way that nursing is represented. In this way, they can challenge gender-bound stereotypes and at the same time continue to use the medium to promote positive images of nursing. In judiciously selecting video content to post on YouTube, nurses can convey to the largely young male public the complexities of skilled nursing and the critical and central role that nurses play in the healthcare system that the YouTube audience might have recourse to use.

Discourse is a vehicle that carries ideology (Fealy 2004, p. 655) and as Hallam (2000, p. 25) has argued, the ‘reality’ that the media constructs ‘suits a particular vision of the world, sustaining beliefs in particular ideas and institutions and the power relations they inscribe.’ Furthermore, the continuing propagation of gender-dependent nursing stereotypes in new online social spaces may be the result of a historical, social and political devaluation of nursing as a female profession (Nelson & Gordon 2004).

The CDA aims to reveal the role of discursive practices in maintaining social relations of unequal power. Accordingly, our analysis highlights YouTube’s financial and executive powers to partner with large film outlets to upload and sanction online content. For nursing, this power functions to narrow the global viewers’ attention towards derogatory images of the nurse as sexual plaything and witless incompetent individuals. Moreover, the power is so pervasive as to obviate the efforts of some nurses to promote positive images through valorising nursing knowledge and skills. Our findings provide an important qualification to Stanley’s (2008) work, which reported a self-confident and powerful nurse in film. They also reveal the workings of the largely unregulated cyber culture in promulgating unfavourable nursing stereotypes, a culture that to date has been overlooked by scholars studying nursing images and identities.

**Conclusion**

As a social practice, nursing remains inherently problematic, as illustrated in the disconnection between the public image of nursing and the reality of nursing practice. Popular images of the nurse constitute a discourse that gives rise to nursing identities. The study of nursing identity is important, as it offers a window on how the profession views itself and how it is viewed by others, including the public who avail nursing services. Academic studies on identity also function to raise consciousness among nurses, alerting them to the problematic nature of their profession and how their identities are forged in public discourses.

Despite its putative democratising function as a medium of the people, YouTube is no different than other popular mass media in the way that it propagates gender-bound, negative and demeaning nursing stereotypes. Although nursing’s regulatory and professional representative bodies are not expected to engage in an online discourse through posting video content on YouTube, their remit includes the effective use of their statutory clout to act to protect the profession from the propagation of immoderate and damaging representations of the nurse. This clout can be exercised by lobbying legislators to ensure the protection of the profession from such stereotyping. Such lobbying might include calls for even greater democracy in the process of moderating online YouTube content, with professional bodies having the decision-making powers alongside corporate voices.

A discourse has constitutive power in the way that it confers social groups with particular identities. YouTube constructed and sustained particular nursing identities that have relevance for nursing practice. This relevance lies in the way that professional relationships are acted out in every day interdisciplinary working and in the ways that nurses articulate their particular disciplinary contribution. Constituted by nursing images, nursing identities get acted out in institutional contexts, giving rise to particular nursing behaviours, in interprofessional working and clinical decision-making. Nurses may internalize a particular identity constructed for them through discourses and act according to the expectations of that identity through their clinical work. Hence, images that give rise to particular identities can ultimately have an impact on clinical practice.

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No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.
Author contributions

JK and GF were responsible for the study conception and design. JK performed the data collection and provided administrative, technical or material support. JK, GF and RW performed the data analysis, were responsible for the drafting of the manuscript and made critical revisions in the article for important intellectual content.

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