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# Valuing brazilian nursing: analyzing historical and gender aspects

**ABSTRACT** | Objective: To contribute to the understanding and reflection on the valorization of nursing, going through historical and gender aspects. Method: An Integrative Review. Searches 2013 - 2018, Portuguese, Spanish and English languages. After refined selection, 13 articles were used in the discussion. Results: Because social oppression is predominantly female, it has an overwhelming force in the concept of nursing. Understanding the aspects that nursing is subject to, influences the strength of the nurse to decide and build her professional future and fight for changes and valorization. Conclusion: The study of history and the influence of gender roles are related to the social oppression of nurses and are essential for critical training.

**Keywords:** Nursing; Gender Identity; Feminism; Sexism; Professional Practice.

**RESUMEN** | Objetivo: Contribuir a la comprensión y reflexión sobre la valorización de la enfermería, pasando por aspectos históricos y de género. Método: revisión integradora. Búsquedas 2013-2018, portugués, español e inglés. Después de una selección refinada, se utilizaron 13 artículos en la discusión. Resultados: Debido a que la opresión social es predominantemente femenina, tiene una fuerza abrumadora en el concepto de enfermería. Comprender los aspectos a los que está sujeta la enfermería influye en la fortaleza de la enfermera para decidir y construir su futuro profesional y luchar por los cambios y la valorización. Conclusión: El estudio de la historia y la influencia de los roles de género están relacionados con la opresión social de las enfermeras y son esenciales para la capacitación crítica.

**Descriptores:** Enfermería; Identidad de género; Feminismo; Sexismo; Práctica profesional.

**RESUMO** | Objetivo: Contribuir para a compreensão e reflexão sobre a valorização da enfermagem, perpassando por aspectos históricos e de gênero. Método: Revisão Integrativa. Buscas 2013 - 2018, idiomas português, espanhol e inglês. Após seleção refinada 13 artigos foram utilizados na discussão. Resultados: Por ser predominantemente feminina a opressão social tem força esmagadora na concepção de enfermagem. Entender os aspectos aos quais a enfermagem está sujeita, influencia a força da enfermeira para decidir e construir seu futuro profissional e lutar por modificações e valorização. Conclusão: O estudo da história e da influência dos papéis de gênero relacionam-se à opressão social da enfermeira e são imprescindíveis para a formação crítica.

**Palavras-chaves:** Enfermagem; Identidade de Gênero; Feminismo; Sexismo; Prática Profissional.

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## INTRODUCTION

The context of nursing practice is directly linked to the feminine qualities determined by gender roles associated with the pre-modern and pre-capitalist nursing model<sup>(1)</sup>. Nursing work was linked to women's work, resulting in devaluation and invisibility<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

The modern nursing instituted by Florence Nightingale determined that the nurse must strictly comply with medical determinations<sup>(4)</sup> and in its origin, Brazilian nursing reproduced these concepts with a dogmatic religious character. The training of Brazilian nurses was based on activities of practical repetitions and disassociated from theory, reducing the possibility of developing creativity and scientific knowledge, reinforcing the differences between nurses and doctors, aggravating the subordination based on gender<sup>(5)</sup>. We understand gender at two levels: the first

as a constitutive element of social relations, based on the different roles played by the male and female sexes, and the second as a representative of power relations in which dominant forces are considered natural and undoubted which attributes meaning to relationships of power<sup>(6,7)</sup>.

The relevance of nursing performance is sometimes not considered, it is necessary to understand and highlight its identity, favoring its affirmation, encouraging society and nursing professionals to be aware of the greatness of their history, achievements, struggles, of their knowledge and its object of work, caring. In this sense, the objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding and reflection on the valorization of nursing, going through historical and gender aspects, in order to contribute to the advancement in the valorization, respect and recognition of the profession.

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## METHODOLOGY

It is an integrative review, whose method is composed of secondary data, based on primary studies, followed by predetermined steps such as elaboration of the research question; sampling and establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; categorization of studies, analysis(8). It was defined as the study question: What are the factors that interfere in the valorization of Brazilian nursing? The searches were carried out from June to November 2018, in the databases of the Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Electronic Medicus Index of the National Library of Medicine (MEDLINE) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) using the following descriptors: Nursing; Nursing History; Gender Identity; Feminism; Sexism; Professional Practice. Inclusion criteria: publications between 2013 and 2018, in Portuguese, Spanish and English, presence of any of the descriptors in the title, methodology and discussion cohesive with the guiding question. Exclusion criteria: articles that did not address the guiding question, historiography of specific personalities and did not address the history of nursing as a profession.

## RESULTS

In view of the combination of descriptors through the Boolean operator "AND", 55 searches were found, duplicate publications were eliminated, considering those that were available in full text. Previous reading and selection were carried out, leaving 32 studies. In a thorough reading of the publications and application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 13 studies remained. Then, the evidence related to the historical and gender aspects contained in the selected articles was extracted, through the reading of each article carried out by pairs, separate and transcribed phrases, words

and concepts that corresponded to elements of interest and comparison was made between them.

## DISCUSSION

### Pre-modern Nursing and Modern Nursing

The history of nursing in the pre-capitalist and pre-professional period was linked to domestic activities, to the mercy of empiricism, sometimes associated with people of low value and social esteem, such as prostitutes and drunks. Unlike medical practice that was characterized by theorizing and preparing for exercise<sup>(4)</sup>.

Florence Nightingale presents that the establishment of knowledge in nursing would not change the role expected by nurses or women in the society in which she found herself<sup>(4,9)</sup>:

[...] no one thinks, however, that obedience to the doctor is not absolutely necessary. Only neither the doctor nor the nurse sufficiently emphasizes intelligent obedience and that mere obedience is too little [...] <sup>(9)</sup>.

Modern nursing in these parameters is full of gender stereotypes, the woman was a discreet and subordinate shadow in the hospital space. The affirmation of these characteristics of the nurse, similar to Maria, a virgin mother, pure and asexual, was intended to "clean up" the moment in history when the profession was exercised by less favored people and who sought redemption by caring for the sick<sup>(4,10)</sup>.

### Nursing in Brazil

In Brazil, nursing was empirical and informal, a fact that began to change with the departure of the sisters of charity from the National Hospice for the Insane (HNA) and the hiring of French nurses from the School of Salpêtrière and the creation of the Professional School

of Nurses (EPEE) influenced by the nursing standard of Dr Bourneville, whose model aimed to train "religious women without habit", devoted caregivers and complying with medical prescriptions<sup>(11,12)</sup>. The Rockefeller Foundation and the North American model also influenced Brazilian nursing<sup>(1)</sup>. In 1920, 13 nurses were responsible for the creation of the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health, later Anna Nery School<sup>(1,4)</sup>, aimed at women of high society; emotional stability, moral distinction and respectful presentation were needed<sup>(11)</sup>. The graduates of the nursing course obtained a high school diploma and the school was incorporated into the University of Brazil in 1946 and in 1962 it was established as being of higher education<sup>(4)</sup>. The fact of staying as a high school course is associated with the restricted female education at the time and the fact that there are no incentives for educational improvement, it would be more appropriate for them to occupy a place in a nursing school than to reach high school and could reach any other higher education course, inducing women's professional choices.

After the graduation of the first class of the Anna Nery School, the Brazilian Association of Registered Nurses (ABED) was founded in 1926, in 1952 it became a public utility and in 1954 it changed its name to the Brazilian Nursing Association - ABEn<sup>(4)</sup>. In 1938, Getúlio Vargas created the Nurse's Day stating that tributes should be paid to Brazilian nurse Anna Nery in all places where nursing was practiced, applying the induction of religious and patriotic ideals as the essence of nursing<sup>(1)</sup> and the institutional rites established from there had the function of manipulating and building an ideal of power, associating certain images<sup>(13)</sup>. The delay in organizing the scientific character compromised the valorization of the profession, nursing was still seen as complementary knowledge, occupying a place that any lay person could fill.

In the Second World War, the first female group of Brazilian military nursing was created in 1942<sup>(14)</sup> whose presence in wars exposes the contradiction of the dictatorship in relation to the social role of women, their stay there is "justified" reaffirming social roles, with men at the front of the battle and women at the rear<sup>(1)</sup>.

### Gender and nursing

Goodman<sup>(10)</sup> argues that the social, economic and physiological context should be taken into account when analyzing the different gender roles established and Saffioti<sup>(15)</sup> refers that gender roles must be fulfilled, with an exact delimitation in relation to the fields in which they can act. However, a nurse cloistered in gender stereotypes and with restricted critical awareness is sometimes unable to see certain situations that surround her. When gender is considered a sociological, political and cultural construction, sex could not be thought of as a demographic, biological or natural variable, but rather as a combination of cultural and ideological factors formed in each historical period in different ways<sup>(7)</sup>. The determination of how gender symbols influenced the social construction of the nursing image must be understood so that we can act on these factors directly, and change destinations that are presented, fallaciously, as the only possible perspective.

### Influence of the Catholic Church in nursing practice

The power of the church in Brazil can be seen with Decree No. 22.257 of December 26, 1932 that authorized the Sisters of Charity to exercise nursing activities if they had at least six years of practice<sup>(1)</sup>. About academic training, Almeida et al<sup>(5)</sup> collected testimonies from recognized militant nurses, many of them former presidents of ABEN:

[...] ethics at the Nursing School was a precept of religion. [...], but it was about the life of a saint, they were things linked to the Catholic religion. He took a priest to give lectures in ethics classes. [...]

[...] the influence of the catholic church, where the charge for the work of the nuns was given indirectly, and the economic value of nursing work was not placed, generated a very submissive, accommodated category, with moments of sporadic militancy. [...] the religious issue [...] brought several problems and I would mention only two: submission and subordination, since most of them worked for exchange of residence and doing good, it is not by chance that today we have the symbols of angels. [...] <sup>(5)</sup>.

In 1958, in the first Nursing Code of Ethics, nursing was characterized as a mission, rather than a profession to be exercised scientifically. Replaces the charitable particularity, with the vocation that keeps nursing submissive to other professional categories<sup>(4)</sup>. In 1975 the Code of Infractions and Penalties did not allow nurses to participate in advertisements, to receive bonuses for their work, to criticize a colleague or the institution where they performed their work, to participate or promote abortions, among other restrictions<sup>(4)</sup>.

### Visibility and professional enhancement

Fowler<sup>(16)</sup> reports that nursing has its progress associated with that of women, it took a lot of struggle for the profession to evolve to the level it is at. Being a nurse, even if it is not understandable to many, is to bear marks of feminism itself. Gradually the collective sense and mutual strengthening between nurses are formed<sup>(16)</sup>. The lack of recogni-

tion of the relevance of nursing work by society and other health professionals is linked to the neglected historical aspects, including in undergraduate courses, and to the fact that scientific care was established late<sup>(17)</sup>. Lombardi and Campos<sup>(12)</sup> present a description of why nursing would be a profession with problems to be valued:

[...] Nursing is women's work, it deals with the care of others, it is a job subordinated to medical authority, it has long been identified with domestic activities [...] <sup>(12)</sup>.

In its conclusion, written in 2018 it presents "[...] another factor that plays in the devaluation of the nursing area lies in its historically asymmetric relationship with medicine, to which it is subordinated and, therefore, to whose authority it must submit. [...]" <sup>(12)</sup>. It is necessary to understand the contribution of the study of the history of nursing in the valorization of the profession. Marinelli et al<sup>(17)</sup> fosters in its conclusion:

[...] Research involving the Nursing History theme and its relevance for the consolidation of the profession is still scarce, requiring more work to be done in order to disseminate information and expand knowledge in the area. [...] <sup>(17)</sup>

Ignorance of what nursing is and its performance, reduces its visibility, interfering with autonomy and this is related to its history, lack of recognition of the scientific basis, dissemination of an image by the media that does not match the real, and the failure to perform personal marketing by the nursing professional, wrong posture before the health team and work overload<sup>(18)</sup>.

### Political performance of nursing

In Brazil, throughout the 1940s and 1960s there was a hierarchy of the pro-

fession and the struggle between different levels of education politically weakened the profession. Only in the 1980s did the conservative character begin to leave associative institutions<sup>(4)</sup>. When this change of scenery occurred, nurses and students who acted politically began to be hostilely treated<sup>(5)</sup>:

“So, I was also called several times by the course coordinator, [...] always harassing me as a person who militated at ABEn as if it were a crime. [...]”<sup>(5)</sup>.

There are still open fights and agendas to be discussed, such as the national definition of the workload and salary floor. What has been exposed so far conver-

ges to the fact that nursing achievements have historically been overloaded, resulting in a politically demobilized profession. It is necessary to produce and search for policies that encourage the criticality of nurses to raise awareness of their category and class.

### Expected changes

All that has been said is not only a presentation of historical facts of nursing, but also “a reminder of who nursing is” (16) and that its entire history is specific, bringing to the fore several flags of struggle that cannot be separated from action(16). The definition of what nursing is determines who will be the nurse, and the nurse's exercise and political performance define nursing<sup>(5)</sup>. Un-

derstanding the aspects to which nursing is subject, influences the nurse's strength to decide and build her professional future and fight for social changes and a more valued nursing<sup>(5)</sup>.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Contributions about the valorization of the profession show the need for further studies in the history of nursing, the history that we need to resume in undergraduate courses is the one that was briefly presented, which goes beyond the facts considered relevant. Nurses being able to recognize the historical and social factors that condition their behavior can break the bonds and fight for valued and recognized nursing. 🐦

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