

Autumn 2005 Honorable Mention

Matthew Gribble

Instructor's Foreword

Movies tell us that in the wake of a murder, detectives would stretch what appear to be pipe cleaners, or a very taut yarn, through the bullet holes left in walls, in lamps, in the hollow doors of haunted rooms. The yarn was there to demonstrate the location of the shooter – or indeed, shooters – relative to the victim. But the fact is that other forces might have conspired in the murder. (Poison may have been used; bullets may have been fired only as an afterthought; perhaps they were fired by the victim himself, before he died . . .) Yarn can tell us the story only in certain circumstances.

As a researcher and a writer, Matthew Gribble analyzes his crime scene with diligence and care. The crisis: The shortage of nurses in America. The question: How and why did this shortage become a persistent problem? Matthew affixes strings of yarn to a number of gunshots: the increasing average age of the workforce, long hours, work that is often menial or clerical, and finally, relatively low salaries.

But these strands lead to new questions, wider causes which have nothing to do with social yarn. These new questions have to do with rhetoric and the enduring association of nursing with “women’s work” and “femininity.” Matthew has the audacity to ask how the rhetoric of femininity actually functions. How and why are we compelled to accept images and tropes as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ when they are anything but normal and natural? Is it possible that the rhetoric of nursing is responsible for the shortage? Or perhaps it is the rhetoric of femininity and masculinity as such? But how did such a crime take place, right under our noses, when so many of us never noticed that an injustice ever took place? This essay is brilliant and provocative because it will not stop until the crime scene has been analyzed to the author’s satisfaction – indeed, until we as readers start looking for the scene of the crime in the occupations we disparage, in the films we watch, and in our own lives.

What I love most about Matthew’s essay has something to do with my appreciation for the work of Frances Glessner Lee, the woman who founded the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard in 1936. Lee created a series of dioramas of unsolvable crime scenes to train student detectives. By studying these dioramas in miniature, she wanted her investigators to learn how to analyze and solve crime in a variety of situations. Matthew’s argument shares this spirit and this is why I think many PWR students will benefit from analyzing the research model he has provided: Look at how he uses the rhetoric of nursing to understand the profession’s current problems. See how the rhetoric of nursing comes to stand in for the wider rhetoric of other ‘feminine’ occupations. Notice all the work that this author is doing – in miniature – to unsettle the tired rhetoric of femininity and masculinity as whole.

Scott Herndon

Gender, Art, and the Nursing Shortage: The Effect of Gendered Visual Rhetoric on the American Healthcare System

Matthew Gribble



Fig. 1. Blink 182 album cover art, Enema of the State.

The photograph on the cover of a recent pop CD reveals much more about American attitudes toward nursing and femininity than it does of the model's body (see figure 1). Its visual rhetoric expresses a sexualized and fantastical vision of the nurse as the model's image is replete with the codes of femininity: she wears heavy make-up, sports a butterfly tattoo, and her hunching posture and tight clothing compress and exaggerate her most obvious sexual characteristics. She does not smile, but her expression instead indicates a distaste for and simultaneous resignation to something. The title of the CD, *Enema of the State* (1999), provides one clue as to what the model finds so unpleasant, but such associations are mostly native to the male and adolescent minds of the album's target audience. Even conceding the title to be part of what art critic Henry Sayre calls the "extended narrative structure" of this image, the title begs interpretation, and "we are invited to read a different story than the one [the artist] tells" (85-86). An equally valid reading of this image is that the nurse-figure is challenging her objectification even as she yields to it; that through her self-conscious coquettishness she offers a passive and incomplete defense against her gender-typing. She is represented, therefore, as being

limited by her gender to indirect modes of argument, apparently being too weak-willed for a more direct objection to her objectification. She at once represents the standard American nurse, the sexual fantasy involving the nurse, the lingering potency of gender-typing, the most objectionable codes of femininity, and, through the parallel arrangement of her breasts with the nursing hat, the subtle and lasting mental link between the most obvious and outward signs of femininity and the nursing profession.

At the same time that such visual rhetoric as this is released for public consumption, hospitals across the country are finding it difficult to recruit an adequate number of nurses. Sandra McMeans, representative of the American Nursing Association, to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs states, "Health care providers across the Nation are having difficulty finding experienced registered nurses [RN] that are willing to work in their facilities . . . [and projections] show that the situation will only get worse" (U.S. Congress, *Looming Nursing Shortage* 11). According to one model, the number of registered nurses is projected to peak around the year 2012, then decline steadily such that by 2020 there will be approximately the same number of nurses as in the year 2000 (Buerhaus 2952). This means that in 2020 the supply of registered nurses will be nearly twenty percent below the number required.¹

Borrowing tools from a number of seemingly unrelated disciplines will allow me to understand the processes guiding visual rhetoric and to consider such rhetoric's tangible effects on the American healthcare scene. This paper will rely on the quantitative foundations of sociological data, the abstraction offered by art criticism and social theory, the intimacy of mind accompanying psychoanalytic theory, and the cultural-historical framing that comes from a detached consideration of popular culture. In addition, the rhetoric of modern biology will be employed to help illustrate the dynamics I discuss. This multidisciplinary approach will not only afford me a greater understanding of and appreciation for the dynamics of visual rhetoric, but will also help me to begin to critique traditional gender-typed conventional imaginings of the nurse and American notions of femininity as well.

A "Girl Job"

To begin with sociological data: Some of the most often cited social causes for the nursing shortage are the increasing average age of the workforce, the long hours (often with mandatory unpaid overtime), the application of RNs to menial and clerical work and the relatively lackluster salaries. Equally important, but much less often discussed, is the heavy gender imbalance in the profession's ranks. David A. Eubanks notes that only 5.9 percent of registered nurses are male, and mentions that in a recent study "students of all ages [grades 2-10] were quick to point out that nursing is a girl job" (U.S. Congress, *Looming Nursing Shortage* 32-33).² Before addressing the reasons for such a widespread perception of nursing as a feminine career track, it is necessary to first think about what exactly it is about the nursing profession that can be construed as feminine, which in turn requires a closer examination of what "femininity" entails.

1 Other models have yielded different results. For example, a study conducted by the Health Resources and Service Administration's National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, "Projected Supply and Demand Shortages of Registered Nurses: 2000-2020," estimates not a rise, peak, and decline in the number of nurses but rather a steady decline, with a 12% shortage in 2010 and a 20% shortage in 2015. This study suggests a 29% shortage by 2020, rather than the 20% suggested by Buerhaus et al. (U.S. Congress, *Who Will Care* 13).

2 This study was conducted in mid-2000 on 1,800 American students by the Healthcare Group of J. Walter Thompson Specialized Communications.

The American notion of femininity can be broadly characterized as including all things intuitive and emotional rather than reasoning; yielding rather than forceful, passive rather than active, squeamish at violence, pretty, domestic and both mentally and physically weak. Weighed against this definition, it immediately becomes unclear how the nursing profession can be viewed as feminine.³ A nurse's daily duties might include the fast and accurate insertion of a needle, the drawing of blood, the checking of the ears and throat for infection, and the instant calculation of pressure. The nurse's job of "assessing a patient's status and intervening whenever there is a problem" requires considerable steadiness of mind and hand (U.S. Congress, *Looming Nursing Shortage* 22). While some consider it to embody the nurturing aspect of femininity, weighed against the standard American conceptions of gender, nursing should not be considered a feminine trade.

What, then, is considered "feminine" about nursing? I would suggest that what is feminine is not the act of nursing but the perception of the nurse, an ideal codified and reinforced by countless images and cultural references. But to begin to consider whether and how images can simultaneously contain and create the popular notion of nurse as "hand maiden," it is necessary to develop a framework for looking at how such images relate to each other and to social practice (U.S. Congress, *Looming Nursing Shortage* 32-33).

The social critic Griselda Pollock offers in her essay "Feminism/Foucault – Surveillance/Sexuality" an especially provocative, though ultimately incomplete, method of approaching images of gender in the workplace.⁴ Pollock draws from the French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault to define representation as a form of social interaction, one in which a body or space is subjected to the "gaze" of a viewer, becoming not just the object but also an imagining, a *perception* of the object (14). Representation is specific, instantaneous, ephemeral and unique. The success of these representations depends on endless repetition – effective representations require confirmation and reinforcement and so are mentally clumped with similar representations. Different representations come together to form discourses, collections of disparate and often contradictory representations, which in turn clump to form an intricate, self-reinforcing and invisible "régime of truth." These result in an "obvious" perception accepted as fact (14-15). It is significant that in successful transference of representation "the very act of representation is occluded," as it suggests that representation is only successful when it no

3 The inverse of the definition of femininity will serve as my definition of masculinity: reasonable, forceful, active, unmoved by (or in some cases enthused by) violence, un-domestic, and both physically and mentally strong. Also, "man" and "woman" in this paper refer to social constructions of gender, not to anatomy.

4 It may be beneficial to take a look at Pollock's exact wording:

Representation is to be understood as a social relation enacted and performed via specific appeals to vision, specific managements of imaginary spaces and bodies for a gaze. The efficacy of representation, furthermore, relies on a ceaseless exchange with other representations. Across the social formation there are diverse assemblages of representations, called discourses, some of which are specifically but never exclusively visual. These combinations interact and cross refer with other discourses, accumulating around certain points to create so dense a texture of mutual reference that some statements, and some visions, acquire the authority of the obvious. At this point, the very fact of representation is occluded and what Foucault has named a régime of truth is established by the constant play and productivity of this relay of signs[...]

Such a frankly Foucauldian account, however, locates representation exclusively on the side of power. Precisely because it operates in the field of power, however, representation as a process is flawed, balked, disrupted, and often overwhelmed by the material it attempts to manage. While representation is an attempt to manage social forces, it inducts and then is shaped by resistance. Insofar as representation constructs relations, these relations are social. (Pollock 14-15).

longer draws attention to itself (14). In the second part of her argument, Pollock divorces her definitions from those of Foucault by insisting on an interdependent quality of the social interaction, presenting representation as a societal equilibrium of contradicting perceptual influences, with the régime of truth both influencing and being influenced by the social framework acting in response to the régime of truth.

This definition of representation as both constructing and being affected by social relations has profound implications for the gendering of nursing. According to her definition, the perception of the feminine nurse does not need a basis in reality for it to come into the public awareness; what matters is that this rhetoric be repeated so often that it develops into a régime of truth and that the image, through this régime, be codified into social relations.

There is a major problem with Pollock's theory, however, in that it does not depart enough from Foucault's. As her argument requires that the régime of truth be identically cast for, by, and within each person in a social network for social relations to be the same across the group (as, under her model, each perception originates in isolation within the mind of each perceiver), it is highly unlikely for there to be any widespread sharing of perceptions across a group. While Pollock allows for the induction and shaping of representation by social resistance, her allowance only extends insofar as "representation is an attempt to manage social forces" (15). As she defines society's effect on the act of representation as exclusively reactionary, she does not allow for individuals or even groups of individuals to make the first move and contribute to internalized representations. It is therefore necessary to establish a more fluid construction of representation, one where the interaction between representation and social relations can flow in either direction. For complex perceptions to be held across a group, the interaction must be able at any time to act progressively or retrogressively. Such an allowance would allow us to explore how gender-specific representations of nursing and society-wide gendered perceptions of nursing interact from either direction, providing the first step to an explanation of how so many children would come to link nursing with femininity. In her essay Pollock describes how the dynamic would work in the first direction, so what remains to be done is to explain how the dynamic could operate in the reverse.

This step would be daunting, but Pollock herself provides a clue as to where to begin. She notes, "Finally, insofar as it makes any appeal to vision, and operates upon the domain of the visual, representation becomes prey to complex issues of fascination and anxiety, curiosity and dread, not theorized by Foucault in his analysis of surveillance. The domain of the visual is an important territory of sexuality, of the psycho-symbolic theorized by psychoanalysis" (15). Just as Pollock draws upon psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (and to feminist re-readings of these writers) to develop her framework, I will now turn to the French psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok and their essay "Notes on the Phantom, a Complement to Freud's Metapsychology" to fill in her argument's holes, turning from broad social theory to the much more individualized field of psychoanalytic thought.

The Diffusion of An Idea

In their joint essay Abraham and Torok use case studies to explore the idea of the "phantom," their term for a negative cross-generational influence on the subconscious. Reflecting on the effect of the phantom, they ask, "How could [a] thought, alive in the father's unconscious, become transferred into the unconscious of his eldest son, everybody's

favorite, and remain so active there as to provoke fits?" (173). They suggest that there can be indirect transference of unconscious cues from one person to another within a group, implying at least one mode of feedback from an external social relationship into a person's internal unconscious. They later assert that a son impressed by another generation's trauma "appears possessed not by his own unconscious but by someone else's" – that a mindset external to the son's psyche can penetrate and overwhelm the son's unconscious. In this way, they claim, a social relation (for example, familial relationships) can internalize an external representation; unspoken ideas can root and take hold. Like Pollock/Foucault's representation, "the phantom is sustained by secreted words . . . it gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than not, eludes rationalization" (175). The internalized framework's continued existence depends on the repetition of its premise and of similar thoughts. Thus, the method they propose by which the phantom survives in the host's mind is nearly identical to how a régime of truth maintains itself. "Extending the idea of the phantom, it is reasonable to maintain that the 'phantom effect' progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next and that, finally, it disappears. Yet, this is not at all the case when shared or contemporary phantoms find a way of being established as social practices, practices along the lines of *staged words*" (176; author's italics). Abraham and Torok suggest that the phantom naturally goes away unless it becomes codified into social practice, a distinction paralleling and adding significance to Pollock's note that "insofar as representation constructs relations, these relations are social" (15). Abraham and Torok's phantom can therefore be viewed as a specific kind of representation: a set of perceptions and values unconsciously inherited from a parent and reproduced and confirmed through social practice.

The dynamic as it is so far presented is somewhat abstract. To review and clarify the process, it might be helpful to shift to the language of medical science. In particular, there are metaphorical rewards for comparing the dynamics of the rhetorical cycle to the two-part life cycle of a virus, though it would not hurt to keep in mind David Summer's warning that "all such metaphors should [probably] be distrusted. Art just is not biology, nor is biology art" (406). While the viral cycle can help to illustrate the rhetorical dynamic, it is important that we not misconstrue them as being identical.

In the first, lysogenic part of the viral cycle, the virus replicates its DNA without killing its host. The phage injects viral DNA into the bacteria, where it is integrated into the bacterial chromosome and becomes a prophage. The prophage can either begin the lytic cycle, or it can allow the bacteria to reproduce and carry the prophage DNA along to its daughter cells (Campbell 333). During the lytic cycle, instead of the virus's DNA being embedded in the bacterial DNA, the bacteria's DNA is hydrolyzed.⁵ The phage DNA directs the cell to make and assemble phages instead of maintaining the bacteria's vital functions. A phage-directed lysosome digests the cell wall, bursting the cell and releasing a swarm of new phages, which will go on to infect other bacteria and continue the cycle (332).

The cycle of visual rhetoric follows a similar arc. In the internalized portion of the cycle, analogous to the lysogenic portion of the viral cycle, an idea repeats itself in the unconscious, accumulating similar representations around itself until the system of representation swells to the size of the régime of truth. Once it is absorbed into the régime

5 In other words, the bonds between the DNA molecules are broken by water molecules and the hydrogen and hydroxyl of the water molecules attach to the ends of the formerly joined DNA molecules. This effectively destroys the functionality of the bacterial DNA.

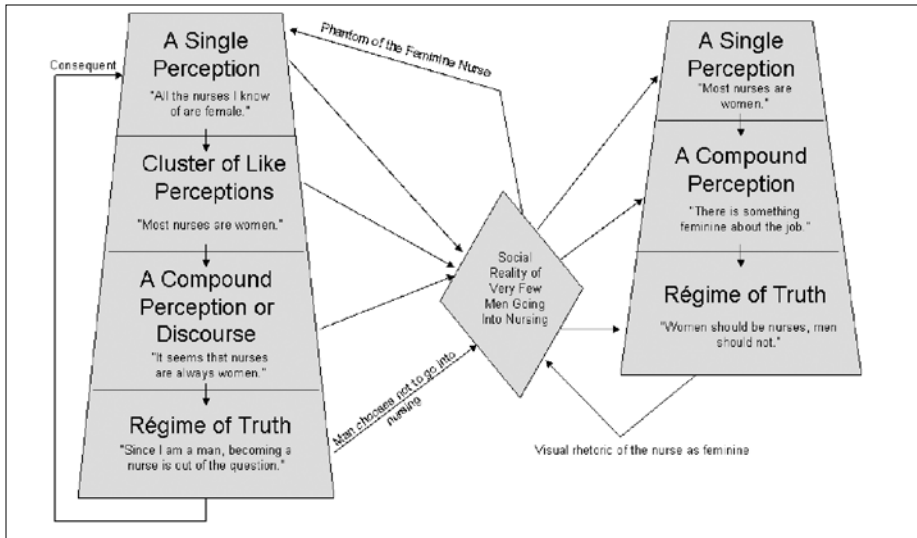


Fig. 2. *The Cycle of Visual Rhetoric as Applied to a Gendered Perception of Nursing.*

of truth, a perception can either reinforce itself by propagating similar or consequent representations in the mind, or it can modify a person’s behavior and thereby establish new social relations. Once the representation (on whatever order of magnitude) is codified into social relations, it leaves the internal cycle and becomes part of the external cycle, which parallels the lytic. A representative mode can be extracted from the social milieu and interjected into the unconscious, functioning like an introjected superego. This internalized perception cannot long remain in the mind, however; to prevent the idea from disappearing it must manifest itself into “staged words” – social interactions. Thus, while a social framework can give rise to an internal suggestion, the suggestion will not stick unless it can be confirmed in another social practice. Just as in the lytic cycle the phage destroys its host, so the social relation externalizes and destroys the internalized representation to reproduce en masse similar social circumstances.

I will now illustrate the cycle of visual rhetoric with one possible argumentative progression related to the figuring of the nurse (see figure 2). In this example, one train of thought related to the gendered rhetoric surrounding nursing is explored, but it is to be understood as an illustrative example only, not as any sort of universally-held sequence of thoughts. Different specific thoughts other than the ones incorporated here might be the basis for a régime of truth; what matters is the more general sequence and development of the argument.

We begin with a single personal perception, drawn from outside the person’s intuition: the observation “All the nurses I know of are female.” This thought joins with similar perceptions to form the more general expression, “Most nurses are women.” This thought is channeled into the next, broader concept, or discourse: “It seems that nurses are always women.” This leads to an “obvious” perception accepted as fact: “Since I am a man, becoming a nurse is out of the question.” All of these thoughts influence the social conditions, but it is the régime of truth that has the greatest impact on social practice. Because the man in this example perceives the profession of nursing as incompatible with his gender, he chooses not to go into nursing. This contributes to the social reality of

few men in the nursing profession. From this status quo a commonly held perception originates: “Most nurses are women.” The thought that “there is something feminine about the job” follows only afterwards, and a commonly held “obvious” perception regarded as fact emerges: “Women should be nurses, men should not.” This view finds parlance in the visual rhetoric of films, television, and popular music album covers, reinforcing the unpopularity of nursing as a man’s profession.

Though it is impossible to use this general dynamic to conclusively trace the direct origins of a particular social practice to any particular representation, or to demonstrate a particular representation to be an exclusive reflection of a particular social relationship, this model is useful because it allows an observer to monitor larger trends in internalized representations (perceptions) by looking at their manifestation in social practice and externalized representation (in films, paintings, or other media). Since the dynamic is cyclic and not linear, it can be observed equally well from any point along its continuum. Therefore, by monitoring the content of a sampling of easily accessible artistic works, it should be possible to infer the large-scale psychology behind the works, a psychology which, once it has taken hold, can guide decision-making and thereby influence reality. If it can be established that the general representation of the nurse in public-domain art is feminine, it then becomes possible to trace the representation of the nurse as a feminine being from the general psychology behind the art to the ideas’ eventual reception in audiences’ minds. If a man were to internalize the representation of nurse as feminine, it is likely that his perception might lead to a lessened identification with the nursing profession as he would identify the profession as incompatible with his perception of himself as male. This would partially explain why so few men go into the nursing profession. To search for evidence of this dynamic, I will now turn to popular-market depictions of nursing with a critical eye for the representation of the nurse as feminine.

The Nurses of Film and Television

Perhaps the most convenient place to start is with the recent popularly-aimed comedies *Meet the Parents* (2000), a film about a male nurse named Gaylord trying to propose with his would-be-in-laws’ blessing, and *Scrubs* (2001-present), a hospital-set television show. The usefulness of *Meet the Parents* and *Scrubs* for indirectly monitoring trends in popular perceptions through publicly accessible representation lies in their broad appeal: each has a large target audience and has developed a considerable following. To quantify this broad-market success somewhat: *Meet the Parents* was the seventh largest-grossing film of the year 2000 and has made over 330 million dollars since its release; and *Scrubs* has remained on the air since October 2001 (Gray, NBC).⁶

The opening credits of *Meet the Parents* feature multi-part harmonizing of the lyrics, “Show me a man who’s gentle and kind and I’ll show you a loser.” Gaylord is first described as having “a real gentle touch,” and the juxtaposition of this description with the song suggests that since he is successful as a nurse, he displays feminine attributes and therefore fails as a man. This notion of nursing as an unseemly profession for a male is a major source of comedy throughout the film, but this paper will only focus on three particularly illuminating moments. When the topic of his job first comes up before his would-be in-laws, each reveals a bias against the profession. When told that Gaylord

6 Gray’s website, boxofficejojo.com, is the source of the box office data. Although the website’s name is suspect, the *Los Angeles Times* prints his editorials and says that his website is followed closely by industry professionals, lending a credible ethos to his raw statistical data.

had been transferred to triage, his soon-to-be-fiance's mother naively asks him, "Oh, is that better than nursing?" as if nursing were a stepping stone to something more socially acceptable.⁷ His would-be-father-in-law points out, "Not many men in your profession, though, are there Greg?" hinting that there is something inherent in the job to drive men away from the profession. The reply, "No, Jack, not traditionally" is followed by a long pause as the conflicting perceptions grate against one another. In a later scene, Gaylord prays over the evening meal, emphasizing the "kind and gentle and accommodating" nature of God. These are more than just traits of God: they are the traits he hopes for his father-in-law to exhibit, and also the traits which he holds most dear. Greg's valuing of kindness, gentleness and accommodation implies for the audience a connection between these traits, typically seen in conjunction with "feminine" types, with those who would choose to work in nursing. Lastly, when Greg tells Pam's future in-laws of his profession, they burst into tearful laughter. "Nursing!" "Ha, ha, that's good." "No really, what field?"⁸ When it is revealed that he "aced his [Medical College Admission] test," his reasons for not becoming a doctor are immediately called into question by the other characters. It is clear that this is not done out of interest so much as out of surprise and disapproval, evident in the way Gaylord's praise of nursing is immediately interrupted and the conversation redirected. Throughout the movie the depiction of male nursing is shown as something socially unacceptable and intrinsically oriented towards femininity, coded here as gentleness. In a recent episode ("His Story") of the popular NBC show *Scrubs* this notion is repeated even more directly.

One of the central plot strands of the *Scrubs* episode "His Story" is Doctor Elliott Reid's scandalous romance with an effeminately-named man, Paul Flowers, who turns out to be a nurse. She describes him as "nice" and "humble" and "so cute too!" but her rhapsodizing is cut short by his entrance in nursing uniform. "Hey . . . a nurse? – Paul." She is so taken aback by his professional identity that she forgets her lover's name. Later she moans, "I'm dating a nurse!" Her disgust for the perceived gender-occupation contradiction is so great that she has to invent a term, "nurse," to express it. Later, after a tiff, the two rendezvous in a supply closet. Paul stops their make-up canoodling session to demand whether she is kissing him because 1) she feels "sorry" for hurting him emotionally or because 2) she continues to have hopes for their relationship. Such discussion of emotions and "the relationship" are tags of femininity in modern gender-relations, and it is significant that the male character of the nurse adopts the mannerisms most closely identified with amorous femininity. Stepping out of the supply closet, Elliott tries to hide her lover's professional identity from a coworker. Flowers then complains to the coworker, "She's covering because she's embarrassed that she likes a nurse, and I really can't figure out why." The reply is swift and matter-of-fact: "Well, that's because you're doing a woman's job, son." Flowers acknowledges the perception of nursing as feminine, but his defense of the compatibility between his masculinity and his choice of profession is so tongue-in-cheek as to be unreliable: "What I do for a living, it doesn't make me feel like any less of a man. Neither does my love of baking, or gardening, or the fact that I occasionally menstruate." His defense is a sarcastic recognition of nursing as feminine, reinforced by lines like "Screw that, I'll cook for you. I've only got one apron though, so bring your own if you want to wear one." Paul's sarcasm undermines any easy categorization, making his actual self-identification as masculine or feminine

7 Triage is emergency room nursing and, according to the film it is where the most skilled nurses work.

8 Specifically, the family of Pam's sister's fiancé.

unclear. While the perception of nursing as feminine is discussed fairly openly, the sincerity of the counter-argument is suspect, and the humor of the episode derives not from the audience's recognition of Elliott's view as biased or false but from the audience's identification with her discomfort over her lover's confusing gender-role identification as a feminine male nurse.

In both of these representations, the male nurse is exceptional, constantly forced to defend his unusual choice of career. Perhaps the most obvious feature of the representation of nursing as feminine is the sheer volume of women represented as nurses in contrast to the number of men depicted as nurses. It is somewhat rare to find any representation of the male nurse at all, and where they exist, representations of the male nurse are usually framed in the context of being among many females. In the *Scrubs* episode, for instance, Paul Flowers is the only male among the nursing staff. Thus, even as these depictions foster a perception of nursing as being too feminine for men, they reinforce this perception by emphasizing the comparative suitability of the profession for women.

Interestingly, there is a class of works specifically created to offer a counter-argument to the widely-held perception of nursing as feminine. In looking at works that attempt to act as "female appropriation of, resistance to, and negotiation with mass-produced culture," and works that try to be genderless reconstructions of the definition of nursing, it quickly becomes apparent that long-held perceptions are neither quickly nor easily displaced (Penley 320).

The web-based 'reality TV show' *13 Weeks*, developed by Access Nurses and plugged on the ABC news channel, hopes to "change the way you think about nursing," but along the way sends very mixed messages about the gendered identity of the nurse (Raw Productions). The program's promotional video short flashes the words "COMPASSIONATE," "ADVENTUROUS," and "HEROIC," signaling a gender ratio of one part feminine-nurturing to two parts masculine-active. It presents nursing as suitable for either gender, but particularly compatible with conventional masculinity. The show's cast of six characters, however, does not reflect this intended gender ratio. Two thirds of the cast are female, and the male nurses are somewhat suspect as affirmations of heterosexual masculinity in the nursing profession. One of the two males, Ron Cornado, is most often shown in floral-print Hawaiian shirts. He gushes constantly about his love of acting, has exaggerated vocal inflection, and frequently uses expressions with homoerotic undertones, such as "I just want to make sure this man holds me like he's never held another man before in his life." (Raw Webisode 2) He is depicted using flamboyant gestures and for half of his introductory clip he speaks with his back to a closet. The scene in which he is shown working in the hospital is underscored by a saccharine-sentimental piano interlude. The last frame of his introductory clip shows him blowing a kiss. While Mr. Cornado's orientation may or may not actually be gay, the rhetoric of the representation of him in the video short is charged with every conceivable trapping of stereotypical homosexuality short of erotic interaction with another male. His presentation in the video carries with it an implicit idea of nursing as softening or perverting heterosexual masculinity.

In contrast, the other male, Nick, is depicted as being aggressively stereotypically heterosexual. The cast website lists his favorite activities as "enjoying football, auto racing, playing pool, bowling, and working out." The text of his biography calls him "your typical all-American boy" and links his interest in nursing to his survival of intense car-accident violence, which is described in full and bloody detail. At first glance, Nick seems

to be the perfect marriage between someone with an interest in nursing and conventional masculinity.

The exaggeration of Nick's masculinity, however, suggests a psychological compensation. As art historian Lisa Tickner sadly notes, "Men moving into art – an area identified with 'feminine' sensibility and increasingly occupied by women art students – might feel the need...to distinguish [their trade] from the pastimes of women and schoolgirls and to adopt the mask of a heightened and aggressively heterosexual masculinity" (Tickner 55). The unblemished completeness of Nick's machismo suggests that it may be put on for effect, that because he perceives his career as feminine he might feel a need to embellish his masculine traits to feel secure in his gender. Although *13 Weeks* attempts to fight current perceptions of nursing as feminine, the minority of males in the group, along with the questionability of their displays of masculinity, makes it ultimately unsuccessful as an attempt to revolutionize gendered perceptions of nursing. The show reinforces the very stereotypes it seeks to destroy by indirectly implicating nursing as an attack on conventional masculinity.

A Coloring Book

The Northeast Indiana Organization of Nurse Executives (NEIONE) decided to take a different tack to address the insufficient number of men and women going into the nursing profession (C. Sternberger). Rather than exclusively challenging adults' largely-cemented perceptions of nursing, it aimed to target all age groups: addressing the usual target of adults and the fairly revolutionary target group of elementary school students. To focus on the latter, NEIONE commissioned an "ethnically and gender diverse" coloring book aimed at third-graders. More than 53,000 paper copies of the *You Can Be a Nurse!* coloring book have been distributed to date, and this figure does not factor in Spanish-language editions of the coloring book or the online version in either language (C. Sternberger).

You Can Be a Nurse! does a commendable job of representing nursing without exclusive gendering. The caption for page four of the coloring book reads, "Both men and women are nurses," and there are roughly equal numbers of male nurses and female nurses depicted in its pages (E. Sternberger). Rather than sort nursing tasks by their relative masculinity or femininity, the matching of individual to task seems to have been done completely without concern for gender norms. A woman is shown on the "Nurses teach us to stay healthy" page and a man is shown on the "Nurses take care of grownups" page. By rendering distinctions between male nurses and female nurses arbitrary, the coloring book goes beyond simply inverting the nursing gender roles to questioning the underlying need for such roles. In doing this, *You Can Be a Nurse!* restructures the discourse of representations away from polar definitions of gender, offering instead a truly genderless vision of nursing as a profession.

Conclusion

In short, one of the major contributing causes to the nursing shortage is that much of the population feels uncomfortable entering nursing because of a perception of the profession as feminine and therefore incompatible with a masculine self-identification. These gender-role perceptions are created and confirmed in popular visual representations of the nurse, such as popular films and photography. To improve the anemic representation of males in the nursing profession's ranks, it is necessary to end the perception of

nursing as feminine. This requires breaking the cycle of representation by substituting a representation based on a contrary perception. The *You Can Be a Nurse!* coloring book offers a rare rhetorical reconstruction of nursing and of femininity. It will be several years before its effects will be felt, as the audience for the work is still in its childhood, but the successful depiction of the un-gendered nurse is a cause for hope and for future improvement in the nursing staffing situation.

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