IMPROVING NURSING’S PUBLIC IMAGE:
ONE NURSE AT A TIME!

CAROL J. HUSTON, MSN, MPA, DPA, FAAN
PROFESSOR EMERITA, SCHOOL OF NURSING
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO
Thank you ATI for inviting me to Savannah and thank you all for coming!
Professional Identity and Image
Can be defined as a reproduction or imitation of something, or as a mental picture or impression of something.

Source: (Merriam Webster Online, 2018).
Image often has little to do with reality…
The public image of the nursing profession unfortunately, is often one dimensional and inaccurate.
Terms Often Used to Describe Nurses

• Nice
• Hardworking
• Caring
• Thoughtful
Not enough people, however, would use the terms “highly educated,” “bright,” “powerful” or “independent thinker” to describe a nurse.
Gallup polls on honesty and ethics consistently place nurses at the top of the list.

Firefighters ranked first, however, in 2001.
It is a strange dichotomy that faces the nursing profession:

The public respects nurses and admires them, but likely does not consider the profession highly prestigious or understand what nursing is all about.
How would most people describe a nurse?
And what would they say nurses do?
Other images are also likely.
A **stereotype** is a generalized belief applied to a group of people with a common characteristic and it often involves simplification or distortion.
COMMON NURSING STEREOTYPES

- Angel of Mercy
- Nurse as a Love Interest (particularly to physicians)
- Naughty Nurse or Sex Bombshell
- Nurse as Handmaiden
- Nurse as Battleaxe
- Male Nurse as Homosexual, Effeminate, or Sexually Predatory
STEREOTYPE: THE NURSE AS ANGEL OF MERCY

Primary roots found in the 1930s.
Depicts nursing almost as a holy vocation......
THE MOST COMMONLY CITED
“ANGEL OF MERCY”-
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
Suggests that nurses are compliant, willing, caring, and dedicated……
And that pay does not matter........
This stereotype is sometimes unconsciously promoted by nurses even today—in the Nightingale Pledge, for instance.

**The Nightingale Pledge**

I Solemnly pledge myself before God and in the presence of this assembly to pass my life in purity and to practice my profession faithfully.

I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous and will not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug.

I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession, and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling. With loyalty

I will devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care.

The Center for Nursing Advocacy suggests that the image of the "angel" or "saint" fails to convey the college-level knowledge base, critical thinking skills, and hard work required to be a nurse.
And it may suggest that nurses do not require reasonable working conditions or adequate staffing, and that they do not want to play a significant role in health care decision-making or policy.
Doctor and nurse romance novels first appeared in the 1930s and '40s.
Nursing was often viewed as a means to getting a husband (particularly a physician)....
NEWER DEPICTIONS OF NURSES IN BOOKS....
STEREOTYPE- THE NURSE AS A SEX BOMBSHELL/NAUGHTY NURSE

For at least 40 years, nurses have been portrayed as sex objects on both television and in the movies.
Sexual stereotyping by the sex/pornography industry is not a significantly publicized or discussed phenomenon within nursing.
THE TYPICAL
“NAUGHTY NURSE”
Some authors have suggested even nursing uniforms were designed to look like a maid's or housewife’s apron…

“tight around the waist accentuating the hour glass figure, and extenuating the female aspects of the role.”
THE CLAIROL
HERBAL ESSENCE
NURSE!!

P&G

[Image of Clairol Herbal Essence Nurse product]
CADBURY SCHWEPPES CANADA

“GET FRESH” CAMPAIGN
LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGNS DO WORK!

We’re writing to make a difference and here’s who we’ve contacted!
The Grill’s owner Jon Basso said that he feels the grill “glorifies nurses as physically attractive and desirable instead of as some old battle ax who changes bedpans for a living” (Waitresses Dressed as Naughty Nurses, n.d., para 7).
STEREOTYPE - THE NURSE AS HANDMAIDEN TO THE PHYSICIAN

Perhaps the most pervasive stereotype of nurses....
The nurse simply serves as an adoring backdrop to the physician, demonstrating little if any independent thought or action.
ANGELA MOORE JEWELRY

"NURSE NANCY" BRACELETS AND NECKLACES
Here's a special theme to celebrate the wonderful women who promote health and make us feel so much better. Talented, terrific and leaders to love!
Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman suggested that nurses were one example of those who perform “menial work dealing with the physical world.”
STEREOTYPE - THE NURSE AS A BATTLE AXE

“An overweight, authoritarian senior nurse who struts around with an air of self-importance, making the junior nurses cry and the patients quake under the sheets.”
Battle axe stereotypes hit their peak in the 1970s and 1980s. 

“Mean, Mean Josephine”
And we all remember Annie Wilkes from the novel and movie “Misery”...........
STEREOTYPE - THE MALE NURSE AS GAY, EFFEMINATE OR SEXUALLY PREDATORY
This makes it very difficult for male nurses to demonstrate the caring, therapeutic interactions that are such an important part of nursing.
In addition, there is a popular stereotype that male nurses are non-achievers for going into nursing.
GAYLORD 'GREG' FOCKER RN,
IN
MEET THE PARENTS
Who Have Been Our Media Role Models?
NURSE STEREOTYPES ON TV

Television medical dramas currently provide the greatest number of visual images of nurses at work.
ABBY LOCKHART, RN, MD
ER
“NURSE JACKIE”
High & Mighty

NURSE JACKIE

Emmy® Winner Edie Falco

SEASON PREMIERE MARCH 28 MONDAYS 10PM SHOWTIME®

Followed by UNITED STATES OF TARA®
The popular television quiz show "Jeopardy!" implied that Nurse Practitioners treat only "minor ailments."
Mattel ruffled nurse’s feathers by producing a tiny fluffy duck called the Nurse Quacktitioner.

The “Quack Nurse”
RESPONDING TO INACCURATE OR NEGATIVE IMAGES IN THE MEDIA.......
Most nurses are upset about their depiction in contemporary media but our efforts to respond and change the situation have been fragmented to date.
A more unified voice became possible with the creation of The Center for Nursing Advocacy in 2001 and The Truth About Nursing in 2009.
Research is increasingly concluding that not only are inaccurate and negative stereotypes of nurses well ingrained, they are instilled early in life.
Indeed, stereotyping about career opportunities begins at a very early age.
THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGING INGRAINED STEREOTYPES

Carol’s failed 2nd grade class experiment

Source- Huston, C. (n.d.) Nursing stereotypes ingrained by second grade.)
a nurse having surgery on a real important disease

Jennifer
Rushing into the hospital.
The nurse is making the bed.
Beckie

oh grat I'm the only boy and in middle

I like that backrub

hi
The Nurse Jana is helping The Kid and is in a Rash!
The babys are taking clear off.
“A NURSE GO TO THE HOSPITAL”
THE NURSE IS TAKING A COT TO THAT ROOM
THE NURSE IS TAKING THE KID'S BLOOD
The important thing is when they take the people to the operating room.
Your the best nurse I ever had.

That is the best medicine I ever had.
“A NURSE SHOWING A LADY HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A BABY”
WHAT DID I LEARN?
The domination and pervasiveness of nursing stereotypes is due, at least in part, to what has been called “nursing’s invisibility as a profession.”
Woodhull Study Results (1997)

Journalists’ Experiences with Using Nurses as Sources in Health News Stories (2018)

So what are the consequences of inaccurate or negative images of nursing? Do they matter?
One significant consequence of the public not understanding either the scope of practice or the skill level required to be a nurse is that it may limit the profession’s ability to recruit the best and brightest students.
Another consequence of inaccurate nursing stereotypes is that they may threaten the collective identity and self esteem of all nurses.
LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

The nursing profession needs to take a more proactive stance to counter the exploitation of nursing and the negative stereotypes that permeate the media.
We need to raise the educational entry level in nursing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Profession</th>
<th>Entry Level Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech pathology</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical therapy</td>
<td>Master’s transitioning to Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational therapy</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MORE NURSES MUST HOLD POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE.
Office of the National Nurse

The effort toward an equal partnership with the Surgeon General on Capitol Hill.
Many nurses serve in Congress and the state legislatures. Could you be next?
Another important leadership strategy needed to change nursing’s image is to change the image of nursing in the mind of the image-makers.
Interacting with the media is not intuitive for most nurses. Formal training is needed.
CONSIDER

Nurses are experts in healthcare. Our invisibility in the media is likely a result of nurses lacking the basic skills and self confidence to get involved, not that the media doesn’t want to talk to nurses.
INTERVIEW
Another strategy needed to improve the image of nursing is to assure that use of the term ‘nurse’ is limited to licensed nurses.
The 1990s saw a blurring of titles, roles, and responsibilities between registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses and unlicensed support staff.
Registered nurses often contribute to the confusion in how they introduce themselves to patients.
Jacobs-Summers and Jacobs-Summers (2011) encourage “nursing out loud.”

The media often uses the term nurse for all aides, volunteers, and medical assistants.....

If they wear white, they must be a nurse.
Another leadership strategy for improving the image of nursing is to change how nurses themselves talk about nursing to others.
We must do a better job of supporting our nurse leaders.
Remember that every nurse controls the image of nursing.
Identifying a shared and accurate image of nursing is difficult given the diversity of roles nurses assume today as well as the lack of a common mode of dress.
Indeed, nurses began shedding their white uniforms in the 1960s as part of the anti-conformist movement and the identity of the RN became blurred.
Patients complain the nurse is unrecognizable or worse yet, assume that everyone wearing a uniform is a nurse. There is no clear image of nursing that encompasses our diversity.
Still others, including myself, would argue that nurses should better define themselves to the public in terms of what they do, not how they dress.
SO, WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Hopefully, toward a shared goal of improving nursing’s public image.
Nurses should not stay in jobs that make them unhappy. There are too many other jobs out there.
Nurses need to emphasize that our perspective is unique, and we need to underscore the depth and breadth of the scientific perspective that underlies our practice.
Patients get better because of nurses, not in spite of nurses....
Negative stereotyping damages our ability to develop therapeutic relationships with our clients.
From a sociological perspective, conflicting stereotypes of nursing have not been helpful and a disconnect between reality and public image continues.
Nurses must decide what they want their desired collective image to be and then do whatever is necessary to present that image to the public.
ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE!
“Florence Nightingale was not a fading Victorian violet who avoided a fight. Rather, she was a disrupter, a change agent, a nurse who used her mind and heart to initiate change in the interest of the health and wellbeing of those she felt called to serve” (Carlson, 2017, para 16).

NURSES TODAY MUST VIEW THE CALL TO CHANGE THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE IN THE SAME MANNER.

In Feb. 2018, The Duchess of Cambridge joined nurses and other health leaders across the world in launching a 3-year Nursing Now global campaign aimed at raising the profile and status of nursing.

BE PROUD OF YOUR PROFESSION AND WHO YOU ARE AS A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL.
And work together to create a public image of nursing we are all proud of!
The responsibility for changing nursing’s image lies squarely on the shoulders of those who claim nursing as their profession.
QUESTIONS?

DISCUSSION