PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: CONCEPT ANALYSIS USING RODGERS’ EVOLUTIONARY METHOD

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Although professional identity is a concept frequently used in nursing literature, its theoretical origin has remained unclear. On the other hand, investigating this concept is essential to the development of nursing as a profession. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and clarify professional identity and describe its attributes.

Material and methods: The framework of this study is Roger’s evolutionary method. After a systematic electronic search in MEDLINE, OVID, PROQUEST, and SCIENCE DIRECT databases, 57 articles on nursing and health sciences and 8 nursing theses were analyzed.

Results: Five attributes were identified and professional identity was defined as an evolving process resulting from the integrity of education and experience, knowledge and caring, personal and professional identity, and values that is related to group interactions at workplace.

Conclusion: Professional identity is a complex and multidimensional concept with gender, social, historical, cultural, political, and organizational considerations. The findings of this concept analysis could guide further researches on nursing professional identity.

Key words: Concept analysis, nursing, professional identity.

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Introduction

Although professional identity is a concept frequently used in nursing literatures, its theoretical origin has remained unclear. The development of professional identity is vital in any profession.

The concept of profession has had an obscure history in nursing. For many years, scientists have identified nursing as a semi-professional career due to lack of academic education, autonomy, theory, and research. The concept of nursing profession has been facing some problems for a long time. These problems still exist today; however, nursing meets all criteria required for a profession.

Most studies on nursing professional identity have focused on academic preparation or transition to practice. While academic preparation and early graduate programs are only parts of professional identity. Thus, it is essential to investigate how nurses construct their professional identity during career, and how this can be developed and strengthened for nursing as a profession. To do this, it is necessary to understand and clarify professional identity through rich description engaging all attributes. The only concept analysis of professional identity was carried out in 1998 while this concept has evolved since then. In this study, the concept of professional identity was analyzed in nursing context: attributes, antecedents, consequences, definition and surrogate terms.
Materials and methods

Concept analysis method
Various methods can be used to conduct a concept analysis. One of the methods that are used for developing knowledge in nursing is Rodgers’ evolutionary concept analysis. This method differs from other concept analysis in emphasizing on the dynamic nature of concepts, which changes continuously with time and context that gradually play an important role in evolving it over time. Since professional identity is a phenomenon with changing context, Rodgers’ evolutionary method was used for analyzing this concept.

Data source
A systematic electronic search was undertaken in the following databases: Medline, Ovid, ProQuest and Science Direct by entering the key words “Professional identity”, “occupational identity”, or “nursing identity” in title and “Nursing”, “healthcare professionals”, or “health sciences” in title and abstract in June 2014.

The following criteria were used for inclusion: articles in English language with available full-text. In total, 187 citations resulted from the search; 77 Studies were retrieved for detail examination. Finally, 65 studies were analyzed. Figure 1 shows a flow chart of the selection process. All texts were reviewed and investigated twice.

Results
In this part of the study, surrogate terms, attributes, antecedents, consequences, and definition of professional identity are expressed.

Surrogate and related terms
Occupational identity, nursing identity, and professional image are terms used as substitutes for professional identity. Concepts including self-concept, professionalism, and understanding nurses’ profession role were associated with the concept of professional identity and were considered as related concepts.

Attributes
In this study, the attributes of professional identity are classified into five categories:

Professional Identity as a Dynamic and Fluid Process
Researchers have argued that professional identity is an ongoing process. The development of professional identity can be considered as an ongoing process started with acceptance in nursing program and emerged during a dynamic and fluid process and professional practice, in which the relationship between education and practice leads to growth.

There are always some issues in the profession that can lead to changes in professional identity and experienced nurses’ viewpoints towards professional identity. These issues set forth by different authors include gender, social, historical, cultural, political and organizational aspects.

Integrity of education and experience
Nursing education is essential for professional identity. Hoeve et al. (2014) believe nurses achieve professional identity through education and work environment. Nurses learn from their work experiences and professional interaction with colleagues. They observe behaviors, attitudes, and norms required for social interactions and professional roles and functions used by people employed in the profession and adopt a sense of professional belonging. Work place communities allow nurses to evolve sense of identity. Healthcare community of practice (CoP) is a group of healthcare professionals who come together with a common interest defined by enhancing practice, institutional knowledge, and professional expertise.
**Integrity of knowledge and caring**

Hoeve et al. (2014) found that caring is the most influencing factor on the development of professional identity. Apesoa-Varano (2007) believes that nursing science is the basis of nursing and includes other areas such as caring. He uses the term "Educated Caring" and explains that the conflict between professionalism and caring is removed through creating nursing identity based on the educated caring. He concluded that nursing science and caring are complementary, and a professional nurse successfully integrates them to achieve professional identity.

**Integrity of personal and professional identity**

Individuals are not blank discs; they bring personal characteristics and previous experiences with them to all new situations. Studies showed that the integration of personal self into nursing indicates professional identity as a nurse. Compassion, competence, self-confidence, conscience, commitment, courage, and decisiveness are nurses' professional identity characteristics associated with caring legacy of nursing. Gregg and Magilvy (2001) stated that the integration of nursing into self is the last step of bonding into nursing.

**Integrity of values**

Fagermoen (1997) considered values as the main part of professional identity development. He believes that human dignity is a central value, while other values such as trust, autonomy, respect for privacy, being a fellow-human, integrity, safety, hope, and compassion somehow originate from professional identity or aim to achieve it. It seems that nurses' professional identity is evolved from an altruistic motivation towards a set of certain and different values.

**Antecedents and consequences of professional identity**

The list of antecedents and consequences of professional identity are outlined in Figure 2.

**Antecedents**

- Professional socialization
- Professionalism
- Determination
- Self-care
- Understanding capabilities and limitations
- Learning from work experiences
- Recognizing values
- Personal philosophy
- Self-reflectio
- Sharing experiences
- Cognitive flexibility
- Management plans

**Consequences**

- For nurse (Positive)
  - Empowerment, Positive personal & professional image,
  - Cooperation, Commitment, Job satisfaction, Retention, Sense of belonging& competence,
  - Resiliency to role pressure

- For nurse (Negative)
  - Endangering autonomy

- For patient (Positive)
  - Endangering quality of care

- For patients (Negative)
  - Endangering quality of care

**Professional identity definition**

On the basis of the findings, the following definition is suggested for professional identity in nursing: Professional identity is an evolving process resulting from the integrity of education and experience, knowledge and caring, personal and professional identity and values that is related to group interactions at workplace. It guides how nurses think, act and interact with patients and compare and differentiate themselves from other professional group.

**Discussion**

The results of this concept analysis show that achieving professional identity can lead to positive consequences for nurses. Therefore, any attempt to assist nurses to strengthen professional identity can be effective.

Socialization of nursing students begins before education, and they constantly construct and deconstruct their identity throughout education. This concept analysis emphasized on the role of COPs for constructing professional identity, by which novice nurses become familiar with expert way of knowing, thinking and reasoning in practical setting.

The results of studies conducted in Japan and Sweden indicate that integration of the personal self into being a nurse indicates the professional identity as a nurse, while the results of this study showed that professional identity is a multidimensional dynamic concept beyond an individual and profes-
sional identity enjoying value, knowledge, care, education, experience, personal and professional dimensions and affected by gender, social, historical, cultural, political and organizational aspects. Comparing this analysis and the analysis of the concept of professional socialization showed that there are similarities between these two concepts, although professional socialization is considered as one of the antecedents of the professional identity.

The literature and studies for this analysis originated from different, which help to generalizing the findings. Further concept analyses is suggested with using hybrid model in different settings and cultures in order to clarify contextual variation of professional identity among nurses.

Conclusion

This paper has clarified and conceptualized the concept of professional identity. According to the findings of this concept analysis, professional identity is a complex and multidimensional concept with gender, social, historical, cultural, political, and organizational considerations. Professional identity is also an evolving process resulting from the integrity of education and experience, knowledge and caring, personal and professional identity and values that is related with group interactions at workplace. It also guides nurses' thinking, action and interaction with patients and differentiate them from other professionals.

References


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