

Uniform and the image of the nurse graduated from the Rachel Haddock Lobo Nursing School

Uniforme e a imagem da enfermeira formada pela Escola de Enfermeiras Rachel Haddock Lobo

Uniforme e imagen de la enfermera egresada de la Escuela de Enfermería Rachel Haddock Lobo

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the symbolic effects of the uniforms worn by students at the Rachel Haddock Lobo Nursing School.

Method: historical-social study, with a documentary corpus consisting of oral, written and photographic sources that portray uniforms, from 1948 to 1951, which corresponds to the inauguration of the school until the formation of the first class. Data analysis was based on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts. **Results:** the students wore three types of uniforms: hospital, public health and nurse. During training, rituals such as receiving the cap and receiving diplomas institutionalized and solemnized the use of the uniform. The professors wore uniforms from their training school. **Conclusion:** uniforms were used as a strategy developed by the School's nurses to strengthen the image of high-standard nurses in society.

Descriptors: Nursing; History of Nursing; Schools; Schools, Nursing; Clothing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar os efeitos simbólicos dos uniformes utilizados pelas alunas da Escola de Enfermeiras Rachel Haddock Lobo.

Método: estudo histórico-social, com *corpus* documental constituído de fontes orais, escritas e fotográficas que retratam os uniformes, no período de 1948 a 1951, que corresponde a inauguração da escola até a formação da primeira turma. A análise dos dados fundamentou-se nos conceitos de Pierre Bourdieu. **Resultados:** as alunas utilizaram três tipos de uniformes: hospitalar, saúde pública e de enfermeira. Durante a formação, rituais como a recepção da touca e a diplomação institucionalizaram e solenizaram o uso do uniforme. As professoras utilizavam uniformes de sua escola de formação. **Conclusão:** os uniformes foram utilizados como estratégia desenvolvida pelas enfermeiras da Escola para o fortalecimento da imagem da enfermeira de alto padrão na sociedade.

Descritores: Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Instituições Acadêmicas; Escolas de Enfermagem; Uniformes.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar los efectos simbólicos de los uniformes usados por las alumnas de la Escuela de Enfermería Rachel Haddock Lobo. **Método:** estudio histórico-social, con un corpus documental compuesto por fuentes orales, escritas y fotográficas que retratan uniformes, desde 1948 a 1951, que corresponde desde la inauguración del colegio hasta la formación del primer grupo.

El análisis de los datos se basó en los conceptos de Pierre Bourdieu. **Resultados:** las alumnas usaron tres tipos de uniforme: hospitalario, de salud pública y de enfermera. Durante la formación, rituales como recibir la cofia y el diploma institucionalizaron y solemnizaron el uso del uniforme. Las profesoras usaban uniformes de su escuela de formación. **Conclusión:** los uniformes fueron utilizados como una estrategia desarrollada por las enfermeras de la Escuela para fortalecer la imagen de la enfermería de alto estándar en la sociedad.

Descriptores: Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Instituciones Académicas; Facultades de Enfermería; Vestuario.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of the National Public Health Service (*Serviço Nacional de Saúde Pública*, SESP) in 1942, through a bilateral agreement between Brazil and the United States in the context of World War II, was fundamental for the government plan of Getúlio Vargas and Minister Gustavo Capanema. After World War II there was realignment in the SESP actions, funding and functions. The services provided by SESP along the American lines were interesting in a Cold War context and a demonstration of American superiority¹. Vargas' successor, President Eurico Gaspar Dutra (1946 – 1951) had a government plan to promote the country's development. It was the SALTE Plan, whose main government goals prioritized four axes that form its acronym: *Saúde, Alimentação, Transporte and Energia* (Health, Food, Transportation and Energy)²; thus having repercussions in the Nursing field.

It is in this context that the Rachel Haddock Lobo Nurses' School (*Escola de Enfermeiras Rachel Haddock Lobo*, EERHL), created since 1944, is opened in 1948 as a second generation of Nursing schools due to the influence of the 1940s and American curricular discussions, mainly by SESP and the need for personnel for its services^{3,4}. This phenomenon highlights the need to better understand how this School worked and, in particular, the symbolic effects of uniforms as object representations, adopted by students and professors, influenced by the Anglo-American model.

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In Brazil, in the first two decades of the 20th century, the nurses' images of that circulated in society were the following: that of a nurse wearing a veil, with a red or green cross on her forehead, under the influence of the Brazilian Red Cross schools; and a nurse wearing a hat with a blue cross from the Alfredo Pinto Professional Nurses' School⁵.

The image of a nurse with a cap gained prominence with the arrival of American nurses who organized the Nurses' School of the National Public Health Department, currently the Anna Nery Nursing School. In addition, through the uniforms it was possible to perceive the phase of the course in which the student was, as well as to distinguish students from professors and the teaching standard^{6,7}.

In this context, the following research question stands out: Which are the symbolic effects of the uniforms worn by EERHL students in constituting nurses' image in society (1948 – 1951)? Thus, the objective was to analyze the symbolic effects of the uniforms worn by students at the Rachel Haddock Lobo Nurses' School.

The discussion on the symbolic effects arising from the use of uniforms by EERHL students and professors was carried out in light of the thoughts of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, especially with regard to emblems and rites as consecrating elements of a profession. This is because, for Pierre Bourdieu, uniforms, flags and badges (emblems) are object representations which, conceived as symbolic properties manifested through rites, determine the mental representation that others may have of both these properties and their bearers⁸.

METHOD

A historical-social and qualitative study whose documentary *corpus* is made up of written, photographic and oral sources, in addition to those found in books, articles, thesis and dissertations that deal with the historical and social context of the time. Data production was completed in December 2022.

The spatial focus was EERHL, currently the Nursing School of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (*Faculdade de Enfermagem/Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*, ENF/UERJ). The time frame covers the period from 1948 to 1951, the initial milestone being the inauguration of the EERHL and the final milestone being the graduation year of the first class of nurses, in which all of the School's uniforms were used.

The written and photographic sources were located at the ENF/UERJ Nalva Pereira Caldas Memory Center (*Centro de Memória Nalva Pereira Caldas*, CMNPC), considering the criteria of pertinence, sufficiency, exhaustiveness, representativeness, homogeneity and organization of the corpus by sectors⁹. Thus, 4 written and 3 photographic sources were selected.

The written sources were collated due to the study time frame and for answering the research question, including the EERHL Internal Regulations (Process No. 23 513/50 – 173); Report on the institution's activities from 1949.2 (Edict No. 23 of 01.26.1950); Anna Nery – Nurse's Anthem; and the dissertation by Nalva Pereira Caldas entitled: "Remembrance Paths: A Retrospective Look at the memory of the UERJ Nursing School", totaling four written sources. It was organized into a systematic chart, which was subsequently subjected to criticism of its reliability and adequacy of information, analysis of the data contained in the content and interpretation with the theoretical framework¹⁰.

The photographic sources referring to the study time and thematic scopes total three. The analysis was carried out using the technique of dismantling the process of creation/construction of reality, in which iconographic analysis (technical and descriptive) and iconological interpretation (cultural, ideological and symbolic) were part of this process¹¹.

The thematic oral history was configured as an information collection technique aimed at discussing a centralized subject matter¹². The inclusion criteria were being a graduate and/or professor at EERHL, finding three participants, of which one accepted to participate in the study. The participant was from the School's second class and, later on in the 1960s, she held the position of Director and Professor at the school, today Professor Emeritus at ENF/UERJ. The interview followed a semi-structured script with the first part containing eight identification data and the second part with nine topics related to the study theme. It was carried out at CMNPC with a total time of 27 minutes. After the interview, recorded using the iPhone XS recording app, transcription and textualization took place¹². The analysis was carried out through an exhaustive reading of the oral source, highlighting the context units¹³.

The data triangulation process was carried out during the analysis of different research sources, comparing diverse information and complementing the data, contributing to greater reliability of the results¹⁴. Thus, from triangulation of the historical context, social structures and discourse learned in historical sources, it was possible to overcome the mere textual description, placing the topic in its historical and social contexts to elaborate this guided and consistent historical interpretation.

The research protocol followed the recommendations set forth in Resolutions No. 466/2012¹⁵ and No. 510/2016¹⁶ of the MS/National Health Council and was approved by the Research Ethics Commission. The interview took place after signing the Informed Consent Form.

RESULTS

The students' training period was 36 months. The uniforms accompanied development of the curriculum, with three moments to change uniforms for the students. In the pre-clinical period, which comprised the first six months of the course, no uniform was required; during the clinical period, which lasted 24 months, a hospital uniform was required; in the last six months, which was devoted to the Public Health area, the students wore specific uniforms; and, at the time of graduation and its ceremonies, the students wore the graduate uniform.

According to the 1950 EERHL Internal Regulations and in line with the participant's speech, the first six months of the course were considered probationary, during which the students were under special attention from the management and faculty, in order to have or not their enrollment confirmed, according to their individual qualities and aptitudes. As a result, the students wore clothes appropriate for girls at the time.

As pointed out in the Report on the institution's activities from 1949.2, the students learned notions about clothing and appearance in the "Professional Adjustment" academic discipline. With a total of 15 hours, it addressed social and ethical issues and the nurses' relationship with the School, the hospital, the patients and the work group. The following description was given in one of the themes of this discipline: "Economic and aesthetic aspects of dresses. Exaggeration in terms of clothing. Correct use of uniforms. Dresses for social occasions."

After passing the pre-clinical period, the students actually entered the School, and a rite of receiving caps and badges took place in the presence of family members and members of the School. From this moment on, they began to wear hospital uniforms in classes and internships, in compliance with the EERHL institutional regulations. Here we have a symbolic effect of the uniform, that is, announcing what the student should be, as a result of inculcating a discreet and homogeneous stance, evidenced in the clothing and the way of using the body, especially through economy of gestures, discreet stance and decent looks.

The participant reports that the cap represented a symbol and that they recited the Nurses' Anthem at professional solemnity moments, in which the lyrics contained an excerpt about the cap that she remembered perfectly during the interview. In the complete stanza recited, we have the following passage: "*Diante da touca da enfermeira/ _Branca de altruísmo e compaixão,/ _é que mais sente a verdadeira/ _Fraternidade, o coração*" ("In front of the nurse's cap/ _White of altruism and compassion,/ _is where the truest/ _Fraternity is felt, the heart"). Thus, in Maria Eugênia Celso's composition, the cap became an object representation that, for the students and professors, symbolized an incorporated symbolic good that shaped nurses' image. When Eduardo Souto added music to it, it became the Nurses' Anthem. It is worth noting that the words referring to the cap present in the Anthem lyrics and sung in academic rites contributed to proclaiming an image of nurses for society at the time.

Figure 1 shows the hospital uniform made up of the following pieces: dress, white apron, white rounded cap, net, white tights and white closed shoes.



Figure 1: Cap reception rite - School Director Zaira Cintra Vidal awards the cap to student Nalva Curvello Pereira, both in the center of the image. Place: First EERHL Headquarters. Year: 1949. Source: CMNPC.

The participant complements the information contained in the photograph with the following report:

"It was a blue dress [...] with the fabric called 'fil a fil' with a combination of blue and white thread, it was a special fabric" and, also, the "hair tied with a little net [soft laughs] so hair wouldn't fall out on things that it might contaminate and the cap was secured with whatever made it easier (C1).

Figure 2, which records the EERHL social body, after the cap reception rite, depicts the first two uniforms worn by the students, in addition to those worn by the professors.



Figure 2: Professors and students with the Hospital and Public Health uniforms - Group image that records the school's social body, with Zaira Cintra Vidal in the center of the image. Place: First EERHL Headquarters. Years: 1951-1952. Source: CMNPC.

Reading the photographic text allows identifying that length of the dress was below the knees, evidencing dress length standardization for all students, as it was the School that made and provided the students' uniforms, for being a public institution. It is worth noting that the first headquarters of the School had a room solely devoted to sewing and professional seamstresses, making clothing very typical of its time and adapted to all the transportation requirements, activities carried out during the internship, occupation environment, climatic factors, economic factors for making uniforms and ease for maintaining hygiene.

The apron was another object representation that belonged to the hospital uniform of the EERHL students, and its use was mandatory during internships and ceremonies. The apron was white and had the same length as the dress skirt; with a square cutout on the front and back of the students' chest; there were two pockets on the front of the apron skirt, at the hips and at the beginning of the thighs.

The hospital uniform had a badge on the left arm. It is inferred that the badges corresponded to the year of the course the student was attending. The course lasted three years and had a badge with one, two or three dashes, making it easy to represent the year the student was in.

The Public Health uniform worn by five students located on the left side of the photographic image was different from the hospital one. This uniform was characterized by a dark-colored dress with a pointed Italian collar¹⁷, skin-colored tights and black closed shoes. In 1953, this uniform was changed to a white blouse and navy blue skirt.

Figure 3, which records the graduation of the first class, shows the students wearing the third uniform, that is, the graduate uniform.



Figure 3: Graduation of the EERHL pioneers- Group image recorded at the solemn graduate event, with Zaira Cintra Vidal in the center of the image. Place: São Sebastião Basilica Sanctuary, Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro. Year: 1951. Source: CMNPC.

The graduate uniform was different from the others at the School, as it was not worn by the students during the course but only during the final rites, such as when the students were training to become nurses. This uniform was used at the graduation ceremony, even in mass. The photographic text records absence of the apron and incorporation of a navy blue trim on the caps, in order to differentiate it from the caps of non-graduate students. This uniform was white, which was confirmed in the participant's testimony.

Since creation of the School, the professors have worn uniforms at different times in their school routines. It is noted that Professor Zaira Cintra Vidal, Director of the School, appears in all three images wearing a uniform consisting of a completely white cap with a pointed shape; a white dress with closed collar, side buttoning (on the left), wrist-length sleeves and pocket on the right side, at hip height. On the left arm there is a badge with a Maltese cross and four dashes; white socks and shoes, as seen in the three images.

Thus, nurses used object representations to produce subjective meanings with high symbolic value. Both the students and the professors had differentiating elements for anyone who saw them. The teachers' uniforms had elements that referred to the school of their training, making visible the teaching standard that began to exercise symbolic power before society about what good quality and modern Nursing was for the time.

DISCUSSION

As it was an entirely female profession when it arrived in Brazil, along the Anglo-American lines, Nursing dealt directly with patriarchy, hindering its integration into society. Registered nurses faced competition in the hospital space with religious women and society ladies devoted to philanthropy with unpaid work¹⁸.

Consequently, nurses used strategies to confer visibility to a new profession, such as: strict discipline in their training and behavior; training abroad for newly graduated nurses; training of teaching staff in specialized hospitals; institutional rites; bringing the School closer to public and religious institutions; services for socially renowned families, including President Getúlio Vargas; and participation in war conflicts. Therefore, it is evident that the registered nurses' image was a concern, since the first class of the Standard School, to establish the profession in Brazilian society¹⁸.

The uniform model studied was implemented in Brazil with the Anglo-American Nursing standard, an institutional discipline modality, allowing to differentiate students from teachers, performance area and the course stage that each student was attending. In addition to that, the uniform already differentiated itself from other existing Nursing models, representing the high intellectual and moral level of Anglo-American model nurses⁷.

Understanding that the Anna Nery Standard Law was in force from 1931 to 1949, all Nursing schools should follow an organization modeled after EEAN. Older and new schools had to go through the equivalence process and the Nursing diploma was only recognized for equivalent schools¹⁹.

EERHL started its operations in 1948 and obtained its equivalence in 1949, even before graduating the first class, which shows the adequate incorporation of the teaching model in force in the country. This is because the 1931 decree determined that the School would only be inspected after it had been in operation for two years, a fact that did not occur with EERHL²⁰.

Therefore, it is worth highlighting the adoption of institutional uniforms and rites that symbolize the image of EERHL-graduated nurses, which includes common elements in the uniforms used by Nursing schools equivalent to the Anna Nery standard, although there are also elements that differentiate them. It made it possible to read the uniforms, through object representation, to differentiate them from the students' and professors' training school.

EERHL did not use uniforms in the pre-clinical period, unlike EEAN, where the students used the preliminary uniform since the beginning of classes. This uniform did not include using a cap or an apron, elements that characterized nurses at the time since, after passing the basic academic subjects and moving on to the internship, the students received a cap and apron, the hospital uniform. At the beginning of the course, the students were also taught how to wear and iron the uniform, making them responsible for taking care of the appearance of their uniform²¹.

There was certain homogeneity in the color of Nursing School uniforms within the Anglo-American system. Blue and white were present in the uniforms of Nursing Schools in the United States of America (USA), at EEAN⁶ and, as this research points out, at EERHL. These colors already had a representation for society of the symbolic capital of nurses who had professional capital influenced by the Anglo-American model.

The EERHL students' dress had a standardized length, as students with height differences had the same distance from the dress hem to the floor. This fact is also observed in EEAN. In addition to that, the dress silhouette standardized the students, diluting their individuality and rendering the group more homogeneous, emphasizing what was equal. This process turned women's body into something neutral, hiding their sexuality. With this, it reinforced the duty of work, helping it to remain a female profession in society²¹.

The apron was a piece used in the EERHL practical fields, whose function, in addition to the pockets, was to protect students during hospital practices, avoiding contamination through contact with the patients. The apron had a symbolism of domestic work and subalternity. When the students stopped wearing it on their graduate uniform at their graduation, it represented their technical ability to develop care without any need for the piece. Therefore, graduates and professors would no longer use it, a fact observed in other Nursing schools⁶.

The rite of receiving the cap was a milestone in shaping the professional Nursing identity, representing a prominent moment for an object representation of modern Nurses, the cap; there were rites and symbolic elements such as singing the Nurses' Anthem and the proclamation of oaths. This rite was already carried out in American schools and was implemented from the beginning of the first EEAN class. It was the moment that marked a rite in Nursing training, after all, the cap was only used by nurses and this already projected the students towards their professional future. According to the speeches of the modern Nursing pioneers in Brazil, the cap meant something focused on God, vocation, commitment and responsibility, making the strategy of shaping the professional and social identity clear^{6, 7}.

Institutional rites are a way of establishing, consecrating or legitimizing certain elevation of a state or social "status" to something arbitrary and with greater symbolic capital. The rites made society know and recognize Nursing students, through the use of a uniform and cap⁸. The rite of receiving the cap and earning diplomas embedded an identity in the students and/or new graduates, as the institutional rites attributed "real" effects, calling on the students to perform nurses' role for society.

In their uniforms, the existing Nursing schools adopted typical characteristics of the normative discourse, originating from the Christian religious and military spheres, essentially masculine. Therefore, they were differentiated by the emblems on their uniforms that evidenced their position on the field²². Therefore, at EERHL, the badge on the arm indicated the year the student was attending. There was also a frieze on the graduate nurse's cap and the teachers were symbolized by the pointed shape of the cap. The students wore blue uniforms and the teachers wore white.

Different cap and badge models were common among North American schools, but cap and apron use was always present, not distorting Nurses' image in society. Thus, it was possible to differentiate the origin of the student/professional's training based on the image. A fact observed in using the cap was that it also served to

differentiate students from professors, a hierarchy symbolically represented by a different shape or by the addition of strong-colored stripes⁶.

The cap is still part of the worldwide iconography of Nurses, present in illustrations and other visual works that need to represent a Nurse⁶. An example is the electronic medical record of the Unified Health System in Primary Care: the icons for accessing a given area have representations of health professionals, highlighting a figure wearing a cap. As a result, Nursing professionals still find representations of their profession using the cap in their routines.

The study advances the historiography of the profession based on the iconographic analysis of clothing. This allows reflecting on the implications of clothing in nurses' professional training process.

Study limitations

As study limitations, we can mention the authors' perceptions, who write from a social place, that is, from a point of view that is permeated by subjectivities. Even so, historical studies are of great interest to our profession, as the history of Nursing makes it possible to understand advances over time.

CONCLUSION

The uniforms and badges present in academic rites conferred visibility to EERHL students and professors. The symbolic effects arising from these celebrations created favorable perceptions of the good image of Nurses in society at the time. In addition, the emblems and rites of the profession operated in a way as a call to order, as they determined models to be followed, as the rites were not merely of passage, but of the legitimization of a new profession.

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Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F. and M.L.X.; methodology, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F. and M.L.X.; validation, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F., P.G.G.S.A., M.T.S.A. and M.L.X.; formal analysis, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S. and M.L.X.; investigation, M.B.S.G.; data curation, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F., P.G.G.S.A., M.T.S.A. and M.L.X.; manuscript writing, M.B.S.G.; manuscript review and editing, T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F., P.G.G.S.A., M.T.S.A. and M.L.X.; supervision, T.C.F.S. e M.L.X.; project administration, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S. and M.L.X.; financial acquisition, M.B.S.G., T.C.F.S., A.J.A.F. and P.G.G.S.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.