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NURSING STUDENTS' SCRAPBOOKS 1938-1968

Visualizing Female Figures on the Border between a Female-Dominated Profession and Aarhus University

When higher education for nurses was established at Aarhus University in 1938, a tradition started of designing scrapbooks where students could express themselves, their attitudes, and interests. The scrapbooks function as visual documentation of women at the border between profession and university. In this article, selected illustrations from the nursing students' scrapbooks are analysed based on a diffractive methodological approach. The analysis takes shape through Sara Ahmed's figure of the willful subject and argues that the nursing student emerges as a modern and strong-willed woman at a time when it was assumed that nurses willingly sacrificed themselves to serve a higher calling.



When Danish women trained as nurses first gained access to further education at the university in Aarhus in 1938, a tradition began among students of making annual scrapbooks. Every scrapbook from 1938 to 1968 includes sections for each of the

programmes offered: health visitors, senior nurses, and teaching nurses.¹ These female students documented their everyday lives as students at the university with newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, drawings, notes, and party songs. The scrapbooks illustrate an image of the nursing students as they themselves chose to select, exhibit, and preserve fragments of their lives – and thus how they wanted to present themselves to each other and their surroundings.

The nursing students' scrapbooks constitute a large visual and historical body of material about and designed by women. At first glance, the scrapbooks seem dusty and their content messy. However, beyond the messiness and the decay of the material, there is a systematic way of illustrating and visualizing everyday life at the university as a nursing student and as a “modern” woman.² In particular, the visual materials give the impression that the women formed a strong community and were culturally and politically engaged in the world around them. This image contradicts the general notion at the time of the self-sacrificing nurse who dedicated her life to her work. This notion was based, among other things, on the fact that, until 1937, practising nurses in Denmark could not marry and start a family. The argument was that nursing, like family life, was a woman's calling and that women could not pursue two callings in life at the same time.³ When the ban on marriage was officially lifted, those who chose to marry were able to continue working as nurses but were mostly used in temporary positions. Especially in rural areas, marriage remained incompatible with the nursing profession until the 1960s. In addition, a board and housing obligation applied to all nurses until 1958, which meant that nurses were expected to live at the hospitals where they worked.⁴

While several studies have explored the importance of education for women in the 19th and 20th centuries and the establishment and development of the nursing profession in Denmark, previous research has not focused on the women's own perspectives on higher education related to the nursing profession.⁵ Based on selected clippings from the scrapbooks, and with inspiration from Sara Ahmed's female figure of *the willful subject*, this article examines how nursing students at Aarhus University during the period 1938–68 portrayed themselves, thereby producing a certain image of the nursing student that seems to contradict the notion of the self-sacrificing nurse.⁶ Furthermore, the article investigates how scrapbooks as a performative visual

1 I use the term “senior nurse” as a translation from the Danish *ledende sygeplejerske*, which might also be referred to as a “leading” or “administrative” nurse.

2 In this context, “modern” refers to the time after 1920, when a new femininity gradually emerged in Western societies (Søland 2000).

3 Malchau 1998, pp. 37-38

4 Wingender 1999 (1), pp. 150-166

5 E.g., Prentice & Theobald 1991; Goodman & Martin 2000; Rosenbeck 2014; Tamboukou 2017; Anderson-Faithful & Goodman 2020; de Coninck-Smith 2020; Fitzgerald 2020; Eisenmann 2021; Andersen et al. 1988; Malchau 1998; Dietz 2013; Wingender 1999; Buus 2001; Svensmark 2020

6 Ahmed uses the American spelling of the word “will” (Ahmed 2014)

and historical material can contribute to research on Danish women's educational history.

In the following, I present a more detailed introduction to the empirical material that forms the basis for the subsequent analysis. Since I draw on Ahmed's work on female figures, I then briefly outline the willful subject as a theoretical approach to the analysis of visual materials. In continuation of this, I detail my methodical approach to working with the scrapbooks in the form of diffractive reading, inspired by Karen Barad. The analysis starts with a woman's description of everyday life as a nursing student at Aarhus University that was published in a Danish nursing journal in 1939. From here, the analysis of the visual sources unfolds with a focus on three selected illustrations. These visual sources can provide insight into historical questions about how nursing students presented themselves as women around the middle of the 20th century. The performative nature of the illustrations can thus make visible a previously unnoticed or ignored expression or message.

About the data and the scrapbooks

The empirical material on which this article is based consists of scrapbooks made by nursing students at Course at Aarhus University for Health Visitors, and for Senior and Teaching Nurses.⁷ The scrapbooks, spanning a significant period of 30 years, are comprised of 18 books that include all classes in all years. Thus, the scrapbooks are not individual, personal books, but yearbooks that can be compared to a portfolio and described as the nursing students' own common archive.

In 1968, higher education for nurses expanded with a new department opening in Copenhagen, which is why I have chosen not to include scrapbooks from 1968 onwards in the analysis. The scrapbook tradition started with the first cohort of students in 1938, seemingly initiated by The Association of Nurses from the Course at Aarhus University.⁸ This association ceased to exist in 1969.

Higher education was highly sought after. In the period 1938 to 1962, a total of 1581 nurses were admitted to the higher educational programme for nurses at Aarhus University.⁹ The requirements for applicants were high and quite a few applications

7 Kursus ved Aarhus Universitet for Sundhedsplejersker og for ledende og undervisende Sygeplejersker

8 Foreningen af Sygeplejersker fra Kursus ved Aarhus Universitet. (Booklet 1940, p. 7)

9 The data from the study by the Danish Ministry of the Interior (Indenrigsministeriet) (1964) goes no further than 1962.

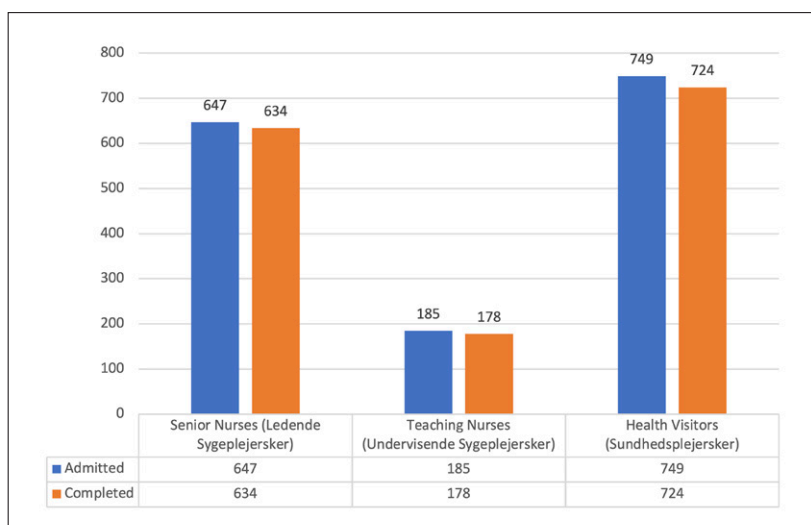


Table 1: The number of nurses who were admitted to and who completed higher education at Aarhus University in the period 1938 to 1962, by programme. The table is created by the author based on data from a report by the Danish Ministry of the Interior from 1964.¹⁰

were rejected.¹¹ In conjunction with the launch of the course, the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten* made reference to pharmaceutical director Frandsen's inauguration speech, in which he stated that there were twice as many applicants as places.¹²

Table 1 shows the distribution of nursing students across the three educational programmes for senior nurses, teaching nurses, and health visitors, respectively. As can be seen from the table, the course for teaching nurses had the smallest number of students and the course for health visitors the largest number. The dropout rate was generally low on all three courses.¹³

Table 2 shows the number of nurses who completed a programme of higher education, by both course and year. Here, the numbers are based on data from 1938 to 1965.¹⁴ Most notable is the increase in the numbers qualifying as health visitors from

¹⁰ Indenrigsministeriet 1964, pp. 26-30

¹¹ Applicants had to be state-authorized nurses, i.e., they had to have completed a three-year professional training programme. In addition, emphasis was placed on the applicant having several years of practical experience and being specialized in a particular field, such as paediatrics. Also considered were statements from former employers and teachers, and the applicant had to present a medical certificate showing a clean bill of health. Women between the ages of 27 and 35 were preferred (Booklet 1940, pp. 8-9).

¹² *Jyllandsposten* 1938; Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A028.

¹³ Indenrigsministeriet 1964, pp. 26-30

¹⁴ There is a difference in the data from the two studies. As seen in Table 1, the total number of nurses admitted to the course for health visitors was 749 from 1938 to 1962, of which 724 completed the course. As seen in Table 2, the total number of nurses who completed the course to become a qualified health visitor from 1938 to 1962 was 749. I have chosen to refer to both studies without assessing which number is correct here. (Lundström & Stenderup 1978, p. 587; Indenrigsministeriet 1964, pp. 26-30)

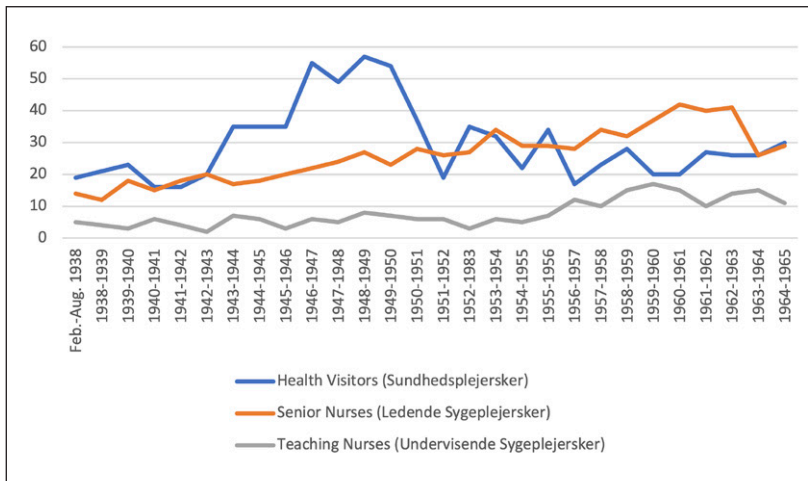


Table 2: The number of nurses who completed course at Aarhus University from 1938 to 1965. The table is created by the author based on data from a book commemorating the 50th anniversary of Aarhus University in 1978.¹⁵

around 1942/43 to 1949. This can likely be attributed to a growing need for health visitors during and in the years immediately following the Second World War. Throughout this period and until 1962/63, there was also a steady increase in the number of nurses completing the programme to become senior nurses. Each of the three programmes included both deaconesses and nuns in all years.¹⁶

For many years, the scrapbooks were stored in the archives of Denmark's School of Nursing, which was housed in the western part of the University Park, *Vennelystparken*, in Aarhus.¹⁷ The scrapbooks were donated to the Danish Nursing History Museum at the museum's opening 27 August 1999 by the rector of Denmark's School of Nursing, Inge Andersen (1936-2005).¹⁸

The nursing students' scrapbooks are primarily a visual material and there is a certain continuity in the structure and design of each scrapbook from 1938 to 1968. For each year, there are portrait photos of every nursing student, some with names attached. There are also photographs from various social events and occasions. The portrait photos appear to be professionally produced due to their more formal setup, whereas the other photographs can be characterized as the nursing students' way of

¹⁵ Lundström & Stenderup 1978, p. 587

¹⁶ Nursing originates from the old Catholic orders (Malchau 2005). The main difference between the Protestant deaconesses and Catholic nuns in the time before 1965 was that a deaconess sister could leave the order at any given time. The Catholic sisters were driven by their monastic calling rather than their calling as a nurse (Malchau 1998, pp. 45-46).

¹⁷ Danmarks Sygeplejerskehøjskole, DSH. From 1938 to 1958, higher education courses for nurses at Aarhus University were grouped under the heading: "Course at Aarhus University for Health Visitors and for Senior and Teaching Nurses". From 1958, the name was changed to: "Institute for Nurses and Health Visitors at Aarhus University" (*Institut for Syge- og Sundhedsplejersker ved Aarhus Universitet*). In 1965, the name changed once again to: "Denmark's School of Nursing at Aarhus University" (*Danmarks Sygeplejerskehøjskole ved Aarhus Universitet*) (Lundström & Stenderup 1978, pp. 577-578).

¹⁸ Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museum. Email correspondence with Susanne Malchau Dietz 08.08.2022

capturing everyday situations, for example in the classroom, at festive gatherings, on excursions, and in their dormitory. Each scrapbook also contains several homemade invitations: to physical activities such as gymnastics and swimming, to Sunday walks in the local area, and to evening lectures and festive gatherings. In addition, they contain clippings from newspapers and women's magazines. These clippings cover a variety of topics, including the nursing students and their education at Aarhus University, the Danish and Swedish royal families and other celebrities, and historic events in Denmark and abroad, such as the occupation of Denmark during the Second World War (1940-45), the Hungarian Uprising (1956), and the launch of Sputnik 1 (1957).

What is noteworthy about scrapbooks as a historical source for research in the humanities is that they provide an exemplary case of the "genre of self" in Western culture. This constructed "self" can also be a collective "self", as seen, for example, in school yearbooks and in the nursing students' scrapbooks, where the narrator is not a single person but a fusion of several different voices. Thus, scrapbooks can offer important clues to the cultural construction of a sense of self. They are an assembled "text of identity" that is fundamentally rhetorical and performative in character.¹⁹ Scrapbooks also have a social function and, in some cases, act as places to document friendship and visualize social networks.²⁰ More interestingly, scrapbooking has been considered a gendered practice, specifically performed by women. One argument is that men have often relied on speech and hands-on demonstration to teach their valued skills, while women have been more likely to transform their knowledge or ideas into something portable or displayable. The creation of portable knowledge suggests a desire to leave a double legacy; because scrapbooks are physical objects, they can literally be handed down to new audiences in a more finalized form.²¹ Another argument is that scrapbooks have historically had a private or familial character and are made for subsequent generations, such as baby books typically made by mothers for their children.²² Yet another argument is that, at a time when women were discouraged from taking part in public debate by speaking up or sharing their opinions in print, scrapbooks provided a means of expressing one's opinion in a non-disruptive manner.²³ Based on these arguments, scrapbooks can be considered a rich historical material for accessing personal, female narratives. However, it is important to bear in mind that the scrapbooks do not necessarily represent every woman included in their pages.

There are several questions that the scrapbooks cannot answer, such as: how many women in each year participated in the design of the scrapbooks? What were the

19 Katriel & Farrell 1991, p. 2

20 Day Good 2012, pp. 559-561

21 Christensen 2017, pp. 233, 238-240

22 Katriel & Farrell 1991, pp. 3-4

23 Kuipers 2004, p. 86

intentions of the scrapbooks? Were they designed with a serious intent or an ironic distance? Therefore, my intention is to explore the content of the scrapbooks as visual material anchored in a specific historical context.

Visual sources can illustrate parts of history that can be more difficult to express with words. For example, visual materials can provide their audience with a greater sense of authenticity or more clearly express certain feelings or moods. Within the literature on visual history, art and other visual sources are explained as something that has agency.²⁴ This can be expressed as the agency of the image, understood as an affective power to generate impressions in the viewer. Thus, the image has an ability to speak to the viewer's emotions at any times which emphasizes both the performative character of the picture, and that the life of images goes beyond the moment of their creation.²⁵

In this article, I consider the scrapbooks as an 'authentic' material that moves beyond time and space. This must be understood in the sense that the scrapbooks constitute a first-hand source for gaining insight into the nursing students' own perspectives. It has been of great importance to me in my study of the women who were enrolled in further education at Aarhus University, to follow the women's own perspectives on themselves and their education. To follow the women's archival tracks so to speak. Written sources, such as diaries, appear to be sparse in the archives, and it was therefore with great excitement that I discovered the scrapbooks. They can, like first-hand oral and written sources, give the feeling of authenticity, since they are created by the women themselves and thus give us access to the women's narratives. Stephanie Medley-Rath explains it this way: "(...) scrapbooks function as authenticity narratives, that is, narratives of stability, the ordinary, or everyday life".²⁶ In addition, the scrapbooks are created in a historical context and interpreted in a different time, which mean that the agency of the image extends and moves in multiple directions. This appears, among other things, in that the female figures that emerge from the illustrations are not simply "figures of thought", but visual figures that seem to possess their own agency.

As a supplement to the scrapbooks, I have interviewed a woman, Inge (b. 1934), who studied to become a senior nurse at Aarhus University in 1963. During the interview, it became apparent that Inge did not remember much from her studies in Aarhus. Therefore, she was surprised to find herself in several photographs in her course scrapbook and looking through the material helped her remember stories, places, and people. The interview with Inge is touched upon in the analysis as a supplement to my interpretation of the scrapbooks and the importance of higher education for Danish women in the mid-20th century.

24 E.g., Gell 1998; Moxey 2013; Magnussen et al. 2018.

25 Moxey 2013, p. 8

26 Medley-Rath 2016, p. 100

Figures of thought

The nursing students' scrapbooks are analysed from a viewpoint rooted in feminist theory, inspired by Ahmed.²⁷ More precisely, I draw inspiration from Ahmed's figure of the willful subject, where "...someone becomes described as willful insofar as they will too much, or too little, or 'in the wrong way'."²⁸ The willful subject can be identified as a problem, a threat, or a protest. According to Ahmed, willfulness is an attribute that has often been associated with girls, women, and, particularly, feminists. However, "will" is also transformed into "willpower" – something positive that entails a queer potential, responsibility, and morality.²⁹ When everything flows in the opposite direction, willfulness is necessary to keep going. At the same time, it is those who go against the flow who are noticed, accused, or challenged.³⁰

Using the figure of the willful subject allows me to emphasize the figurative dimension of the women in the material, rather than placing them into certain fixed categories. A figure must be understood as both a vision that the subject is on the way to realizing and as a critical aspect of its own position.³¹ Furthermore, the figure is an interesting analytical approach, since the figure – as well as the scrapbooks – is formulated at the border between fiction and fact and can be described as a "figure of thought", or as images that express both lived reality and imagined alternative subjectivities.³²

In the analysis of the scrapbooks, "figures" appear in more than one sense. Figures 1, 2, and 3 are selected clippings from the scrapbooks and labelled Figures. However, they are also images of non-individualized female figures, who make visible different emotional and strong-willed characteristics. Thus, the "figures of thought" are also becoming "figures of drawing" as well as the Figures entangle with the female figures and can be read diffractively through one another or as effects of each other.

Diffractive readings

Working with a large archive of material covering a period of 30 years requires some form of methodical systematization. Instead of approaching the material in chronological order, I have chosen a different reading of the material, inspired by Barad's diffractive method.³³ Diffraction, which originates in the field of quantum physics, can be explained as a way of mapping the effects or patterns of difference. As a methodological approach to analysing data, diffractive reading involves reading

27 Ahmed 2012, 2014, 2018, 2020

28 Ahmed 2014 (2010), p. 3

29 Ahmed 2014, pp. 1-13

30 Ahmed 2020, pp. 159-184

31 Lykke 2012, p. 233

32 Ahmed 2000, 2012, 2014; Kuipers 2004; Day Good 2012

33 Barad 2003, 2007, 2014

texts or theories through each other, letting their differences influence each other and create new patterns. Not only does the diffractive method measure the effects of difference, it also highlights, exhibits, and makes evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world, including the ontology of knowing.³⁴

The diffractive approach in the analysis is expressed, among other things, by my choice to make some cuts in the material that are not based on chronology or specific locations. Based on these cuts, I have sought to assess what materializes and what gets sedimented. Thus, the methodological workflow has not been linear or causal, but has happened through an experience of the actualization of the material. Furthermore, the diffractive method draws my attention to the various representations of the women in the scrapbooks. They are “women and students”, “women and nurses”, “nurses and students”, and “trained professionals and academics”. However, rather than oppositions or disjunctions, I view these pairings as conjunctions, as multiplicities without predefined properties or functions.

In the following, I analyse selected clippings and artefacts from the scrapbooks. Each was selected to exemplify the different female figures that emerge from the material. These imagined female figures propose a way of understanding the nursing students' perceptions of themselves as women, as students, and as nurses at the border between profession and university.

Everyday life as a student nurse at Aarhus University

”Det skal ikke være nogen Hemmelighed, at det er noget ganske særligt at være paa Kursus i Aarhus”³⁵

So begins an article written by a nursing student that was published in the Danish journal for nursing on 12 April 1939.³⁶ The article is about everyday life as a participant at the nine-month Course at Aarhus University for Health Visitors and for Senior and Teaching Nurses.³⁷ It describes how the day started every morning with one hour of gymnastics to compensate for the sedentary nature of the study activities. After this, breakfast was prepared, with lectures starting at nine o'clock in the morning on normal weekdays. Sometimes teaching took place in classrooms at the municipal hospital, sometimes in auditoriums located in the University Park. The entire morning was

34 Barad 2007, pp. 71-73

35 “It is no secret that it is something very special to be attending a course in Aarhus.” (Tidsskrift for Sygepleje 1939, p. 8)

36 Tidsskrift for Sygepleje

37 In the first year, the training lasted six months, after which it was extended to nine months (Aarsberetning 1938-1939).

taken up by lectures, with lunch served at 12 noon in the cafeteria for the dorms at the municipal hospital. After lunch, students gathered in the common room. Here, they relaxed in comfortable chairs with a newspaper and a cigar or cigarette. The duration of the after-lunch break was dependent on how much homework the students needed to complete. The library was often a hive of activity, although there were always some students who wisely took the time for a walk in the fresh air before burying themselves in their books. After a few hours of work, there was a coffee break and the students gathered in the kitchen. Some even had time to enjoy an afternoon concert on the radio before the day's final lectures. At six in the evening, course activities were over, and dinner was served, again in the cafeteria. The evenings were spent in various ways. Every 14 days there was some form of talk, debate, or entertainment, organized by the nursing students themselves. The course directors ensured a cosy and homely atmosphere during these evening events so that everyone felt included. Saturday evening was language evening where the women could practice their language skills. Late at night, a couple of students could be seen working in the common room. Some were members of the so-called News Committee, reviewing that day's newspapers and writing the most important news on a noticeboard. Every morning, members of the House Committee would perform various tasks, such as caring for the plants in the common room. These and various other committees ensured that everyone had the opportunity to contribute to the student community.³⁸

This narrative gives an overall impression of the structure of everyday life at Aarhus University. It is also one of the few written sources I have been able to find in the archive, where nursing students themselves describe their daily routines at the university. As a supplement to this description, the scrapbooks are a significant, visual material documenting student life, the women, and their movements around the university. In particular, the scrapbooks provide visual depictions of the nursing students' leisure activities, their involvement in different student committees, and their social gatherings.

Both the above description of everyday student life and the scrapbooks indicate that studying at the university left little time for family life alongside one's studies. Thus, a picture emerges of the diligent nursing student who is committed to her profession and her studies. However, the scrapbooks, more so than the written description, also show the nursing student as a feminist figure who is determined, possesses political agency, and makes demands on her personal and professional life.

In the following, three illustrations are presented that were produced by nursing students in 1940, 1959, and 1960, respectively. I have selected these particular illustrations because they stand out and demand our attention while at the same time exemplifying the content of the scrapbooks more generally.

The willful nurse

It is worth noting that the nursing students portray themselves as women, students, and nurses in diverse ways, in different situations, and at different times in the scrapbooks throughout the years. Sometimes, the three figures are entangled; sometimes, they stand alone. The figures emerge in the women's drawings, their everyday photographs, and the lyrics to songs they have written, which are often about being a woman, friendship, and the hardships of student life. Some drawings illustrate the nurse in her uniform, doing her job.

Figure 1 is a drawing from 1940 illustrating a nurse in uniform who is being pulled in different directions. The nurse must clean windows and carpets, wash floors, and wipe down beds. She looks somewhat frightened, indicating that she is not satisfied with or in control of the situation. The drawing refers to a debate evening organized by the students with the title: "Er der Grænser for Sygeplejerskers Elasticitet?"³⁹ The planned date for this debate was 3 December 1940, and the discussion was to focus on boundaries within the nursing profession.

The drawing is an example of how the nursing students in 1940 understood nursing as a profession with various set tasks. Rather than being a mirror that reflects the nursing students, the drawing can be interpreted as a diffraction as understood within classical physics – an apparatus or obstacle that bends and spreads the image of the students like waves, forming a figurative representation of the nurse. In the drawing, the female figure of the nurse expresses the nursing students' dissatisfaction and their demands for a reduced workload and better working conditions. As such, the drawing can be interpreted in the context of contemporary conditions for nurses in Denmark in 1940. For instance, cleaning was a regular part of the nurses' duties; it was not until an educational reform in 1957 that cleaning tasks were limited.⁴⁰

Since the professionalization of nursing occurred through the establishment of an educational programme at the Deaconess Foundation in 1863, nursing was seen as closely linked to a religious calling, mainly based on Christian philanthropy. This was still the prevailing perception in 1940.⁴¹ The Florence Nightingale Pledge was introduced in Denmark in 1913, where it is stated that, with God as a witness, the nurse promises to live her life in purity and to practise her profession faithfully. Thus, it was argued that it was God's intention that the nurse serve, which also meant that she must sacrifice her own needs for the benefit of others. Among the rules associated with the practice of nursing was that the nurse had to pay for and live in accommodation at the hospital for her entire working life and that she was not allowed to marry

39 "Are There Limits to the Elasticity of Nurses?"

40 Wingender 1999 (1), pp. 150-166

41 Malchau 1998, p. 34



Figure 1: "Are There Limits to the Elasticity of Nurses?" 1940⁴²

and start a family while practising her profession. The religious calling was emphasized as a professional ideal in Danish Nurses' Organization's nursing textbooks from 1926 to 1950. Improvements similar to the scientification of training for nurses that took place in the US in the 1920s were not considered appropriate in Denmark - the prevailing opinion was that such changes would come at the expense of this calling. It was especially doctors who insisted that the calling preceded the nurses' training.⁴³ In 1933, a system of state authorization was introduced for nurses and training extended to a three-year programme. However, the content of the education was not uniform throughout the country, and although nursing gradually began to be seen as a profession, the idea of a calling remained dominant. It was not until 1956 that the Nightingale Pledge was replaced by a new pledge downplaying the religious aspects and based on a principle of conscientiousness and regulations. In 1979, such pledges were abolished for Danish nurses.⁴⁴

42 Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A027, p. 35

43 Malchau 1998, p. 37

44 Malchau 1998, p. 41

The illustration of the nurse being pulled in all directions is a reaction to the demands placed on nurses at the time, which went far beyond the core components of the profession. It is thus also a reaction to common perceptions of the nurse as a self-sacrificing female figure, guided by a sacred calling that she does not question. This resistance can be linked to a willfulness to make a stand against conditions that seem unfair. It is in illustrations like this that Ahmed's theoretical figure of the willful subject emerges, sticks out, and makes itself noticed. The willful nurse is unwilling to sacrifice herself to her profession if doing so means washing floors and cleaning carpets, thereby disrupting the image of the self-sacrificing nurse. Through the appearance of the female figure as the willful nurse, new patterns seem to emerge in the visual material, leading me to explore a slightly different female figure. The effect of this diffractive movement is exemplified in Figure 2.

The dissatisfied nurse

The drawing of the health visitor in Figure 2 has no title or description. It appears in the scrapbook from 1959 and shows a dissatisfied woman, seemingly in uniform, weighing a baby on a bismar scale. What is the source of the woman's dissatisfaction? The heavy baby? The weighing method? Her working conditions more generally? Or should the drawing be understood humorously? On the same page as the drawing, three photographs have been glued but have since fallen out, with only the traces from the glue left behind. Thus, the original context of the drawing is missing assuming that the drawing is applied after the other elements have been glued in. The passage of time is clearly visible here, and the material has taken on a different expression, isolated from the original context, further clouding any attempts to ascertain the artist's message.

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the drawing, and regardless of whether the drawing is intended to be funny or not, the female figure in the drawing does not exude joy. On the contrary, the figure is a joy killer – or “a killjoy”, which is another of Ahmed's feminist figures, closely linked to the willful subject.

According to Ahmed, a *killjoy* is a feminist figure who is willing to kill the good mood in pursuit of a personal and often political project. A killjoy is troublesome and willing to get into trouble. Central to Ahmed's figure of a killjoy is the experience that something is going against you, the feeling of bumping against something, and thereby gaining new perspectives on what is against.⁴⁵ Thus, the killjoy figure is a willful subject who, despite adversity continues to follow her own path. Like the willful subject that will too much, too little, or in the wrong way, the killjoy figure asks the wrong questions, complains, and refuses to smile if there is nothing to smile about.⁴⁶

45 Ahmed 2018, pp. 13-15

46 Ahmed 2018, p. 12



Figure 2: "Health visitor weighing a baby with a bismar scale", 1959⁴⁷

Ahmed's book, *A Killjoy Manifesto*, is divided into sections corresponding with a set of principles.⁴⁸ Principle 2: "I am willing to cause dissatisfaction", is closely aligned with the female figure in the drawing of the health visitor weighing a baby. According to Ahmed, dissatisfaction comes from being dissatisfied with that which causes the dissatisfaction. Thus, displeasure is not merely because displeasure is desired, which is perceived by some as a desire in itself, but because there is a reason for this reaction.⁴⁹ From this theoretical angle, it is possible that the depiction of the health visitor as a killjoy figure was intended to inspire political action. At the time the drawing was made, changes in the structure of basic training for nurses were being implemented – changes that also had an impact on the further education at Aarhus University. To address considerable variations in the form and content of programmes, basic training for nurses was standardized by a royal decree in 1957. At the same time, 33 nursing schools were established, replacing more than 100 training courses that had previously been offered at hospitals around the country. Following these changes to basic training, a four-month preparatory course was introduced for those enrolling in the courses at Aarhus University, which was later replaced by an entrance exam.⁵⁰ This standardization represented a tightening of admission requirements. In addition, in 1958, the higher education programme for nurses at Aarhus University changed its name to Department for Nurses and Health Visitors at Aarhus University.⁵¹ In conjunction with the establishment of the department, the programme was given its own departmental building in the University Park in Aarhus, and *Dansk Sygeplejeråds*

47 Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A036, p. 25

48 The book "Killjoy Manifesto" (2018) is an edited extract from the book "Living a Feminist Life" from 2017.

49 Ahmed 2018, pp. 20-21

50 Lundström & Stenderup 1978, pp. 579-580

51 Institut for Syge- og Sundhedsplejersker ved Aarhus Universitet

Kollegium – the building housing the halls of residence for nursing students – was completed. The two new buildings were officially inaugurated 10 May 1958.⁵²

It is impossible to know whether the drawing of the health visitor is a reaction to the changes in the nursing profession that were occurring at the time. However, the health visitor illustrated in Figure 2 can be taken as an example of a modern female figure. According to Birgitte Søland, young women in the 1920s were concerned with appearing delightfully feminine, neither frightening nor feminist. They thus sought to produce an image of cheerful, girlish femininity to actively undercut older forms of female authority, and thus reject the more confrontational tone of early 20th century feminists.⁵³ In the same way, Figure 2 can be interpreted as a symbol of how young women in 1959 sought to disrupt the image of ‘the nice girl’ and, by showing their dissatisfaction, were able to move away from the existing feminine ideals and appear contemporary and modern.

The modern nurse

The period covered by the nursing students' scrapbooks is a period of change in common perceptions of nursing and of development within the training and education of Danish nurses. In 1938 when the course at Aarhus University was established, it was the first time in Danish history that a female professional education was affiliated with a university, and the first time in Denmark that a programme within higher education was exclusively aimed at women.⁵⁴ On the day of the official inauguration, Saturday 5 February 1938, the event was referred to in the newspapers as something quite special as it was the opening of the first university course in Danish history where admission did not require upper secondary qualifications. The chairman of the university board, barrister C. Holst-Knudsen, noted in his speech that Aarhus University, by virtue of its modernity, wanted to extend a helping hand to practical life.⁵⁵ It was thus pointed out that it was an extraordinary event to admit professionally trained women to the university, and it was emphasized that Aarhus University wanted to appear a modern university, in implicit contrast to the old and more traditional university in Copenhagen. At the same time, nursing was still perceived

52 Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook: 000368A035; Lundström & Stenderup 1978, pp. 585-586

53 Søland 2000, p. 64

54 In 1951, the first men were admitted to the state hospital's nursing school (*Rigshospitalet*). In 1958, the first two male students were educated as senior nurses at the higher education programme for nurses at Aarhus University. (Dietz 2022; Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A035).

55 "Universitetets Opgaver ved denne Lejlighed er kun det, som vi har vist før – Ønsket om, at det moderne Aarhus Universitet rækker det praktiske liv en hjælpende hånd" (Demokraten 06.02.1938), (Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook: 000368A028)



Figure 3: “Not like that, but this is what a girl should look like”, 1960⁵⁶

as a religious and female-only calling in 1938, with women expected to sacrifice their own needs in pursuit of this calling.⁵⁷ Thus, on one hand, it was considered a progressive step that nurses gained access to university in 1938, with the first students considered pioneers within their field. On the other hand, nurses were still bound by traditional views of women, education, and professions. This paradox symbolizes the border between the modern woman and the traditional nurse that I want to explore with the last example of a female figure that I have selected from the scrapbooks. Figure 3 presents a drawing from 1960, illustrating two women: one stout, one slim. In addition, active number of other women are depicted demonstrating gymnastic exercises. The drawing is an invitation, produced by the nursing students’ “Sports Committee”. It reads: “Tag nu en rask beslutning og gør noget for at bevare sundheden”.⁵⁸ Next to the drawing of the stout woman, who is standing at a dinner table with food in her arms, is written: “Ikke sådan”, and next to the slim woman is written: “Men sådan skal en pige se ud”.⁵⁹ The women performing gymnastics are dressed in shorts and t-shirts, the stout woman in a floral dress, while the slim woman is wearing a plain dress and presents herself gracefully, almost dancing.

Søland wrote about the young generation of the 1920s and their efforts to become modern.⁶⁰ In her book, she describes how being modern was partly expressed through social behaviour, body awareness including fitness, sexuality, and, not least, the women’s clothes and hairstyles. This new femininity was self-conscious, with young women

56 Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A037; p. 16

57 Malchau 1998, pp. 37-39; Malchau 2005, pp. 88-90; Gøtzsche & Nygaard 1993

58 “Make a quick decision and do something to preserve (your) health”. (Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A037)

59 “Not like that” “But this is what a girl should look like” (Dansk Sygeplejehistorisk Museums Arkiv: Scrapbook 000368A037)

60 Søland 2000

actively distancing themselves from earlier images of Victorian women, exemplified by their own mothers. Although the generation of 1960 is more recent than the women on whom Sølund bases her arguments, there seem to be certain comparable features in their pursuit of modernity. The female figure presented in Figure 3 is ambiguous in that it is both modern and rooted in more traditional gendered patterns. However, the ideal of the slim body in itself was not a new phenomenon in 1960, since an interest in health through physical activity and diet was a core element of modern femininity in the 1920s, not as an option or a means to a beautiful appearance, but as a moral obligation for all women.⁶¹

This sense of a moral duty to get fit also seems to be present in the drawing from 1960 and the accompanying text. This perception of what a female body should look like was therefore not new in 1960. In addition, the depicted physical activities still seem to be bound by cultural boundaries for what constitutes appropriate feminine behaviour. Across the scrapbooks, gymnastics, swimming, and walking are the most frequently depicted forms of sporting activity for the women. In this sense, there seems to have been little development in this regard since the 1920s. What is modern about the female figure in the drawing seems to be connected to the active women's style and expression, emphasized by their clothing; their strong, flexible, and energetic bodies; and their self-confident personalities in contrast to the stout woman, who is preoccupied with food and ruled by her lust and greed.

Although the scrapbooks thematically follow a certain pattern across all years from 1938 to 1968, they also differ from each other over time in terms of the aesthetic visual expression and the shifting topics. The nursing student illustrated as a modern female figure is a continuous figure throughout the period. In particular, the figure of the modern woman is highlighted in drawings, lyrics, and clippings from women's magazines showing young women practising yoga, sunbathing in bikinis, or showcasing the fashion of the time. The modern female figure exudes self-confidence, she is forward-thinking and often on the move. However, the scrapbooks also bear witness to changes over time. This is visible in the students' portrait photos, where the women's style and expression changes during the period, taking on a more modern look.⁶² For example, in 1938, the portrait photos show each woman in profile, each with their hair pulled back from their face with hairpins and with slight curls across the ears. In the post-war period and until 1958, most of the students had their eyes turned towards the camera, and there are small changes in the women's hairstyles. In 1958, a few of the young women have short hairstyles, and one woman is seen cradling her baby daughter in her arms. This is also the year where the first two male students appear in the scrapbooks. In general, the photographs and portrait photos

61 Sølund 2000, pp. 62-63

62 According to Danish archive regulations, individuals must be anonymous, which is why this article does not use photographs or names of people in the material other than my informant, who has given her permission.

seem to become more informal over the years. For example, in the portrait photo of my informant Inge from 1963, she is seen sitting outside on a flower basin in front of the nurses' dormitory. After 1958, group photos begin to appear, with the students standing in front of their then newly constructed department building.

As Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farell argue in their article about scrapbooks as cultural texts, the scrapbooks represent an established mode of self-narration.⁶³ The narrative in the nursing students' scrapbooks is a common "self", which, in addition to expressing a community, also shows how the women perceived themselves and/or would like to be perceived by others. Here, the illustrations in Figures 1, 2 and 3 exemplify how visual materials can depict an expression, a style, or a certain look that the written word may have more difficulty in describing. Becoming modern is implicit in the pursuit of higher education at Aarhus University as a woman and a nurse, and in going against the flow by, for example, showing one's dissatisfaction and by making demands with regard to one's working conditions. The modern is explicit in the women's appearance as someone who follow contemporary trends. Meanwhile, their explicitly modern appearance also reproduces a more traditional view of women as someone who must look beautiful in a certain way as exemplified in the drawings of the slim and the stout women. Therefore, the modern female figure functions as a cultural border figure that moves between profession and university, tradition and progress, old and new. According to Sølund, the modern behaviour among young women in the 1920s was partly driven by a desire for fun and excitement, claiming the right to leisure and spending money of their own, which to some extent freed them from the ties of family, and from surveillance and control.⁶⁴ I argue that this search for excitement, independence, and progress was also part of the nursing students' decision to pursue further education at the university. This assumption is supported by my informant Inge, who explains that her studies in Aarhus made it possible for her to become a senior nurse at Hillerød Hospital, thus providing her with a certain economic independence and authority. Inge did not know anyone in Aarhus when she moved there in 1963 at the age of 29. She got a room in the nurses' dormitory and, by looking in the scrapbook for her year, photographs indicate that Inge took part in various social events. At first, Inge did not remember much from her time in Aarhus, but by looking at the photographs of herself and her fellow students, she suddenly remembered their names, that one was funny and another nice, where they moved and got jobs after graduation. According to Inge, they all were employed in positions as senior nurses after graduation. Then they were scattered around the country, and Inge lost contact with them all.⁶⁵ Inge's description emphasizes that the higher education programme for nurses at Aarhus University was important for the women's subsequent working lives and their independence as modern women. The

63 Katriel & Farell 1991

64 Sølund 2000, p. 170

65 Interview with Inge 20.06.2022

scrapbooks indicate that the nursing students managed to create strong female bonds, establishing a solid group of professional women who had fun together and offered each other support along the way. Comparing Inge's descriptions and stories with the content of the scrapbook for her year highlights the entanglements between real life and materiality. Inge's encounter with the scrapbook and her embodied engagement with the material gave her the opportunity to look back on her youth and her time as a nursing student. Her memory was thus becoming with the material. The way in which the data merge, intertwine, and sometimes diverge shows that a diffractive approach to the material can help in understanding the fragments and the messiness of the matter. This approach also gives the reader an idea of what is emerging from the entanglements of texts, artefacts, and humans.

Conclusion

By examining the scrapbooks of nursing students attending Aarhus University between 1938 and 1968, this article contributes new perspectives on how women at the border between profession and university have portrayed themselves – and thus either how they perceived themselves or how they wanted to be perceived by others. Based on a diffractive reading of the scrapbooks that led to the selection of three illustrations created by the nursing students themselves, it appears that the women did not present themselves in ways aligned with the common understanding of the self-sacrificing nurse. Instead, they portrayed themselves as physically active, modern, and willful women who were culturally and socially interested in the world around them and who made demands in terms of their profession and their working conditions. The female figure sometimes appears to be situated at the border between the modern and the traditional, which supports the figure of the nursing student at Aarhus University as a boundary figure who balances between a traditional perception of women and nurses and a perception of the nursing student as a progressive, modern woman. Thus, the results of the analysis provide a more complex picture of nurses pursuing further education in Denmark around the mid-20th century and their perspectives on themselves, education, femininity, and the nursing profession. Furthermore, the visual materials that I have highlighted in this article entangle the past and (my analytical) present, places and people, opening different perspectives on nursing students and student life at Aarhus University for women with professional training.

The scrapbooks do not depict the life stories of individuals. Rather, they function as shared visual archives for the nurses who wanted something *more* with their profession. The scrapbooks reveal the women's solidarity and friendship as a kind of women's movement and document a common "we" that created visual patterns of their existence in history. Reading the scrapbooks through one another and through

feminist theory, while acknowledging that I as a reader entangle with the material, the article shows how, historically speaking, education has been an arena for women to evolve on personal, cultural, and political levels. In addition, it shows how important aspects of the Danish nursing history are accessible in visual sources.

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Scrapbooks:

Box 1: 000368A025-000368A028

Box 2: 000368A029-000368A033

Box 1: 000368A034-000368A038

Box 2: 000368A039-000368A045

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Resumé

Sygeplejestuderendes Scrapbøger 1938-1968.

Visualisering af kvindefigurer på grænsen mellem en kvindedomineret profession og Aarhus Universitet.

Baseret på en analytisk gennemgang af scrapbøger, udviklet af danske sygeplejestuderende ved Aarhus Universitet i perioden 1938 til 1968, undersøges de sygeplejestuderendes opfattelse af sig selv på grænsen mellem profession og universitet. Med afsæt i en diffraktiv læsning af kildematerialet viser analysen, at kvinderne portrætter sig selv som henholdsvis kvinder, studerende og sygeplejersker. Som metodisk greb for at tydeliggøre de forskellige kvindeskikkelser, der bryder frem af materialet, tages der afsæt i Sara Ahmeds feministiske figur *the willful subject*. Denne flertydige kvindefigur er fremtrædende i kvindernes måde at fremstille sig selv på i scrapbøgerne på tværs af årgange og kursushold. Kvindefigurerne tydeliggør, at de sygeplejestuderende havde stærke holdninger til deres fag og de arbejdsvilkår, der var gældende. Kvindefigurerne indikerer ligeledes, at de sygeplejestuderende opfattede sig selv eller gerne ville fremstå som moderne kvinder, der fulgte med tidens trends, og som tog afstand fra forestillingen om den opofrende sygeplejerske, for hvem sygeplejergerningen var et religiøst og kvindeligt kald. Artiklen bidrager således med nye perspektiver på de sygeplejestuderendes liv ved Aarhus Universitet, og fremlægger et mere komplekst billede af kvinders syn på uddannelse, kvindelighed og profession omkring midten af det 20. århundrede i Danmark.