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The Influence of memes on wider discourses associated with nurse education

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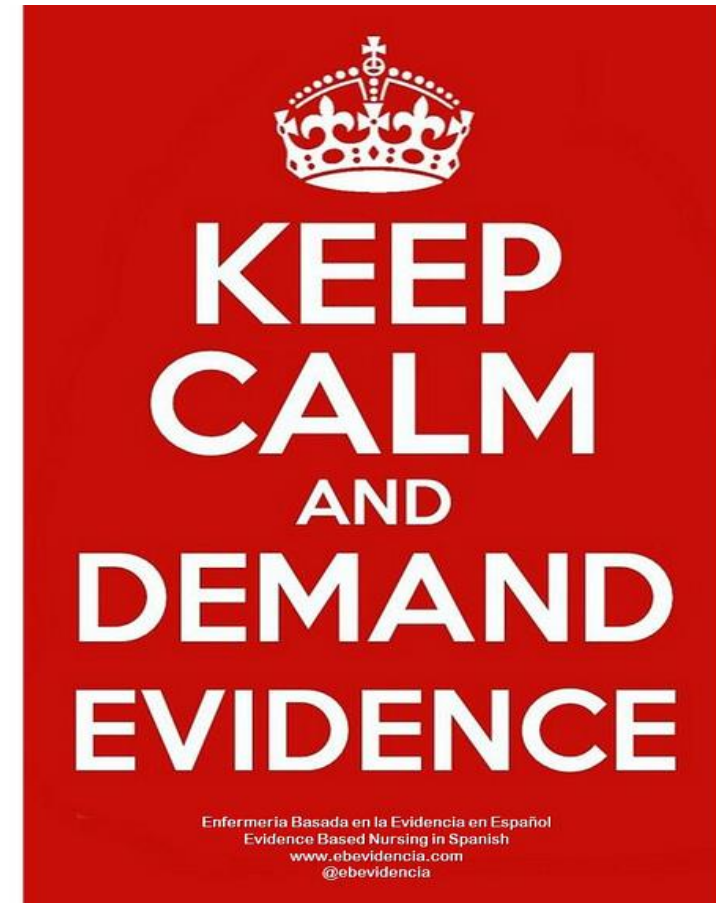
Memetic Theory

Genes replicate to pass genetic information from one generation to the next.



Mememes first described by Dawkins (1976) in his book *The Selfish Gene*.

Mememes replicate to transmit cultural elements from one person to another through imitation.



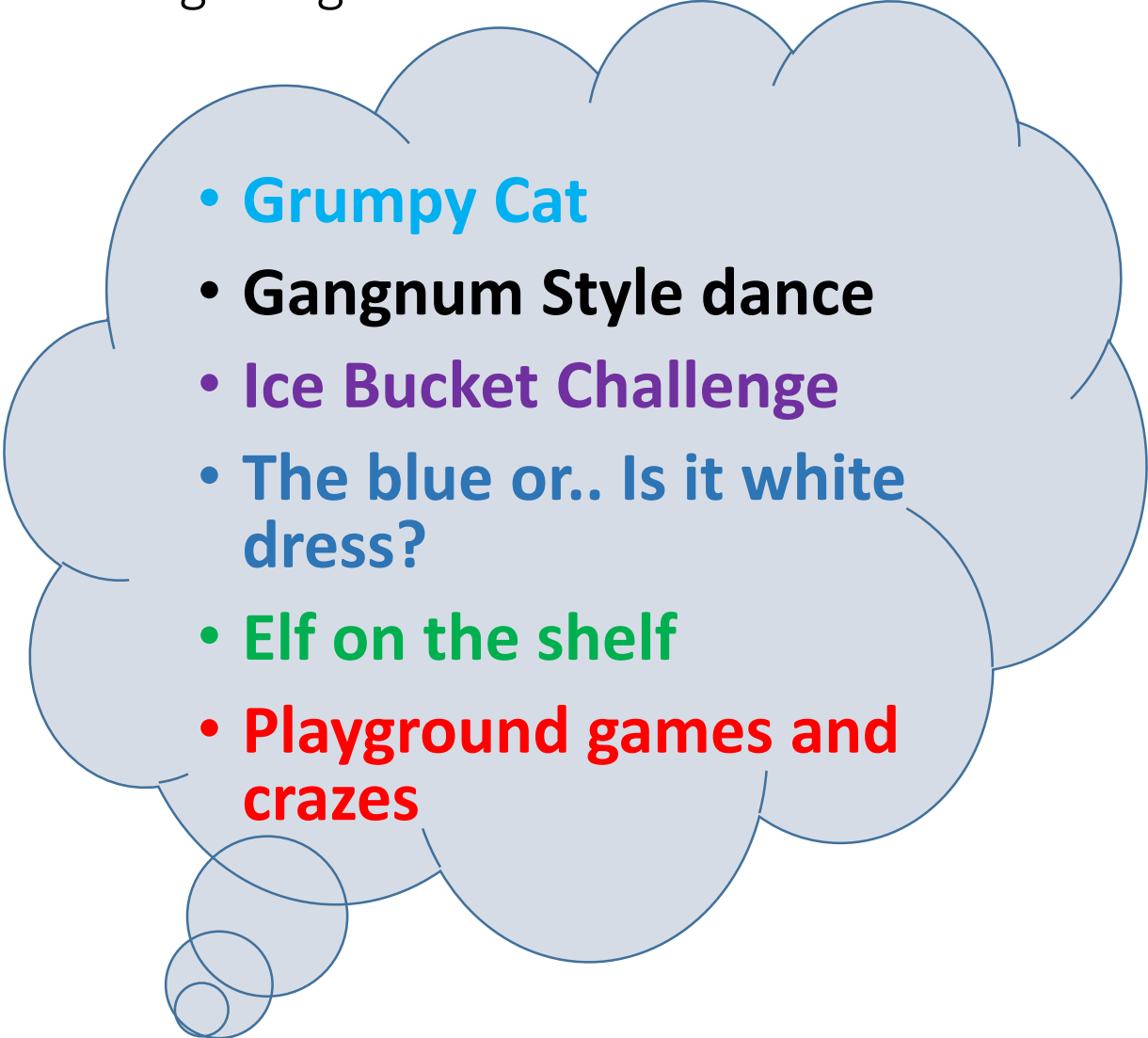
Successful Memes

Originate from within peoples' minds and through social interaction before being passed on through stories, songs or ways of doing things.

Successful memes need to be:

- easy to understand
- easy to remember
- easy to communicate to others
- copied accurately (Fidelity)
- copied many times (Fecundity)
- copies must last a long time (Longevity)

(Dawkins 1976)

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- **Grumpy Cat**
 - **Gangnum Style dance**
 - **Ice Bucket Challenge**
 - **The blue or.. Is it white dress?**
 - **Elf on the shelf**
 - **Playground games and crazes**

Spotting Memes

- Effective memes survive by continuing to replicate while evolving as they go. They serve to sustain certain views, ideas or ways from within a group.
- Memes passed via the internet are more likely to stay true to their original meaning.
- They can contribute and are part of the development of a culture.
- A meme does not have to be true to spread. (Blackmore 1999)

Mememes and Nursing

- Nursing has unique memes that make up myths, rituals, and traditions (Pediani and Walsh 2000).
- Memes spread quickly where people are engaged in watching and copying.
- Discourse communities have their own cultural norms so memes are likely to replicate easily between members during everyday conversation (Midgley 2004).
- Memes can move between environments, for example from clinical practice into university and vice versa.



The Study

Aim: To identify and explore memes associated with nurse education as discussed in relation to professionalism.

Methods:

- **Interviews:** 8 lecturers and 7 student nurses multiple times over 3 years (between April 2013 – August 2016).
- **Documentary and media data:** TV, publications (professional and lay), newspapers, curriculum documents, NMC guidelines, public reports.
- **Analysis:** Discourse Analysis approach from Social Psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

The Memes

- 1:** Lecturers are not credible clinical practitioners.
- 2:** Student nurses are less capable and less respectful than when lecturers were students themselves.
- 3:** Nurses are not valued by the public.



Meme 1: Lecturers are not credible clinical practitioners

- Found and perpetuated by talk from lecturers and third year students.
- Lecturers acknowledge this meme, but do not appear to 'pass it on'.
- Conveys and replicates messages of a 'perceived' superiority to clinical nurses.
- The lecturers in this study positioned themselves as academic educationalists but also expert practitioners.
- May serve to differentiate between the two professional groups (lecturers and clinicians).
- Heard for a number of years i.e. Wakefield (2000), Gillespie and McFetridge (2005) and Felstead (2013).

Examples:

Student talk

STACEY (year 3): ... I mean I've had really embarrassing moments where I've gone into practice expecting things to happen like I was taught and they haven't and been like: well at uni they said this and people laugh at you ↓ and they're like **"well at uni, they say lots of things"**. They think you're criticising and you're not, you're just like **"But the lecturer said this ↑"**,
[SC3P9]

Lecturer talk

ANITA: ...this is perpetuated by some anecdotes from practice –you know, we are grown in a cupboard, or in a bag of mushrooms, and that we haven't actually had any experience out there, but as we keep saying to them **"But we've been at the top of our tree, out there and that's why we're here"**. [LA1P13]

Institutes require more than the traditional theoretical classroom teaching. Nurse teachers have a role beyond this in encouraging students to link theory with practice, and practice with theory. Therein lies a challenge for nurse teachers to ensure they remain credible within the clinical setting and continue to provide education and support, which is firmly grounded in both practice and theory.

Gillespie and McFetrdige
(2005)

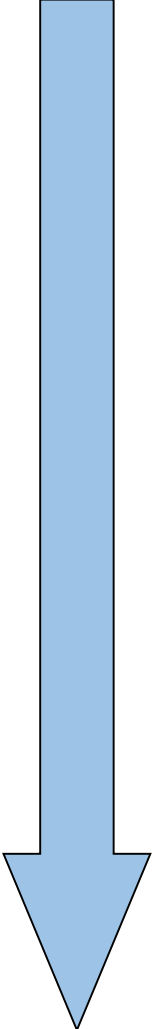
...to be cared for by nurses who are not only competent but also behave professionally, so students must be educated to develop professional qualities. The Nursing and Midwifery Council stipulates that professional values must underpin education as well as practice (NMC, 2010a). Much has been written on the qualities of an effective role model and the potential barriers to becoming one. This article focuses on preregistration adult nursing education and role modelling, with a slant towards development of professionalism, as opposed to skills competence. Attention is paid to the identity of students' role models and strategies for role modelling linked to teaching and the curriculum. Academic staff have an equal stake in nurse education: for them to be

Felstead (2013)

'Too Posh to Wash' Meme

- Positions nursing profession as not requiring degree education potential to:
 - Damage the reputation of lecturers
 - Raise the profile of clinical nurses
 - Serving to make clinical nurses 'special' (Pediani and Walsh 2000).
- Meme as a response to professional jealousy (Wakefield 2000)
 - Fear of being less attractive to the labour market without a degree (Barton 1998) .
 - Further fueled when clinicians meet students who do not demonstrate 'common sense' knowledge of clinical skills (Pediani and Walsh 2000).
- Highly successful spread via media reports to wider audiences.

Media interest in the 'Too Posh to Wash' Meme

Author and Publication	
Lister (2004), The Times – 'Too posh to wash'	
Salvage (2007). The Independent – 'Too posh to wash'	
Fletcher (2009), Daily Express – 'Could get too posh to wash'	
*Ford (2012) Nursing Times – 'Degree Nurses 'not too posh to wash', says Willis Commission	
Chapman (2013), Daily Mail – 'Too posh to wash'	
*2020 Health.Org (2013) - Too posh to wash? Reflections on the future of nursing	
*Blackhouse (2013), Nursing Standard – Learned Resentment at the heart of 'too posh to wash'	
*Nursing Students (2015), Poem, 'Too posh to wash' University of Dundee Website	

* Discourses attempting to refute the meme continue to fuel it

Meme 2: Student nurses are less capable and less respectful than when lecturers were students

- Found in lecturer talk only.
- Students seen as influenced negatively by unprofessional activity from wider society.
- A search for evidence of this meme found articles saying:
 - ‘University students cannot write decent English and find it hard to plan their work’ (The Independent Newspaper, 24th May 2006)
 - ‘low academic standards’ (The Times Higher Education 2016)
- Not aimed specifically at student nurses, but about university students generally.

Examples:

lecturer talk

ANITA: Yeah. Perhaps society's changed ↓, because you know, students aren't the same as they were 30 years ago. [LA1P7]

ROSE: ...I would say things have changed and I feel very old-fashioned and I say 'these are the standards that I expect and this is how they should behave and that is how I used to behave, ...Just general politeness and manners and everything to do with that. Has that just slipped in society and are we just seeing consequences of that? [LC1P5]

University students can't write decent English. Worse, their attempts to do so show that many can't follow a logical train of thought or present a reasoned argument. In fact, growing numbers are not ready for the demands of higher education.

The Independent (2006)

And they aren't interested in learning

"I'm glad I'm retiring. It has become increasingly rare for students to be motivated or engaged by their studies, or to possess what, for me, is an ordinary degree of cultural and academic hinterland."

Times Higher (2016)

Meme 3: Nurses are not valued by the public

- Heard in the year one student talk only.
- Search for evidence of meme spread:
 - Student nurse Rachael Starkey (2014) writing in the Nursing Times expressing concerns amid the changing landscape of nursing careers and negative press portrayal of the profession.
- This study took part during the aftermath of the Francis Report (2013)
- A YouGov. survey (2011) reported:
 - 47% considered nurses to be less caring
 - 41% considered them less professional than they were.
 - Kings Fund survey (2015) found that trust in nurses had fallen significantly from 30% in 2002 to 21%.

Examples

STUDENT NURSE JAYNE (year 1): I've had like a few people in clubs and stuff come up and say "That's a bit dodgy, isn't it, with what's going on at the moment?" I've had someone come up to me and tell me: "You're going nowhere in THAT job". They said "There's no point". People... they expect... it's got to the point where some people just expect you to be nasty now. [SC1P3]

STUDENT NURSE KIM (year 1): I just think the nursing as a whole profession at the minute has had a hit and I know what I am like if I go into a supermarket and there is a nurse in their uniform and I am thinking 'it's absolutely disgraceful, what are you doing?', ...you'd be like 'why are you doing this?', like 'get out, you're making us look really, really bad', erm, I just think we need to be associating the positive with everything that's kind of going on with the news and stuff. [SMH1P10]

Mememes and Nurse Education

- Memes may offer potential insight into the:
 - Hidden curriculum
 - Perceived gaps between theory and practice
- Criticism of lecturers clinical credibility potentially arises within clinical practice and spread, via mememes, via students returning to university.
- Both academics and clinicians call upon discourses that position themselves as 'special', knowledgeable experts.
- Mememes help position the 'real' nature of nursing knowledge as occurring in practice (close quarters spread), perpetuating talk that *might* de-value theoretical knowledge in nursing.
- Apprenticeship students, recruited directly from clinical practice, *might* experience a different form of socialization into nursing than university recruited students.

Mememes and Professional Image

- Wright (2017) expresses concerns about the spread of mememes relating to nursing. Some might be amusing, but they may be damaging the reputation of the nursing profession, and serve to reduce public trust.
- First year students' talk positioned them as entering a profession that *they* feel is not valued by the public. This might negatively influence student recruitment.
 - The professional nursing reputation may need repair following the negative influences of the Mid Staffordshire Inquiry (2012). Negative portrayal of nursing from public discourses found in the media seems to have seeped into the first year student talk.

Conclusions

- Memes may offer insight into wider discourses influencing nurse education.
- Findings suggest some memes may negatively influence the relationships between the:
 - Educational 'segments' of university and clinical practice (Melia 1984)
 - Lecturers and clinicians
 - Students and lecturers
 - Hidden curriculum in nurse education

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