

## **THE (RE/DE)CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF NURSING IN THE BRAZILIAN NEWS MEDIA: 1980-1986**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** identify how the formulation process of the professional identity of nursing took place through news items related to the regulation of the profession between 1980 and 1986.

**Method:** qualitative, historical, documentary research, guided by the socio-historical research process.

**Results:** of the 2994 news items that were located, 122 were analyzed that had been published in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. The importance of the movements and claims of the nursing category and its representative organs was highlighted, which culminated in the approval of the new law of professional nursing practice in 1986. The news items on care and research activities were also highlighted, including scientific events, particularly the Brazilian Nursing Congresses. Contributions to the development and evolution of nursing as a profession were also evidenced, which influenced the professional identity process. The professional identity during this period was marked by the empowerment of nursing and its categories, based on struggles and actions in search of better work conditions and a better quality of care.

**Conclusion:** based on the actions of the nursing category and its representative organs, the update process of the professional nursing regulation could be legitimized and pushed forward. The regulation of professional practice resulted from the movements of categories and representative organs, besides daily nursing practice in care, education and research, being considered essential for the historical construction of the professional nursing identity.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Professional practice. Nursing. Government regulation. Professional identity. Media. Periodicals.

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# O PROCESSO DE (RE/DES)CONSTRUÇÃO DA IDENTIDADE PROFISSIONAL DE ENFERMAGEM NA MÍDIA JORNALÍSTICA BRASILEIRA: 1980-1986

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** identificar como ocorreu o processo de formulação da identidade profissional de enfermagem através de matérias jornalísticas referentes à regulamentação da profissão, no período de 1980 a 1986.

**Método:** pesquisa qualitativa de cunho histórico do tipo documental, orientada pelo processo de investigação sócio-histórica.

**Resultados:** de 2.994 reportagens localizadas, foram analisadas 122, publicadas no jornal Folha de São Paulo. Destaca-se a importância dos movimentos e reivindicações da categoria de enfermagem e suas entidades representativas, que culminaram com a aprovação da nova lei do exercício profissional de enfermagem em 1986. Também se destacaram as reportagens que tratavam de atividades assistenciais e de pesquisa, incluindo eventos científicos, especialmente os Congressos Brasileiros de Enfermagem. Também foram evidenciadas contribuições para o desenvolvimento e evolução da enfermagem como profissão, que influenciaram no processo de identidade profissional. A identidade profissional, durante este período, foi marcada pelo empoderamento da enfermagem e suas categorias, baseada em lutas por melhoria nas condições de trabalho e qualidade da assistência.

**Conclusão:** a partir das ações provenientes da categoria de enfermagem e suas entidades representativas foi possível legitimar e impulsionar o processo de atualização da regulamentação profissional de enfermagem. A regulamentação do exercício profissional foi resultado de movimentos de categorias e entidades representativas, além do cotidiano do exercício da enfermagem na assistência, educação e pesquisa, sendo considerada essencial para a construção histórica da identidade profissional de enfermagem.

**DESCRITORES:** Prática profissional. Enfermagem. Regulamentação governamental. Identidade profissional. Identidade. Mídia. Jornal.

# EL PROCESO DE (RE/DES)CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD PROFESIONAL DE ENFERMERÍA EN LOS MEDIOS JORNALÍSTICOS BRASILEÑOS: 1980-1986

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** identificar como ocurrió el proceso de formulación de la identidad profesional de enfermería a través de materias periodísticas referentes a la regulación de la profesión en el período de 1980 a 1986.

**Método:** investigación cualitativa, histórica del tipo documental, orientada por el proceso de investigación socio histórica.

**Resultados:** de 2994 reportajes identificados, fueron analizados 122 publicados en el diario *Folha de São Paulo*. Se subraya la importancia de los movimientos y las demandas de la categoría de enfermería y sus entidades representativas, que culminó con la aprobación de la nueva ley del ejercicio profesional de enfermería en 1986. También se subrayaron los reportajes que trataban de actividades asistenciales y de investigación, incluyendo eventos científicos, especialmente los Congresos Brasileños de Enfermería. También fueron evidenciadas contribuciones al desarrollo y a la evolución de la enfermería como profesión, que influyeron en el proceso de identidad profesional. La identidad profesional durante este período fue marcada por el empoderamiento de la enfermería y sus categorías, basado en luchas en búsqueda de mejores condiciones de trabajo y cualidad de la atención.

**Conclusión:** a partir de las acciones originadas en la categoría de enfermería y sus entidades representativas se pudo legitimar e impulsar el proceso de actualización de la regulación profesional de enfermería. La regulación de la práctica profesional resultó de movimientos de categorías y entidades representativas, además de la práctica enfermera diaria en la atención, educación e investigación, siendo considerada esencial para la construcción histórica de la identidad profesional de enfermería.

**DESCRITORES:** Práctica profesional. Enfermería. Regulación gubernamental. Identidad profesional. Medios. Publicaciones Periódicas.

## INTRODUCTION

Professional identity can be defined as the set of characteristics coming from the individual and this set becomes responsible for differentiating this individual from others in society. An important fact to emphasize in this respect is that these characteristics come from complex processes, including the daily context, performance, and social reflection. It is on the basis of this set of characteristics that distinguish individuals in society that we can identify who we are professionally, that is, our professional identity.<sup>1-3</sup> The professional nursing identity is conceived based on its history, knowledge and health care processes, and the identity can be formed, alternated, or altered according to the time and circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Defining the professional identity as an object of study, in the context of sociological discussions, when working with this object, this shows the interface of something that is constantly moving, based on interpersonal relations, social, historical and cultural issues.<sup>5</sup>

In line with the ideas presented above, we highlight the concept of professional identity proposed by Claude Dubar,<sup>6</sup> which treats professional identity as a complex process that, once built, can be deconstructed and rebuilt again as the years and times go by. It is not unique and unchangeable, but a complex process that changes over time. The author points out that there are aspects that persist in identity, such as, for example, the identity acquired during undergraduate education, which usually perpetuates itself over the years, being modified according to the processes of social experiences, but retains its essence due to the importance of the time lived.

In the nursing scenario, we can briefly highlight different historical periods that have impacted the process of professional identity construction. At the end of the Middle Ages, we had the so-called “critical period of nursing”, which was brought about by historical processes such as the evasion of religious women due to the Protestant Reformation, leaving health care to people considered disqualified in society (street dwellers, drug users, prostitutes, prisoners, among others).<sup>7-8</sup>

With the emergence of modern nursing, and under the influence of Florence Nightingale, in the world health care scenario, nursing identity focuses on fickle technique within principles of good and health focused on the environment and on the division of labor into categories.<sup>9</sup>

In the Brazilian scenario, Ana Justina Neri stands out for her performance in the Paraguayan War.<sup>10</sup> From that point on, the professional regulation process of nursing in the world is highlighted, and specifically in this study in the Brazilian context.

Law No. 2604, of September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1955, regulated the professional practice of nursing throughout the Brazilian territory. This law classified the profession into seven categories: nurse, nursing assistant, obstetrician, midwife, practical midwife, practical nurse or nursing practitioner, and regulated their responsibilities. In this regulation, nurses were assigned, besides nursing practice, but not as an exclusive task, the management of nursing services, participation in teaching at nursing schools, nursing school management, and participation in examination commissions of nursing practitioners.<sup>11-12</sup>

Thirty-one years later, after extensive discussions, new legislation was approved to update the previous one, Law No. 7498/86 of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1986. In its context, it reduces from seven to four the categories of nursing and defines them as follows: nurse, nursing technician, nursing assistant, and midwife. It refers to the need for specific training for each category though, besides the need for registration in the Nursing Council. This law highlights the exclusive activities of the nurse, which guarantee the leadership of the nursing team and differentiates them from others, such as the management of the nursing staff, the organization and management of nursing services, the systematization of nursing care, consulting, auditing and issuing nursing opinions, nursing consultations, among others.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we will use the time cut starting in 1980 to understand labor movements and struggles of the category, ending with the year 1986, with the publication of the updated professional regulation.

In line with these aspects, we decided to work with the print media, and more specifically with the newspaper Folha de São Paulo newspaper of that time, aiming to know the nursing professional identity expressed in this communication medium. The print media is an instrument used as a source of knowledge for a large part of the general population. When working with this type of source it is crucial to understand that the media possesses a singular characteristic, in that it delimits its own rules and can sometimes preserve inequities and highlight certain facts to the detriment of others.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, despite understanding the bias in the news items the print media published, it can be considered an important source of data in view of its national relevance, besides influencing the development of concepts and knowledge in the general population. Therefore, this study aimed to identify how the professional nursing identity was formulated through news items on the regulation of the process published between 1980 and 1986.

## METHOD

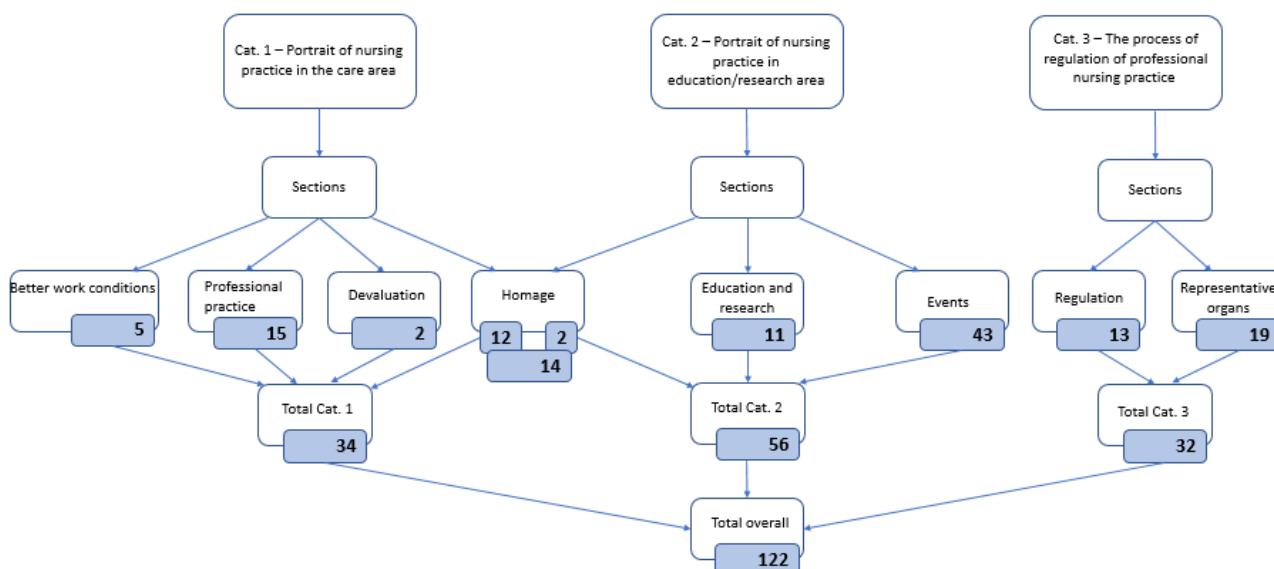
This is a qualitative, historical and documentary research, guided by the socio-historical research process. The main characteristic of qualitative documentary research is that it brings documents as evidence of past events, and thus, through these sources, investigates facts based on these historical testimonies.

Focusing on the image reported by the print media, this study used the newspaper Folha de São Paulo as the basis because it is considered an important vehicle for the dissemination of information in the Brazilian context.<sup>17-18</sup> On the website of the newspaper Folha de São Paulo<sup>19</sup>, we find all editions of the newspaper in full from 1921 to the present. First, all the news items published in the period from 01/01/1980 to 12/31/1986 were selected that included the keywords Nurses and/or Nursing in their context. As that database does not comply with the standards of the scientific data collection bases, the keywords belonging to the standardized descriptors in the health area could not be used.

The findings resulted in 2,994 news items, 122 of which were analyzed. The 2822 excluded items were due to lack of adherence to the theme, little discussion of the subject and dealing with social and non-professional identity. To analyze the news items, a data collection tool was used, specially developed for this study. The news items were saved in full, in separate documents, according to the category they referred to. The analysis followed the consistency of characterization to the proposed goal and was focused on the professional identity characterized by Claude Dubar.<sup>9</sup> This study followed the guidelines proposed by the Committee for Research Involving Human Beings, in accordance with National Health Council Resolution No. 466/12 - Ministry of Health. Due to being a historical documentary research, based on open-access documents freely available to the population, this study complies with Resolution No. 510 of April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, according to which research that uses open-access information needs neither registration nor evaluation by the (*Conselho Nacional de Saúde* - CEP/CONEP) system, in accordance with Law No. 12527/2011, nor research that uses information in the public domain.<sup>20</sup>

## RESULTS

According to the documentary analysis based on the print media, the newspaper Folha de São Paulo, the categories of the 122 news items were organized through the establishment of sections of the news items, which were the result of a dimensioning process, according to the main theme. The development process of the categories is characterized in Figure 1 for the sake of comprehension.



**Figure 1** – Composition of the number of news items in *Folha de São Paulo* per category. Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, 2017.

In this research, we obtained a satisfactory number of results, considering the repetition of the findings, which exemplified the media report in the professional identity formation process. We also used the time cut that refers to times of struggle to update professional nursing regulations. To better present the results of this categorization process, we will separately clarify the themes in three categories.

### Category 1: The portrait of professional nursing practice in the care area

This category consisted of 34 news items, and the result of one item was shared with the second category.

Among the 15 items about professional nursing practice, three emphasize aspects related to health promotion in the collective scope, and 12 emphasize daily activities that nursing professionals perform in the process of health care of the population. We also found highlights regarding the health care process, through 12 reports that somehow paid homage to nursing professionals who worked directly in care for the population. In order to clarify the ideas in from this category, we cite some news items.

*News item 1 - "Smoking".* Date: 06/01/1980 - Pg. 10

[...] *In 1979, at the University of São Paulo School of Nursing, Prof. Nilza Carmen de Lemos Junqueira Franco discussed the same problem from another angle [Master's thesis], showing that, as a health professional, the nurse can play a highly relevant role, raising the patients and the general public's awareness not to smoke, in view of the clear risks of smoking [...].*

*News item 2 - "Death of Tancredo highlights the role of computers in medicine".*

Date: 04/24/1985 - Pg. 39

[...] *"In intensive care environments, often, a well-trained nurse is better than any monitor" guarantees the clinician, who is nevertheless an enthusiast of what became known a bit more than a decade and a half ago as medical informatics [...].*

The news items were evidenced that addressed the devaluation of the nursing profession. They showed the nurse as a professional who is undervalued and forgotten by society, as evidenced in the title of the news items: “The nurse, the forgotten” and “Poor nursing”, disseminating a professional who studied hard, worked long workdays, received insufficient wages and was undervalued by society as well as the government and institutions. In addition, unemployment rates were high, being replaced by nursing assistants and technicians, as the value of the workforce is low, despite being categories with different functions. Likewise, the lack of legislation that defined the role of each category implied this non-recognition.

*News item 3 - “Nurse – the forgotten”* Date: 06/18/1980 - Pg. 02

*[...] A severe problem is the situation of the nurse, a health professional with a higher education degree – between 4 and 5 years, full-time, with long training periods during which (s)he is used as non-remunerated specialized workforce. What we see in hospitals being mistakenly as nurses are nursing assistants and attendants, whose theoretical block is negligible when compared to that of nurses. The hospitals hire three nursing assistants for the salary of one nurse, which entails inefficient and even dangerous nursing care.*

*News item 4 - “Organization”.* Data: 05/02/1980 - Pg.17

*After solving the hemodialysis problem, Manir Bittar declared that he will not attack any work, but will make sure to enhance the dynamics of patient care. “We will improve the care standard and, for that purpose, we have already hired five new nurses of high standards, totaling ten registered professionals besides the five we already have. There will be one nurse of high standard at each clinic [...].*

In this context, this category supported aspects of nursing practice in care, demonstrated in the 34 news items that illustrated the theme and permitted understanding the contexts through the perspective of the print media.

## **Category 2: The picture of nursing practice in education and research**

From the context of 56 news items, we obtained a total of 11 items that highlighted aspects referring to the area of nursing education and research. Of these, seven dealt with academic research, whether within undergraduate or graduate areas. The accreditation by the Federal Council of Education of the first Graduate Course in Psychiatric Nursing was one of the highlights, in addition to three other news items that discussed research by nursing professionals within the care area.

In the homage category, two articles discussed the nursing professional in the research area, recalling that one of them was shared with the previous category because of the subject, but is also calculated in this category due to greater thematic adherence. Next, articles 5 and 6 are shown, which were considered the most impacting in this category.

*News item 5 - “Nurse proves the efficacy of papaya in wound healing”.* Data: 04/12/1986 - Pg.25

*Based on an experience of the British physician Christopher Rudge, who in 1977 used papaya to heal an incision in a kidney transplantation patient, nurse Lina Monetta, 25, from Osvaldo Cruz Hospital (located in the neighborhood of Paraíso, in the South of São Paulo), undertook an exhaustive investigation of the healing properties of Carica papaya (scientific name of papaya). As a result of this research, she was awarded the first prize for nursing research during the 38<sup>th</sup> Brazilian Nursing Congress, held at the end of October in Rio de Janeiro. [...]*

*News item 6 - “Nursing”.* Data: 10/04/1981 - Pg.10

*Prof. Amália Corrêa de Carvalho, who graduated in the 1<sup>st</sup> class at the School of Nursing in 1946, has just published an excellent volume on this part of the University of São Paulo, picturing its entire history from 1942 until 1980. With her entire experience focused on nursing practice, this esteemed faculty member very rightly highlights that one of the core objectives of Nursing Schools is to develop, in its programs, the qualification of habits and attitudes concerning the imponderable of this marvelous art. [...]*



It is important to highlight an important medium in the scientific area in general, which are the events intended to promote and disseminate scientific research. We highlighted 43 scientific events published in the print media in the period used, in order to broaden the scope for the nursing categories. Of these events, there were some divisions according to the denominations coming from the disseminating organs: seven meetings/lectures, nine journeys, one forum, 10 weeks of nursing, two encounters, five congresses, five courses, a symposium, and a seminar. It should be recalled that, despite the repetition during the disclosure of the events, each event was considered only once.

In this category, as opposed to the first category, the experience of the nursing category in education and research was described, a vision that was constructed based on the 56 news items that discussed these aspects in their context. These offered an image and understanding of how the image of the 'academic' nurse was reported in the print media and its reports.

### **Category 3: The regulation process of professional nursing practice**

In this category, aspects related to the regulation process of professional nursing practice were pictured. When we used Folha to better understand the facts that gave rise to Law No. 7498/86, we first found 14 publications of official representatives of the nursing category, such as the Regional Nursing Council (COREN), the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN), the Professional Association of Nurses of São Paulo and the Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEN). These reports did not directly discuss professional regulation, but they demonstrated the strength of the representative power of those entities, through publications of general interest to the nursing category.

When considering the 14 items in this section, 11 came from COREN, one from ABEN, one from COFEN and one from the Professional Association of Nurses of São Paulo. Concerning the themes, eight of the items published calls; two were general announcements for the category; two disseminated positions of those entities in defense of nursing professionals; one was a retaliation; and one dealt with the indignation of nursing workers towards COREN. Items 7 and 8 present two more striking and antagonistic examples to clarify this category.

*News item 7 - "Trends and Debates". Date: 02/11/1980 - Pg. 3*

*[...] A study developed by professor Mário Antônio Sayeg from the National School of Public Health and the High School of War proved beyond doubt that the hospitals from the private network hire and use unskilled and untrained staff. In addition, some days ago, the chairwoman of the Brazilian Nursing Association protested in a TV show against the private health institutions that hire human resources in the nursing area who are not even able to stay in a hospital environment.*

In that context, in order to better understand these aspects of the nursing regulation process, among the news items used in this research, there are 18 that addressed the theme. Eight of these discussed the bill to update and regulate the nursing professionals and their categories.

*News item 8 - "Nurses propose regulation". Date: 01/23/1980 - Pg.9*

*A bill that changes the regulation of the nursing profession is due to be sent this month to the National Congress by the Secretary of Labor, Murilo Macedo. The project was prepared by the federations of nursing professionals from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul, and presented to the secretary for examination. The aim of the three associations is to prevent private hospitals and clinics from continuing to use unskilled labor, to the detriment of trained professionals. The project, however, does not harm current employees who do not hold specialization degrees in nursing, as it proposes the recognition of those professionals who are active until the new law comes into force, if approved. [...] among other advantages, the new legislation would permit surveying the exact number of nursing professionals from all over the country. Then, it would also be easier to find out how many need training and recycling courses.*

*News item 9 - "COREN/SP - Announcement to the nursing professionals and the board of health institutions all over Brazil". Date: 08/07/1986 - Pg.6*

*On June 26<sup>th</sup>, law 7498 86 was published from the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month, which determines on the regulation of nursing practice and other measures. The new law will replace the outdated law 2624 55, which together with its regulation based on Decree 50 387/61 was a poignant document for the reality of 31 years ago, therefore not attending to the current stage of nursing development. [...].*

As observed, the regulation process of professional nursing practice in the Brazilian context, presented in the media studied, expressed the identity of nursing.

## DISCUSSION

The process related to professional nursing practice in the care area becomes relevant when we talk about professional identity. Through it, we were able to understand the vision of society through the impression of the news media, as well as to partially identify the successive processes of socialization that influenced the development/modification of the professional identity of nursing. Referring to the theoretical framework of this research, based on the ideas of the French sociologist Claude Dubar,<sup>6</sup> who argues that the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of professional identity are based on continuous processes of socialization.<sup>6</sup> In the present case, they are understood in the context of professional practice, taking into account the method proposed in this study.

When we work with the reflection of the media publications in the professional identity of nursing, it is worth emphasizing the duality reported by Dubar,<sup>6</sup> where he emphasizes the relational process, that one has an identity for the other, that is, what they say you are, your 'virtual' identity, which in this case can be attributed to the professional nursing identity highlighted in the print media. And there is also the biographical process, which is the identity for oneself, that is, who I say that I am, which is the 'real' identity, the professional's vision of him/herself.

The formulations of news items are guided by common sense, with a tendency to highlight factors valued by society.<sup>21</sup> This research is partially in line with the findings of this study, considering that, during the data search and analysis process, most of the items discussed subjects related to nursing care, valuing the disease as the baseline object of the news item. As for the category on nursing care, the "opportunity to get in touch more intimately with the institution's space through the narration and description of the language of the word and of the image the reporter offers"<sup>22:711</sup> is highlighted. The study, which reinforces the importance of the sociological challenge involved in understanding the development process of the professional identity in the past, with a focus on sociology, more specifically Claude Dubar.<sup>2</sup> The socialization processes that occurred during the life trajectory of the individual permit the "[...] understanding of the conception of identity that is conferred in a relationship of identity for oneself and for the other [...]"<sup>2:429</sup>

The print media highlighted not only factors related to professional practice, but also aspects related to the improvement of nursing care. In addition, there are concerns about the need to increase funds, whether to hire new professionals, thus increasing the nursing staff, or to improve the work conditions. In order to establish these precepts, there are the studies<sup>23-24</sup> that discuss the burden of the nursing team as an aspect that directly affects the quality of care, also being considered an important factor when it comes to patient safety. Where and when staffing is done incorrectly and mistakenly, the quality of care drops and, therefore, the likelihood of adverse events during care delivery increases.

The fragility in professional valuation, characterized by unemployment and hiring of nursing assistants or technicians to the detriment of nurses is common in the scope of nursing. This is due to the population's lack of knowledge regarding the functions and categories of nursing, and this lack of information ends up resulting in the devaluation of nursing as an essential profession in the health



area.<sup>25</sup> Professional identity is not a process that, once consolidated, becomes unchangeable, but results from a complex process of socialization that can be perpetuated at different times experienced by different individuals, and this depends on the importance and impact of the professional identity process.<sup>2,6,8</sup> In the opposite sense, there are the moments in which the media presented reports that somehow honored the nursing category, as a set of attitudes that influence the professional identity as characteristics that value the profession.

Regarding questions arising from professional nursing practice in the research area, the authors present several opinions and highlights on the subject. We start this discussion based on the scientific process involved in nursing care, focusing on the part grounded in the teaching and research process in nursing. In this sense, a study presents the relevance of the nursing research area and the importance of stimulating this activity since the beginning of professional training, that is, during the undergraduate nursing course or technical training course.<sup>26</sup> Linaker,<sup>27</sup> in turn, argues that health professionals, including nursing professionals, increasingly adhere to the need deriving from their professional practice to learn to apply research in their daily reality.

Also, scientific events are highlighted as important sources of research dissemination. During a scientific event, students and professionals can be gathered who come in search of an aspect of common interest. In addition, they permit the faster disclosure of facts and results to the academic community than the traditional sources of research dissemination. The literature deriving from these events, in this case the proceedings, has the characteristic of rapid propagation.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, the lack of distinction between the nursing categories stands out, as well as the generalization of nursing professionals as nurses, be it by the media, or by society in general. In a way, this invisibility of the profession and professionals ends up contributing to the devaluation, resulting from the lack of knowledge of nursing functions and categories, as opposed to the professional identity profile.

Regarding the regulation of the nursing profession, the most recent update took place through the publication of Law No. 7498/86,13 on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1986, which deals with nursing practice in the Brazilian scenario. Considering the importance of this law, in force until now, it is pertinent to imagine its impact in the Brazilian scenario of the professional identity of the nursing categories. The update of the regulation cannot be understood as a single fact but needs to be considered as a result of a process of trade union and labor movements to support its occurrence.

With regard to the nursing organs, COFEN, COREN, and ABEN stand out as the main entities responsible for the evolution of nursing as a profession, as these entities have often supported and triggered the advance of this category as a science. The historical process marked by nursing is highlighted, due to its different ages and professional identities experiences, as well as the importance of these entities in the course of this process.<sup>29-30</sup>

The regulation results from a sequence of struggles and movements in different social contexts, sometimes by the labor entities and sometimes by nursing. In understanding this process, we question the reasons that led to the publication of Law No. 7498/86, the needs involved, the precariousness and problems that could benefit from this regulation, and the stakeholders and non-stakeholders in this process. Regarding the procedures that preceded the approval of the update of the bill of professional nursing practice, two groups could be identified with different positions related to the project. The first consisted of COFEN, and the large majority of regional and sectional departments of the Brazilian Nursing Association, in favor of the approval of the project. The second group, composed of some ABENs and Nurses' Unions, was against the approval of the project, in the belief that a new project should be elaborated based on the ideas coming from nursing throughout the country, thus broadening the scope of the project.<sup>31</sup>

During the period studied, another theme that stood out among the news items was related to Bill No. 2726/80. This bill dealt with the regulation of medical practice but, if approved, it would have

a strong influence on other professions in the health area. The other health professions would be subordinated to doctors, which would significantly modify some professions that would risk extinction due to loss of functions. In order to contribute to the understanding of this finding, a study focuses on the professional regulation of medicine and its effects on other health professions. The authors explain that the process involved in regulating medicine as a profession can be considered an absurd situation because “[...] the strength of an enacted law goes beyond what is written, given the multiplicity of legal interpretations and poor construction of its text.”<sup>32:9</sup> In nursing, this problem is linked to the reflections in the qualitative decline, whether in patient care or in the professionals’ living conditions.<sup>33</sup>

It is important to consider that the Brazilian Constitution is a result of social movements and does not come from the desire of a minority portion of a group and its leaders. “The law establishes and disciplines given situations and not the other way around. It is necessary first to conquer and affirm a certain reality in practice and then to assure it by law.”<sup>31:167</sup>

The publication of the new regulation of professional nursing practice partially divides the opinion of the authors. One study<sup>33</sup> highlights nursing’s experience of a crisis in the Brazilian scenario, both regarding professional identity and the labor market in which the emergence of the new legislation is seen as a perspective of changes. Nevertheless, there are loopholes that limit the full range of professional standardization.<sup>31</sup> Overall, however, the authors agree that professional regulation was an evolution in terms of professional autonomy, defining the exclusive activities of the nurse.<sup>11</sup>

As limitations of this study, the fact stands out that this research was based on a single medium, *Folha de São Paulo*. Thus, sometimes, there was no clear information in the news items, with themes that were hardly explained, making the full understanding of the subject more difficult. This resulted in the researchers’ greater effort to achieve a reliable result of the data collection stage. These aspects are in line with the foundations and premises based on the documentary research method in historical research.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this study, different periods and profiles of the professional nursing identity could be perceived and evidenced, according to the evolution of the facts that resulted in the regulation of professional nursing practice through the publication of Law No. 7498/86. These facts are linked to a historical process based on care activities, research activities, relentless movements by the representative nursing organs across the country, and the mobilization of the nursing staff. It also permitted the identification of identity processes in each era in accordance with the social, economic, epidemiological, and political-professional needs related to health. Thus, relations could be established with the different processes of identity idealized and developed by the French sociologist Claude Dubar.

Hence, the professional identity of this period was marked by the empowerment of nursing and its categories, based on struggles and movement in search of better working conditions and better quality of care. Based on the actions of the nursing category and its representative entities, the update of the professional nursing regulation could be legitimized and boosted. This study permitted a better understanding of the factors surrounding the updating of professional nursing practice through Law No. 7498/86, including labor movements, the relevance of nursing entities, and the influence of this process on the professional identity of the category.

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## NOTES

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No conflict of interests.

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