

Nurse ratched power essay sample



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Women are a great part of society; women sometimes overpower men by their sexuality to gain power and control, which lead to constant battles for dominance. Nurse Ratched, and her matriarchy run the ward filled with mental patients. McMurphy, a new patient, uses the ward to escape from society and its rules. He soon realizes the power, Nurse Ratchet has established, and tries to break it. In the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, the character of Nurse Ratchet tries use her sexuality over men to establish power and control in the ward, but McMurphy challenges her, as he protests against Ratchet's demands by ignoring work and watching television, winning the war. Nurse Ratchet uses her sexuality to overpower the men in the ward when she covers up her body and being unattractive, which helps create a matriarchy. Sexuality provides a huge cause to the power struggle between McMurphy and nurse Ratchet. Nurse Ratchet uses her unattractiveness to her advantage by covering up her body and attitude which McMurphy can not " get it up over her old frozen face in there even if she had the beauty of Marilyn Monroe"(Kesey 64).

McMurphy realizes that his weapon of sexuality to overpower Nurse Ratchet cannot be used, simply because of her role as a woman in the ward. Nurse Ratchet hides her sexuality by hiding in the Nurse's station while she, " watches all this through her window" (37). The Glass Window symbolizes a barrier, which protects Ratched from all the men in the ward and their power of sexual dominance. Nurse Ratched also controls her sexuality against McMurphy when he asks what her bra size is, she simply, " ignored him just like she chose to ignore the way nature had tagged her with those outsized badges of femininity"(138). By ignoring and concealing her sexuality and

femininity, Ratched demonstrates her power above McMurphy sexually. She leads a matriarchy, which leaves the patients petrified and powerless. The Supervisor, a woman, is a close friend of Nurse Ratchet. Harding tells us that all Ratchet has to do is, "pick up that phone...and call the supervisor and mention, the doctor seems to be making a great number of requisitions for Demerol"(56).

Even though Nurse Ratchet is not the head of ward, she still has the power to manipulate the roles of the men in the ward, including the doctor, and thus demonstrates her power over men. Nurse Ratchet does have a feminine advantage over men; aside from just sexuality, she has established complete control in the ward as well as full power over the patients. Nurse Ratchet manipulates her patients emotionally, through discussion meetings, and also physically, through medication. Nurse Ratched uses her tool of group discussion to aide the patients, but it seems that she proposes a democracy but she really controls the patients herself with her own power, for example, "you may take the suggestion up with the rest of the staff at some time, but I'm afraid everyone's feelings will correspond with mine"(94). Nurse Ratchet uses group meetings to determine everyone's final faith in the ward depends and she has the final word.

Physically, Nurse Ratchet manipulates patients through medication. Sefelt takes seizure medications that prevent seizures but also ruin his mouth, never benefitting him. Nurse Ratched knows about the consequences but "She nods again and repeats, 'needs no more medication.' Her face is smiling, pitying, patient, and disgusted all at once - a trained expression." (152). Ratched uses her authority to make examples of the members; this

makes her rule more effective especially when Sefelt is suffering from seizures. Although Nurse Ratchet has power in the ward, McMurphy tries to break that power and control through his own antics, which involve many of the other patients. McMurphy tries to break her. During his stay, McMurphy stops cleaning and turns on the television to watch the World Series. Nurse Ratchet is furious and turns off the TV with her control panel. McMurphy still stays there and the other Acutes join in, Bromden notices her reaction and describes Nurse Ratchet as, “ a fifty year old woman hollering and squealing at the back of their heads about discipline and order and recriminations” (126).

Ratchet starts to lose her power due to McMurphy's protest alongside the patients, which establishes that they now have the power in the ward. McMurphy also demonstrates his power when, “ he could use one of the smokes he bought this mornin', then ran his hand through the glass”(172). When he breaks the glass of the Nurse Station, McMurphy shows that he cannot be controlled and demonstrates that he can be stronger than Ratched. McMurphy also gives the patients freedom when he “ led the twelve of [them] toward the ocean” (205). By taking the patients fishing, McMurphy saves them from Ratchet's rule; he makes them saner and is the Savior of the ward. Although McMurphy finds ways to take Nurse Ratchet's power away, she still finds a way to fight back. With all the antics that McMurphy has pulled, Nurse Ratched still thinks she has the upper hand, attempting to manipulate McMurphy, she persuades all the patients against him and treats him using electro-shock therapy. Nurse Ratchet thinks she has the upperhand and describes McMurphy as, “ simply a man and no more,

and is subject to all fears and all cowardice and all the timidity and any other man is subject to”(136-137).

Nurse Ratchet sees no power in McMurphy she knows that he will eventually settle down and subside to her power. Nurse Ratchet persuades the patients against McMurphy in another meeting as she declares “ I have various other bets he made listed here, including something to do with deliberately trying to upset the staff”(228). Ratchet tells the patients that McMurphy conned them of their money and that they can no longer trust him. McMurphy later shows his loyalty when he protects George from receiving a cavity search and he progresses into a fight with the black aides. Nurse Ratchet tells him “ all he has to do is admit he was wrong, to indicate, demonstrate rational contact, and the treatment would be canceled this time”(242). Nurse Ratchet thinks she can manipulate McMurphy through her treatments of electro-shock therapy, but McMurphy overcomes it.

Although Nurse Ratchet sees no power in McMurphy, the war between Ratchet and McMurphy nears its end. McMurphy is catching up to Ratched, and she knows it too but the war is in her control. Ratched, “[knows] she’d lost one big round and was losing another...the fight could go on as long as she wanted” (175). Ratchet thinks, she has complete control of the war, and can manipulate McMurphy anytime she wants. But, McMurphy takes away her power of sexuality, by revealing her breasts, returning back to the ward Nurse Ratched is noted wearing “ a new white uniform...in spite of it being smaller and tighter...it could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman” (276). The power of her sexuality is gone and all the men realize it. The rest of the patients realize that she can no longer control them and all

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the non-commits leave. Nurse Ratchet realizes, “ She couldn’t rule with her old power any more...she was losing her patients one after the other” (277). The combine is now free of Nurse Ratched’s power thanks to the, savior, McMurphy.

Though McMurphy has won the war he has suffered badly. Bromden finally sees McMurphy, he realizes that McMurphy has been lobotomized and takes him out of his misery, “ Oh, no. [suffocating McMurphy] I’m not goin’ without you, Mac. I wouldn’t leave you this way. You’re coming with me. [laying him down] Let’s go” (278). McMurphy, like Jesus, has saved everyone, they are all free from Ratched’s control, and his death is his escape from society.

Everyone, now in the ward is free from Nurse Ratchet’s power. Nurse Ratchet uses her sexuality to dictate the men in the ward, but is challenged by McMurphy with his keen antics. The ward with the help of McMurphy, become more sane and able to realize the lack of power Ratchet no longer has. Throughout history, important figures have sought power whether it was Hitler or the Great Empire of Rome. Each made their mark by exhibiting power and dominance to those they conquered. Power helped each civilization in society to thrive and once that power was lost, they started to decline. Nurse Ratchet trying to exhibit her dominance in the ward, failed due to the protest of McMurphy and the patients to Ratchet’s demands.