

The Misunderstanding of Nurse Ratched

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In *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, the Nurse Ratched (Big Nurse) holds the highest level of authority and has jurisdiction over everything in the ward. The chronics and acutes are expected to follow the rules of the ward regardless of whether they want to or not. One acute in particular, McMurphy, makes his best effort to change some of these rules to benefit the acutes, chonics, and himself. Although his requests are reasonable, they're often shut down by the Big Nurse because they inherently violate ward policy, intended to keep the patient's best interest in mind. It can be easy to see the Big Nurse as a villain because it might seem like she intentionally trying to make life in the ward less enjoyable for patients. However, it's important to remind ourselves that the Big Nurse is committed to her job, and being a strict enforcer of ward policy is a by-product of that.

Ken Kesey's novel has encouraged me to put myself in the shoes of authority figures and not instantly view them in a negative light. The Big Nurse may seem like a villainous character, but in reality she's just an employee of the ward doing her job. On the contrary, I sometimes get frustrated at my parents who may seem like they being harsh on me and want to restrict my personal freedom, but in reality have my best interest at heart and only want whats good for me.

In middle school, arguments with my parents became frequent as I wanted to become more independent. I remember getting angry at my parents whenever they'd say I couldn't hang out with friends or had to come home at an earlier time. One Friday, my middle school buddies and I decided to hang out at one of our houses. We initially planned to just hang out for a couple hours, but as time passed we all thought it would be smart to ask if we could hang out for a bit longer. One by one each of us asked our parents if we could stay a few more

hours. I called my mom and asked for a sleepover but was met with a stern, no. Frustrated, I pleaded with my mom telling her that I'd only stay a few more hours. She responded by telling me that our car was in the shop so I would need to get home via public transportation, which she refused because the neighborhood my friends and I were in wasn't very safe. Caught in my emotions, I wasn't able to understand why she said no and immediately got sour. However, when I put myself in my mom's shoes I can see that there's no good reason to be frustrated at my mom because all she wanted was for her son to be safe.

Similarly, the Big Nurse holds jurisdiction over McMurphy who often challenges her judgment. On page 125, McMurphy turns on the TV in the ward to watch the World Series game. Knowing that this violates the ward schedule he continues to watch TV along with other acutes and chronics. Nurse Ratched comes over to the TV and exclaims to McMurphy, "You are supposed to be working during these hours... Mr. McMurphy, I'm warning you!"(125). This line of dialogue from Nurse Ratched sheds a bad light on her because she's objecting to a leisure pastime for the ward members that isn't causing any harm. In addition to this, her manner in responding to McMurphy is aggressive, which can further solidify the idea that she has a negative persona. However, knowing that McMurphy should be following the ward schedule instead of watching TV puts him in the wrong. The Big Nurse may seem like the antagonist, but her stern personality is only present to reinforce the ward policy and maintain order.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest has encouraged me to sympathize more with authority figures by putting myself in their shoes. It's easy to let emotions get in the way of understanding why you can't get what you want, no matter how reasonable it may be. In the past, this often caused me to hold onto negative feelings, which did nothing good. But taking a step back to understand the context and reasoning behind why your being denied can help you make better decisions and improve relationships with authority figures. Even though it might seem like my mom and Nurse Ratched are being harsh, they only want the best for who they have authority over.

