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## Male Nurses: A Visible Minority

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# Male Nurses: A Visible Minority

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Mentors: Arlene Spilker & Susan McNiesh



***Jaspinder Kaur***

Major:  
Nursing

Mentor:  
**Arlene Spilker &  
Susan McNiesh**

Male Nurses: A Visible Minority

***Biography***

*Jaspinder Kaur is a 2nd year nursing student at San José State University (SJSU). Jaspinder is interested in pursuing a graduate degree in nursing in hopes of becoming a nurse researcher. Jaspinder's current project focuses on men in the nursing profession. Her goal is to explore commonly faced challenges by male nurses/nursing students and understand how these perceptions and stereotypes affect their ability to provide care.*

*In addition to being a first-generation college student, she is also the first woman in her family to go to college. Pursuing higher education is very important to Jaspinder because it would help her develop her potential, lead an independent life, and influence other female members of her family to attain a higher education. She hopes to break the sociological barrier of education in her family and community through her educational experiences.*

## ***Male Nurses: A Visible Minority***

### **Abstract**

Because nursing is associated with feminine characteristics, it is mainly considered a woman's profession (Meadus, 2000; Roth & Coleman, 2008). Despite the increasing number of men choosing nursing as a profession, they often face discrimination in this predominantly female profession (Roth & Coleman, 2008). When men choose a female-dominated profession like nursing, they are questioned regarding their sexual orientation and are considered inappropriate for bed-side nursing (O'Connor, 2015; Meadus, 2000). Patients' perceptions of male nurses as sexual aggressors or gay affects their ability to do their job (Evans, 2002). The goal of this literature review is to explore challenges commonly faced by male nurses and understand how these perceptions and stereotypes affect their ability to provide care.

### **Introduction**

When people hear the word "nurse," they immediately think of a woman in scrubs, so it's no surprise that nursing is a female-dominated profession (Rajacich et al., 2013). For example, as of 2011, 91% of nurses were women and only 9% were men ("Men in nursing," 2013). Despite nursing being a normative career for women, more men are now choosing it as a career option ("Men in nursing," 2013). For example, the rate of men in nursing has increased from 2.7% in the 1970s to 9.6% in 2011 ("Men in nursing," 2013). Despite the efforts to increase the number of men in nursing, they are still a minority in this profession ("Men in nursing," 2013).

Even though historically men provided significant contributions to nursing, they have received little to no recognition (Rajacich, Kane, Williston, & Cameron, 2013). For example, in the U.S, men served as nurses during the Civil War, and they were significant in reducing mortality rates among the troops during the wars (Rajacich, et al., 2013). Even Mahatma Gandhi was a nurse during his time in Africa (Rajacich et al., 2013). Lack of recognition of male nurses in history further encourages society to associate nursing with women (Rajacich et al., 2013).

Although both genders have the ability to care and nurture, these characteristics are mostly considered appropriate for women; therefore,

men often face issues with gender identity and stereotypes for choosing a feminine career (Roth & Coleman, 2008; Rajacich et. al., 2013). Many people think that men choose nursing because they are gay, and they face discrimination in clinical settings because of this common stereotype (Evans, 2002; Roth & Coleman, 2008). Even patients have a difficult time considering men as appropriate for a job that requires touching, caring, gentleness, and nurturing (Meadus, 2000; Roth & Coleman, 2008). As men challenge gender-defined roles and choose a nontraditional career like nursing, they often face discrimination (Meadus, 2000; Roth & Coleman, 2008). This is interesting because men are criticized for choosing a female-dominated profession, but their female counterparts are more likely to be praised and gain recognition when they choose a male-dominated profession (Meadus, 2000; Roth & Coleman, 2008).

Regardless of society's attitudes and perceptions of male nurses, research shows that men choose nursing for the same reasons women do, which is to care, nurture, and advocate for their patients (Meadus, 2000). Therefore, the goal of this literature review is to explore the common challenges male nurses face and understand how gender stereotypes affect their ability to provide care and build relationships with their patients.

### **Methods**

I searched multiple databases, including PubMed and Medline, and key words included male nurses, stereotypes in nursing, male nursing statistics, male nurse recruitment, male nursing students, and clinical experience. Studies that were published between 2002 and 2017 were considered for my literature review. I reviewed over 25 articles, but only 10 articles were considered for my literature review. The following is the summary of each study.

Schmidt (2016) explored male student nurses' professional values in clinical and classroom settings and how well they adjusted to the hospital setting. Open-ended questions regarding participants' clinical experiences were used to facilitate the interviews. They conducted a qualitative and phenomenological study. The data was analyzed, categorized, coded, and lastly, common themes were identified (Schmidt, 2016).

Nine male nursing students in their third or fourth year of nursing school participated in this study. Four students were third-year students and five were fourth-year students. Twenty-two percent of the participants were over the age of 30 and 78% identified themselves as Caucasian. Because being certified as a nursing assistant was an admission requirement for this particular school, most of the participants had experience working in a healthcare setting as a nursing assistant (Schmidt, 2016).

Evans (2002) conducted his study on 8 male registered nurses (RNs) from Nova Scotia, Canada; their ages ranged from 20 to 50 years. The participants had between 7 and 32 years of experience working as nurses in multiple areas of nursing, including mental health, medical-surgical, leadership roles, and community health (Evans, 2002). Two rounds of interviews were conducted with these participants.

Rajacich et al. (2013) used a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the responses of 16 male nurses in this study. The participants were between the ages of 21 and 48 years, and their experience in nursing ranged from 2 months to 21 years.

The main theme of these articles revolved around the idea of care and how both genders demonstrated it (Schmidt, 2016; Evans, 2002). The participants stated that they developed core professional values, such as caring, before even starting nursing school (Schmidt, 2016). Because their nursing values were influenced by various life experiences, it was easy for them to understand the concept of care (Schmidt, 2016). They showed their care through patient advocacy, safety, effective communication, and teamwork (Schmidt, 2016). Even though touch is a common tactic to provide comfort and reduce anxiety, male nurses reported being hesitant with this concept (Schmidt, 2016; Evans, 2002).

Female nurses often showed care by touching patients, whereas men reported using humor to bond with their patients because it helped reduce their own and patients' anxiety (Schmidt, 2016; Evans, 2002). Male nurses have to carefully assess the patient situation before they even decide to touch (Schmidt, 2016; Evans, 2002). Even when male nurses are providing care for male patients, they reported being very careful with their touch. For

example, teen patients might misinterpret the male nurses' touch and perceive them as being gay (Evans, 2002). One participant working in a mother-baby unit stated that he was accused of inappropriately touching a newborn baby boy while he was changing his diaper.

The study conducted by Rajacich et al. (2013) explored male nurses' viewpoints of being a visible minority in the nursing profession. Participants stated that being a minority had both positive and negative aspects. Some men stated that being a minority motivated them to do their best because they represented other male nurses; they also had the opportunity to promote nursing to young men in schools. On the other hand, a few men reported that being a visible minority was harmful as it was associated with discrimination and prejudice (Rajacich et. al., 2013). For example, in Schmidt's (2016) study, male nursing students and nurses reported not getting enough recognition for their patient care; instead, they were often called to get help with lifting a patient and technology-related problems (Schmidt, 2016). Furthermore, a majority of them hated being identified as male nurses because it isolated them from their female counterparts, who are simply referred to as nurses (Rajacich et. al., 2013). The term "male nurse" further signifies that they are indeed a minority in this profession (Rajacich et. al., 2013).

### **Discussion**

The main theme of these articles revolved around the idea of care and how both genders demonstrated it. Providing physical comfort to patients, regardless of their age and gender, comes naturally to female nurses (Evans, 2002; Rajacich et al., 2013). Men nurses stated being reluctant to provide physical comfort to patients as they were afraid that their touch may be viewed as inappropriate (Schmidt, 2016; Rajacich et al., 2013). For example, the participants in Meadus and Twomey's study (2011) reported receiving little to no information on the use of touch during nursing school, so this made their transition into the clinical setting extremely difficult. For this reason, men have to put in extra efforts to build comfortable relationships with patients and delegate tasks that involved intimate touch of patients to avoid professional complications (Rajacich et al., 2013).

Another common theme that emerged was that men hated being referred to as male nurses (Schmidt, 2016; Rajacich et. al., 2013). The gendered-term “male nurses” made them feel that they do not belong in nursing (Schmidt, 2016; Rajacich et. al., 2013). This term further reinforced the norm that men are indeed a visible minority in this profession. Instead of being labeled as male nurses, the participants hoped to be simply known as nurses.

The articles that I reviewed explored common barriers that male nurses face in the nursing setting. However, lack of diversity was a major weakness of these studies. For example, Schmidt’s study included only college students from one university and they were mostly Caucasian. Evans’ (2002) study only explored eight male registered nurses’ experiences. None of these studies explored the female nurses’ viewpoints of men nurses in clinical settings. These studies cannot be generalized because the results were not representative of other men nurses across the country.

This literature review shows the continued need for promoting equal acceptance of male nurses in the clinical setting. The feminine image of a nurse in society is a significant barrier preventing men from choosing nursing as a profession (Meadus, 2000; Roth & Coleman, 2008). Therefore, I would like to expand this topic by exploring male nursing students’ experiences in nursing school and clinical settings. The results can be used to promote awareness of issues male nurses commonly face.

### **Conclusion**

Nursing is still a female-dominated profession, and this creates problems for men who are interested in this profession. Research suggests that men choose nursing as a career to provide care and help others, but they are questioned regarding their sexual orientation, and are considered inappropriate for bed-side nursing (O’Connor, 2015). Care is a core nursing principle, and nurses of both genders show care towards their patients differently. Providing comfort by touching comes naturally to female nurses. However, because men’s touch is sexualized in general, male nurses are more reluctant to touch their patients. Stereotypes that men are inappropriate for bed-side nursing impacts their ability to perform their duties to their best.



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