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### Attitudes and Perceptions towards Men in Nursing Education

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Wally J. Bartfay, RN, PhD<sup>1</sup>

Emma Bartfay, PhD<sup>1</sup>

Kimberley A. Clow, PhD<sup>2</sup>

Terry Wu, PhD<sup>3</sup>

1. Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ontario, Institute of Technology (UOIT), Oshawa, Ontario
2. Associate Professor, Faculty of Criminology and Justice Studies, UOIT
3. Professor, Faculty of Business and Information Technology, UOIT

Canada

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#### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The aim of the current investigation was to compare and contrast societal perceptions and attitudes towards men in nursing as reported by male and female nursing and non-nursing university students. **Methods:** A comparative study design was employed to investigate societal attitudes and perceptions towards male nurses enrolled in school of nursing in a mid-sized university in Ontario, Canada. A convenience non-random sampling method was employed that consisted of undergraduate nursing (N = 82) and non-nursing (N = 67) students. Perceptions and attitudes towards men in nursing were assessed using the Attitudes Towards Men in Nursing Scale (ATMINS). **Results:** Sixty-seven non-nursing students partook in this investigation, including 36 males and 31 females. The non-nursing female students ranged in age from 19 to 25 years (mean = 21.6 +/- standard deviation [S.D.] 4.9), and non-nursing male students ranged in age from 19 to 37 years (mean = 23.9 +/- 4.9 S.D.). The nursing female students ranged in age from 19 to 44 years (mean = 21.8 +/- 8.8 S.D.), and the male nursing students ranged in age from 19 to 46 years (mean = 28.9 +/- 8.8 S.D.). Overall, both female nursing and non-nursing students were found to have less favourable perceptions and negative attitudes towards male nursing students. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Our findings suggest that there is a general perception in Canadian society that nursing is a more suitable career choice for women than men. Moreover, societal perceptions and stereotypes towards male nurses (e.g., they are gay, effeminate, less compassionate and caring than female nurses) prevail, which may negatively contribute to their recruitment and retention in nursing programs. Greater efforts need to be taken to recruit more positive male role models in clinical practice and academia. Furthermore, recruitment ads for nursing should make greater efforts to portray the male presence in the profession. These strategies will help to address in part the current national and global shortages for nurses and also help to encourage diversity in the profession.

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#### PURPOSE

The recruitment and retention of men in nursing has been a challenge due to a variety of educational and social barriers, including the understanding that nursing is a traditionally female profession and the perception that men in nursing are effeminate or gay.<sup>1-4</sup> A growing number of nursing scholars and organizations have advocated for greater gender diversity in nursing.<sup>5-8</sup> Nonetheless, others have strongly argued against the need for recruiting more male nurses and maintaining the status quo and current societal perception of the profession.<sup>9,10</sup> London, for example, has declared that nursing is "an intrinsically female profession, based on female values and morals and a holistic world view."<sup>9(p.80)</sup> Currently, little is known about how societal perceptions and attitudes towards male nurses may negatively impact on their numbers in the profession.

The first statistics to report the total number of male nurses in Canada occurred in 1951, and they accounted for a mere 0.33% (N = 138) of all nurses nationally.<sup>11</sup> Despite the passage of almost six decades, men in nursing in Canada have retained their minority status at 5.6% for males (N = 14,007) versus 94.4% (N = 237,668) for females.<sup>12</sup> By comparison globally, registered male nurses in the United States comprise approximately 9% of all nurses nationally, 10% in the United Kingdom, 18% in Germany, 22.9% in Portugal, and 25% in the Philippines.<sup>3,13-15</sup> Although attrition rates for females nursing students have been reported to range between 8 and 15 percent, rates as high as 50 percent have been reported for males.<sup>16,17</sup>

Not surprisingly, there is evidence to suggest that male nursing students experience high levels of role strain and anxiety.<sup>2,18,19</sup> "Role Strain" is here defined of AS not fitting IN or being welcomed and/or discriminated against due to one's minority status.<sup>20,21</sup> It has been argued that the feminization of nursing curriculums, which includes the incorporation of female or motherly attributes associated with the concept of care, often helps to reinforce the belief that men in nursing are unwelcomed oddities, misfits or tokens.<sup>3,4,7,22</sup> Moreover, the absence of male role models helps to further create feelings of isolation and role strain for male students.<sup>1,6</sup> Accordingly, the aim of the current investigation was to compare and contrast societal perceptions and attitudes towards men in nursing as reported by male and female nursing and non-nursing university students in Ontario, Canada. It is hoped that these findings will provide important insights into how we may better recruit and retain more men to the profession and remove current barriers faced by males in schools of nursing.

## METHODS

A comparative study design was used to investigate societal attitudes and perceptions towards men in nursing in Canada. A non-random convenience sample was employed where the subjects consisted of undergraduate nursing students enrolled in a mid-sized collaborative entry-to-practice degree program in Ontario. Non-nursing students in undergraduate degree programs enrolled in business (i.e., accounting, marketing), information technology, general health sciences (i.e., kinesiology), and medical laboratory technology were recruited as the comparison group. Subjects were recruited from various classes on campus and four \$100 gift certificates were provided as a draw and incentive to partake in this study. This study had institutional approval and conformed to Tri-Council standards, and informed written consent was obtained from all participants.

Perceptions and attitudes towards men in nursing were assessed using the Attitudes Towards Men in Nursing Scale (ATMINS), as detailed in Figure 1 below. The ATMINS consists of a Likert-type scale comprised of six questions where subjects can choose strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree in response to the questions. The ATMINS was developed using a Delphi technique where four experts on men in nursing provided input into the development of the scale. The feedback and input provided by the experts were subsequently compiled and returned for further feedback and comments. A total of five mailings took place until consensus was reached by all experts on the panel. The ATMINS was subsequently piloted and found to have high test-retest reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.93, N = 22). The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science computer software program (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, percentages, and ranges were computed for the responses and demographic variables for male, female, and combined (male and female) respondents. Comparisons between group responses (i.e., males versus females & nursing versus non-nursing students) obtained on the ATMINS followed a two-step procedure. First, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed and a P-value of less than 0.05 was deemed significant *a priori*. Second, when a statistically significant difference was observed, post-hoc multiple pair-wise comparisons were performed using Duncan's multiple range test.

## HYPOTHESES

1. The majority of both nursing and non-nursing students will report that there is a general perception in Canadian society that nursing is not perceived as a very masculine or a macho-type of career for males to pursue.
2. The majority of both nursing and non-nursing students will report that there is a general perception in Canadian society that female nurses are more caring and nurturing than male nurses.
3. The majority of both nursing and non-nursing students will report that the current portrayal of nursing by the mass media discourages men from choosing nursing as a career.
4. The majority of both nursing and non-nursing students will report that the current portrayal of male nurses in society as being gay or effeminate discourages men from choosing nursing as a career.
5. In comparison to male students, the majority of female students will report that nursing is appropriate for females because they tend to be more caring and compassionate by their inborn nature.
6. In comparison to male students, the majority of female students will report that they would not encourage a male family member to pursue nursing as a career choice.

**Figure 1: Attitudes towards Men in Nursing Scale (ATMINS)**

**Subject Code:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Sex:** Male Female (Please circle) **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Faculty or university program currently enrolled in:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Year in current program:** 1 2 3 4 (Please circle)

**Directions:** We are interested in obtaining your personal opinions and insights regarding men in nursing. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and leave it blank without penalty. All the information on this form is regarded as confidential and will be only accessible to members of the research team. Please **circle** the response that best describes your own personal opinion related to the following questions. Your participation is greatly valued and appreciated.

1. **I believe that nursing is not perceived as a very masculine or a “macho-type” of career for males to pursue in our society.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree
2. **I feel that there is a general perception by society that female nurses are more caring and nurturing than male nurses.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree
3. **The current portrayal of nursing by the mass media (e.g., television, films, magazines) as being more suited for women discourages men from choosing nursing as a career.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree
4. **The current portrayal of male nurses as being “gay” or effeminate in nature by the mass media (e.g., television, films, magazines) discourages men from choosing nursing as a career.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree
5. **I feel that nursing is more appropriate for females because they tend to be more caring and compassionate by their inborn nature.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree
6. **I would encourage a male family member (e.g., brother, son, partner) to pursue nursing as a challenging and rewarding career choice.**  
 Strongly disagree                      Disagree Neutral                      Agree                      Strongly agree

**Thank-you!**

## RESULTS

Sixty-seven (N = 67) non-nursing students partook in this investigation, including 36 males and 31 females. The non-nursing female students ranged in age from 19 to 25 years (mean = 21.6 +/- standard deviation [S.D.] 4.9), and non-nursing male students ranged in age from 19 to 37 years (mean = 23.9 +/- 4.9 S.D.). Eighty-two (N = 82) nursing students partook in the study including 12 males and 70 females. The nursing female students ranged in age from 19 to 44 years (mean = 21.8 +/- 8.8 S.D.), and the male nursing students ranged in age from 19 to 46 years (mean = 28.9 +/- 8.8 S.D.). Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage totals for males, females and combined responses for non-nursing students on the ATMINS. Table 2 shows the responses obtained for nursing students on the ATMINS.

In support of hypothesis 1, the majority of both male and female non-nursing students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that nursing was not perceived as a very masculine or macho-type of career for males to pursue in Canadian society. Similarly, the majority of male and female nursing students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Table 2).

In support of hypothesis 2, results from question 2 of the ATMINS suggest that there is a general perception in Canadian society that female nurses are more caring and nurturing in comparison to male nurses. Indeed, the majority of both male and female non-nursing and nursing students were in agreement with this statement.

**Table 1: Non-nursing undergraduate students**

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 1 (3.2%) C = 3 (4.5%)	M = 3 (8.3%) F = 1 (3.2%) C = 4 (6%)	M = 3 (8.3%) F = 0 (0%) C = 3 (4.5%)	M = 22(61.1%) F = 24 (77.4%) C = 46 (68.7%)	M = 6 (16.7%) F = 5 (16.1%) C = 11 (16.4%)
2	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 3 (9.7%) C = 5 (7.5%)	M = 5 (13.8%) F = 3 (9.7%) C = 8 (11.9%)	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 9 (29%) C = 11(16.4%)	M = 14(38.9%) F = 13 (41.9%) C = 27 (40.3%)	M = 12(33.3%) F = 3 (9.7%) C = 15 (22.4%)
3	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 1 (3.2%) C = 3 (4.5%)	M = 5 (13.8%) F = 3 (9.7%) C = 8 (11.9%)	M = 3 (8.3%) F = 5 (16.1%) C = 8 (11.9%)	M = 14(38.9%) F = 17 (54.8%) C = 31 (46.3%)	M = 12(33.3%) F = 5 (16.1%) C = 17 (25.4%)
4	M = 1 (5.5%) F = 0 (0%) C =1 (4.5%)	M = 5 (13.8%) F = 7 (22.6%) C = 12 (17.9%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 7 (22.6%) C = 7 (10.5%)	M = 26(72.2%) F = 14 (45.2%) C = 40(59.7%)	M = 4 (11.1%) F = 4 (12.9%) C = 8 (11.4%)
5	M = 3 (8.3%) F = 4 (12.9%) C = 7 (10.5%)	M = 14(38.9%) F = 12 (38.7%) C = 26 (38.8%)	M = 6 (16.7%) F = 7 (22.6%) C = 13(19.4%)	M = 8 (22.2%) F = 8 (25.8%) C = 16 (23.9%)	M = 5 (13.8%) F = 0 (0%) C = 5 (7.5%)
6	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 0 (0%) C = 2 (3%)	M = 2 (5.5%) F = 1 (3.2%) C = 3 (4.5%)	M = 21(58.3%) F = 5 (16.1%) C = 26(38.8%)	M = 10(27.8%) F = 18 (58%) C = 28 (41.2%)	M = 1 (2.7%) F = 7 (22.6%) C = 8 (11.9%)

**Note:** All values shown are the frequency for each response and percentage (%) totals; all percentages have been rounded off and may not therefore total 100%; M = males; F = females; C = combined males and females; total number of males = 36; total number of females = 31; combined total = 67.

**Table 2: Nursing undergraduate students**

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 4 (5.7%) C = 4 (4.9%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 5 (7.1%) C = 5 (6.1%)	M = 7 (58.3%) F = 49 (70%) C = 56 (68.3%)	M = 5 (41.7%) F = 12 (17.1%) C = 17 (20.7%)
2	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 7 (10%) C = 7 (8.5%)	M = 1 (8.3%) F = 9 (12.9%) C = 10(12.2%)	M = 5 (41.7%) F = 43(61.4%) C = 48(58.5%)	M = 7 (58.3%) F = 11 (15.7%) C = 18 (22%)
3	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 5 (41.7%) F = 58(82.9%) C = 63(76.8%)	M = 7 (58.3%) F = 12 (17.1%) C = 19 (23.2%)
4	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 0 (0%) C = 0 (0%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 8 (11.4%) C = 8 (9.8%)	M = 3 (25%) F = 37(52.9%) C = 40(48.8%)	M = 9 (75%) F = 25 (35.7%) C = 34(41.5%)
5	M = 7(58.3%) F = 11(15.7%) C = 18 (22%)	M = 5 (41.7%) F = 8 (11.4%) C = 13 (15.9%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 2 (2.9%) C = 2 (2.4%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 38(54.3%) C = 38(46.3%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 11 (15.7%) C = 11 (13.4%)
6	M = 5 (41.7%) F = 4 (5.7%) C = 9 (11%)	M = 7 (58.3%) F = 5 (7.1%) C = 12 (14.6%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 7 (10%) C = 7 (8.5%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 44(62.9%) C = 44(53.7%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 10 (14.3%) C = 10 (12.2%)

**Note:** All values shown are the frequency for each response and percentage (%) totals; all percentages have been rounded off and may not therefore total 100%; M = males; F = females; C = combined males and females; total number of males = 12; total number of females = 70, and combined total = 82.

Question 3 stated that the current portrayal of nursing by the mass media as being more suited for women discourages men from pursuing nursing as a career. In support of hypothesis 3, the majority of both male and female non-nursing students (Table 1) and nursing students (Table 2) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Question 4 stated that the current portrayal of male nurses as being gay or effeminate in nature by the mass media discourages men from choosing nursing as a career. In support of hypothesis 4, the majority of non-nursing males (72.2%) and male nursing students (75%) agreed with statement 4. Similarly, 52.9% of female nursing students agreed with this statement and 35.7% strongly agreed.

Hypothesis 5 was only partially supported, as evidenced by the responses obtained on question 5 of the ATMINS for males and females. The majority of male and female non-nursing students agreed with this statement. Similarly, 54.3% and 15.7% of female nursing students, respectively, either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. By contrast, the majority of male nurses students either disagreed (41.7%) or strongly disagreed (58.3%) with question 5 ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Lastly, hypothesis 6 could not be supported by the results obtained for statement 6 of the ATMINS. Although the majority of male non-nursing students remained neutral as their response (58.3%), 27.8% agreed with this statement. By contrast, the majority of non-nursing students (44.8%) indicated that they were in disagreement with this statement ( $P < 0.01$ ). Surprisingly, the majority of male nursing students either disagreed (58.3%) or strongly disagreed (41.7%) with this statement, whereas the majority of female nursing students agreed (62.9%,  $P < 0.01$ ).

### CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Our results suggest that there is a general perception in Canadian society that female nurses are more caring and compassionate in nature. Similarly, Bartfay and Bartfay found that 93% of their female nursing students sampled agreed that nursing was a more appropriate profession for females because women tend to be more caring and compassionate by their inborn nature when compared to males.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the current societal perception between nursing and women is so dominant that merely reading the word nurse automatically activates the concept of the caring and compassionate female nurse.<sup>2,19,23</sup> Hence, this societal belief may be further reinforced by the feminization of nursing curriculums.<sup>3,4,20</sup> A Canadian qualitative study by Paterson et al. reported that female nursing faculty often expected male students to provide care to their clients based on female or motherly attributes.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, O'Lynn found that 30.9% of male respondents surveyed at 90 different schools of nursing in the United States reported that nursing faculty emphasized feminine ways of providing care and knowing, and 46.4% of male students perceived this as a significant barrier.<sup>7</sup> Nursing in Canada remains the only profession where men have retained their minority status since the turn of the century.<sup>11,12,18</sup> By comparison, men have been able to break-through the gender barriers in other professions once dominated by women, including elementary teaching, social work, and library sciences.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, a number of studies have reported that high school guidance counselors often discourage interested males to pursue nursing as a possible career option.<sup>13,24-27</sup>

The overall results from this study suggest that there is a general perception in Canadian society that nursing is a more suitable career choice for females than men. In a Canadian study involving undergraduate nursing students, one-third of each group of male and female respondents reported that females were superior in their natural aptitude for nursing.<sup>28</sup> In an American study, Auster surveyed the sex differences in attitudes towards nursing education of 335 male and 508 female students at 32 degree granting programs.<sup>29</sup> The survey revealed that men suffer from high levels of role strain, and student evaluations of their curriculums revealed preferences along sex-typed interests and values reflective of distinctive socialization patterns males and females acquire in society. Similar findings were reported by the Bernard Hodes Group employing a web-based survey of American nurses and students.<sup>18</sup> These findings may also help to explain, in part, why the majority of male nursing students in our study reported that they would not encourage a male family member to pursue nursing as a career choice.

Furthermore, results from our study are in agreement with others that suggest that the mass media (e.g., television, magazines) and entertainment industry contribute to the negative societal portrayal of men in nursing, which may discourage males from entering the profession.<sup>29-34</sup> These include the stereotyping of male nurses as oddities, psychotic killers, and being gay or highly effeminate in character. Motion pictures such as *Magnolia* and *Meet the Parents* help to reinforce these negative societal stereotypes about men in nursing.<sup>33,35,36</sup> For example, the actor Ben Stiller plays a male nurse in the recent film *Meet the Parents* who must face his father-in-law's belief that all male nurses are gay and effeminate.<sup>33,36</sup> In a Canadian qualitative study of men in nursing, one respondent stated: "*Males are never portrayed as hero's...If you see a male nurse in the movies- TV, he's crazy, psychotic or a serial killer.*"<sup>31(p.211)</sup> Similarly, Meadus & Twomey reported that the most common perceived barriers encountered by 250 registered Canadian male nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador were sexual stereotypes, lack of recruitment strategies, female-oriented profession, and a lack of positive male role models in the mass media.<sup>37</sup>

Taken together, the results from this study suggest that there is a general perception in Canadian society that nursing is a more suitable career choice for women than men. Moreover, societal perceptions and stereotypes towards male nurses (e.g., they are gay, effeminate, less compassionate and caring than females) prevail, which may negatively affect their recruitment and retention in nursing programs. Greater efforts need to be taken to recruit more male role models in clinical practice and academia. Furthermore, recruitment ads for nursing in Canada should make greater efforts to portray the male presence in the profession. Additional investigations are required to determine which strategies and media types can most effectively be utilized to recruit and retain more men to the profession of nursing. This will help to address current national and global shortages for nurses and also help to encourage diversity in the profession.

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