

## Gender-Role Identity Among Male Nursing Students: A Descriptive Study



### Nursing

**KEYWORDS :** Gender role, Nursing profession, role socialization, Male nursing students.

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### ABSTRACT

*The objectives of the study were to describe the reasons for choosing nursing to study, gender role classification, and gender-role characteristics according to Bem sex-role inventory among male nursing students admitted from two nursing schools in Chennai. A cross-sectional descriptive quantitative study was conducted using a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of demographic information and Bem-sex role inventory. The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics. Results revealed that the highest reported reason for choosing nursing to study was "Easy to go abroad" (27.87 %) and the lowest reported reason was "To earn a degree" (09.83%). Results revealed that 13.11% of students were found to be masculine, 31.15% androgynous, 29.51% undifferentiated, and 26.23% were feminine.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nursing has been labeled as a gender-oriented profession, and since Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern day nursing, it has tended to be a woman's career, making it difficult for men who wish to become nurses. Nightingale's personal vision of nursing was a purely feminine one and the qualities she considered essential for caring such as compassion, tenderness and unselfishness were in essence considered feminine. The concept of nursing as female work is influenced by society, politics and the economic system. The social construction of nursing as "woman's work" has tends to inhibit men from entering the nursing profession. Feminization of nursing is still an important issue. Over the past three decades there has been considerable attention in the nursing literature to the analysis of sex role characteristics and role strain in male nurses argues that the caring literature is generally associated with women and femininity.

Male nurses are continuously scrutinized for their ability to display both the feminine characteristics of a nurse whilst conforming to the hegemonic masculine ideology. When males choose a traditionally female occupation, they tend to experience role conflict. Men choose nursing due to job availability and security, and some were attracted by nursing emphasis on biological sciences, and the desire to work in a humanistic field. Some enter the profession with the aim of gaining a job in abroad.

There is a growing body of literature on men in nursing, but research has failed to question gender characteristics of male nursing students. Over all, men who enter nursing typically face questions about their masculinity or sexuality. Although the words **gender** and **sex** both have the sense 'the state of being male or female', they are typically used in slightly different ways: **sex** tends to refer to biological differences, while **gender** refers to cultural or social ones.

Socialization refers to people adapting ideas about social roles from other members of their society. The characteristics of instrumental socialization include the ability to compete, aggressiveness and ability to lead a power to accomplish tasks. Expressive socialization includes learning to nurture, to be affinitive and to be sensitive to needs of others. Gender expression refers to the external manifestation of one's gender identity, through "masculine," "feminine or gender-variant or gender neutral behavior, clothing, hairstyles, or body characteristics.

Gender roles differ according to cultural-historical context, and while most cultures express two genders of masculinity and femininity, some express more androgyny which

means that they have high masculinity and high femininity characteristics and has been proposed as a third gender. Their gender could be responsible for the reported difficulties that male nursing students have in finding jobs, as well as other challenges they face while in nursing services, a fourth category is when there is low masculinity and low femininity and was labeled as undifferentiated (Anthong, 2004). Consequently, it seems fair to suggest that nursing education can accommodate all types of students, those that are psychologically masculine, feminine androgynous or undifferentiated. Therefore, it is now time for nurse educators to work harder at breaking down the gender role stereotypes in nursing.

### The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To describe the reasons for choosing nursing to study among male nursing students
2. To describe male nursing students gender role classification according to Bem sex-role classification.
3. To describe the gender-role characteristics of male nursing students according to Bem sex-role characteristics.

### METHODS

#### Study design, setting, and sample

This is a descriptive quantitative research that used the cross sectional survey design through distributing a self administered questionnaire. Necessary permission was obtained from Competent authorities. The study was conducted among male nursing students studying B.Sc. Nursing from two nursing colleges in Chennai from 1<sup>st</sup> year to final year. The target population was all male undergraduate nursing students (n=61) and the inclusion criteria included being male undergraduate nursing students, willing to respond and give consent to participate in the study. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit the study participants.

### INSTRUMENT

The instrument of this study consists of two sections. The first section was the participants demographic characteristics form which asked participants regarding their age, the level of education, and the reasons for choosing nursing as a profession. The second section was the short-form Bem sex role inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981) which was a widely used instrument in measuring gender role perceptions. This inventory is composed of 30 items and three subscales: 10 items stereotypically masculine characteristics, 10 items stereotypically feminine characteristics, and 10 items neutral characteristics. Examples of stereotypically masculine characteristics include: aggressive, dominant and willing to take risks. Examples of stereotypically feminine character-

istics include: affectionate, sympathetic and understanding. The participants were asked to indicate how well each of the characteristics describes them on a seven point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true). The short-form BSRI is a widely used instrument in measuring gender role perceptions (Bem 1974) .

**RESULTS**

**Participants characteristics**

Completed questionnaires of 61 were collected. The students average age was 17-24 years. **Reasons for choosing nursing to study**

Results revealed that the highest reported reason was “Easy to go abroad” (27.87%) and the lowest reported reason was “To earn a degree” (09.83%).

**Table1: Reasons for the choice to study nursing among male nursing students (n=61)**

REASONS FOR CHOOSING NURSING PROFESSION	f	%
Like the profession	14	22.96
To earn a degree	06	09.83
Easiness to get job and earn	11	18.03
To help others	06	09.84
Encouragement by family	05	08.20
The only course I got	02	3.27
Easy to go abroad	17	27.87

**Gender-role classification of male nursing students**

Results of this study showed that the classification of male students to their gender-role according to short-form BSRI were follows: 8 students (13.11%) masculine, 19 students (31.15%) androgyny group, 18 students (26.23%) undifferentiated group, and 16 students (2.46%) feminine group.

**The Characteristics of students according to short-form BSRI**

As shown in Table 2 the average score for students’ masculine subscale was 4.80 out of 7 (SD=2.16). The highest masculine characteristics score (Mean= 6.24, SD=1.27) was for the item “Strong Personality “and the lowest masculine characteristics score (Mean= 3.93, SD=2.09) was for “Defend own beliefs”. The average score for feminine subscale was 4.86 out of 7 (SD= 2.24). The highest feminine characteristics score (Mean= 6.14, SD= 1.53) was for the item “Understanding” and the lowest feminine characteristics score (Mean= 3.47, SD= 2.32) was for the item “Shy”. The average score for students’ neutral subscale was 5.25 out of 7 (SD=0.70). The highest neutral characteristics score (Mean= 6.11, SD=1.59) was for the item “Truthful” and the lowest neutral characteristics score (Mean= 3.49, SD=2.02) was for “Moody”. Results revealed that nursing students neutral subscale had the higher average score, followed that of the feminine subscale and the masculine subscale.

**Table 2. Means and standards deviations of short-form BSRI subscales and subscales item characteristics (n=61)**

Sub	Mean	Item Characteristic	Mean	SD
Masculine	4.80 (SD=2.16)	Self Reliant	5.00	1.98
		Defend own beliefs	3.93	2.09
		Independent	4.01	2.14
		Analytical	4.80	2.05
		Leadership abilities	5.26	1.92
		Athletic	4.54	2.27

		Assertive	4.37	2.36		
		Strong Personality	6.24	1.27		
		Willing to take risks	5.34	2.21		
		Forceful	4.50	2.21		
Feminine	4.86 (SD=2.24)	Yielding	4.14	2.03		
		Cheerful	5.90	1.70		
		Shy	3.47	2.32		
		Sympathetic	5.44	1.93		
		Sensitive to others needs	5.55	1.87		
		Affectionate	5.57	1.91		
		Flatterable	3.65	2.00		
		Understanding	6.14	1.53		
		Loyal	5.95	1.66		
		Feminine	2.78	2.23		
Neutral	5.07 (SD=2.14)	Helpful	6.06	1.57		
		Moody	3.49	2.02		
		Reliable	5.29	2.02		
		Jealous	3.50	2.48		
		Truthful	6.11	1.59		
		conscientious	5.68	1.69		
		Theatrical	4.95	1.79		
		Happy	6.04	1.73		
		Secretive	5.01	2.25		
				Unpredictable	4.54	2.02

**DISCUSSION**

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study that aimed to explore male nursing students’ gender-role characteristics according to short-form BSRI characteristics. The study findings revealed that almost one third of the sample chooses the nursing as a field of specialization because it is easy to go abroad which ranked the highest reasons for studying nursing. It is due to financial reasons and availability of work.

The study findings indicated that the overall description of the gender-role of nursing students in this study was androgyny according to short-form BSRI. However, the study findings indicated that male nursing students also possess feminine characteristics such as: understanding 51 %, being affectionate 30%, loyal 48%, sympathetic 42 % and sensitive to other’s needs 43%. The nursing profession as a feminine one requires such traits, and this is consistent with Ozmedir et al (2008) who found a statistically significant relationship between gender’s perceptions about nursing as a female profession. Caring for patients by nurses requires the possession of characteristics such as being affectionate, sympathetic and sensitive to patient’s needs. Previous studies found that nursing students who graduated from nursing education program viewed nursing as a job more appropriate for women.

In this study nursing students were found to exhibit characteristics as being forceful and athletic which makes them competitive and willing to take risks which may hinders their easiness to be integrated in the nursing profession, and this was consistent with Evans (2004). The differences in expressive characteristics such as being sympathetic and affectionate were found between male and female nurses supporting the notion that male nurses perceive themselves as having feminine characteristics essentially required for nursing (Evans, 2004).

The androgynous sex-role characterization of male nurses

and its degree held to be desirable for nurses are represented with the presence of most of the masculine characteristics and some of the feminine ones which was found in this study, which will determine the indicators for future trends in nursing recruitment. Simpson (2004) described a typology of male workers in female dominated occupations classified as seekers, finders and settlers, and found that males benefit from their minority status in the female profession through enhanced leadership, and being given different treatment to occupy positions better than females counterparts.

The male nurses' characteristics of being affectionate help them in providing protection and defense as key aspects of care. Also being athletic makes them physically strong and gives them status and authority through their physical strength. Male nurses find challenges associated with carrying out intimate physical care which acts as a barrier to their duty of care especially to female patients. Caring involves touch as an important component of caring which was problematic for men because women's use of touch as caring behavior is normalized while sexualized men's touch. However, male nurses find difficulty to provide nursing care involving physical touch with patients especially for female patients which is culturally not accepted in India.

This study has important implications. Nursing educators need to develop their abilities to understand and describe male nursing students from the gender-role perspective better than the stereotype image which is present now a days. Recruitment of male nursing students needs to be based on the utilization of the necessary characteristics needed for the ideal role of the nurse. In the present, recruitment of male nursing students usually does not follow any rule.

The study findings may help in establishing rules for the recruitment of male nursing students in different academic settings based on personal characteristics required for nursing profession. The utilization of the study findings may help male nursing students to develop self-acceptance of their role as nurses based on the actual characteristics they possess. Planning for easy role transition from being nursing students to graduate nurses is suggested to be based on the gender-role perceptions as provided by the results of this study. The results of this study may help male nursing students to understand their gender-role characteristics, and may help them in the socialization and integration process in the nursing profession.

## CONCLUSION

The study findings demonstrated that the overall description of the gender-role identity of male nursing students in this study was masculine according to short-form BSRI. However, the study findings indicated that nursing students also possess feminine characteristics. The results of this study may help in providing evidence-based criteria for the gender-role perceptions of male nursing students for their recruitment and to increase the rate of their retention in the nursing profession.

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