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**The influence of gender bias on male nurses and nursing students in the obstetric,
maternal, and pediatric nursing profession.**

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NURS 498VH

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Abstract

This literature review analyzes if gender bias influences the disproportionate number of male nurses and male nursing students in the pediatric, maternal, and obstetric nursing fields as compared to nursing as a whole. PubMed and CINAHL databases were utilized to find 15 research articles focused on the experiences of male nurses and male nursing students. These articles were compared amongst each other to find common themes of the male experience in the nursing fields of pediatrics, maternity, and obstetrics. The three common themes found were 1) Men tend to encounter situations where their professionalism will be monitored more closely when assigned to female patients to a greater extent than their female colleagues who are assigned to male patients 2) Personality and character have a positive impact in the building of trusting relationships with patients and their families, but awareness of gender still elicits a mental conflict and merits a difference in care 3) Gender bias related barriers in the nursing profession leads to role strain. In conclusion, gender bias is found to influence the disparity of male nurses and male nursing students in the particular nursing fields of pediatrics, maternal, and obstetrics due to a perceived difference in quality of care based on gender.

Introduction

Importance

Male nurses must balance two different roles in the nursing profession. The first role is their task role. This is to demonstrate the ability to perform job requirements such as nursing assessments in an evidence based practical approach that are tailored to their patients' needs. The second role pertains to their gender, which is acknowledging their presence as a male when working in a predominately female environment. The task role is taught during nursing school and other forms of education. As they gain experience in the workforce, the ease of performing their tasks more effectively improves. The second role, however, is a constantly evolving task that is typically experienced from the first day of nursing school and is expected to play a part throughout their career. Men in nursing do not have the privilege to believe that their gender does not have an impact on patients. Male nurses are viewed differently just for being male, which requires them to take on the extra responsibility of modifying their patient interaction to provide a different kind of patient experience compared to their female colleagues.

For example, in 2002, Evans called the male nurse a "cautious caregiver", meaning they individually have to take an extra step in moments where their male gender status will come into question, such as delivering care that would require them to deal with a patients' genital area or when they are expected to use skillsets like compassion, kindness, and empathy (Evans, 2002). These are traits that are typically viewed as more inherently feminine. Understandably, being cautious is necessary in order to avoid any misunderstanding of sexual implications that could arise while taking care of female adults and children. Yet, at the same time, this need of constant awareness of gender recognition results in many male nurses experiencing role strain (MacWilliams, Schmidt, & Bleich, 2013). It is important to acknowledge that gender bias exists

for male nurses in this specific regard so that we may try to understand why and where those biases occur, and how to lessen these biases so that both male and female nurses can provide competent and trustworthy care to patients.

Background

There are currently 4,242,436 active registered nursing licenses in the United States, of which, only 9.8% of those licenses belong to those who identify as male (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2021). Consequently, 90% belonging to females, and 0.2% identifying as other (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2021). The lack of male participation in the nursing field extends into nursing school programs as well. A census of United States BSN programs from 2014 found that male nursing students made up 14% of the population, but that number has steadily declined to 11.5% in 2019 (National League for Nursing, 2014). These statistics effectively demonstrate that men are a minority in the nursing field. The proportion of male nurses decline further when examining the fields of pediatrics, maternity, and obstetrics. In these fields, male nurses comprise an even smaller proportion of the population than the national averages. In fact, male members comprise 1.8% of the population in the American College of Nurse Midwives (American College of Nurse-Midwives, 2021). Trends in nursing schools, hospital systems and other nursing related affiliations have long marketed to males to try to increase the proportion of males in their institutions, however, male nurse participation in pediatric, maternal, and obstetric related fields have remained stagnant.

This literature review will analyze gender bias and its role as a potential barrier that may be deterring male nurses to certain fields. This literature review will also try to bring a more conclusive understanding as to why gender bias occurs towards men in pediatric and obstetric nursing fields by utilizing available research data on male nursing experiences around the world.

Gaps in Literature

Gender bias towards male nurses in the pediatric and obstetric profession is not an abundantly researched topic. This is mostly due to the small sample size of male nurses that is present in those fields. Conversely, research of the male nurse experience in general is well-studied. Many studies highlight the disparities of males in the nursing profession, but few evaluate sub-fields of nursing, such as the fields of pediatrics and obstetrics.

Purpose

The purpose of this analysis is to see if gender bias plays a role in the disproportion of male nurses in the pediatric, maternal, and obstetric profession. This literature review will utilize studies that analyze the male nurse or male nursing student's experience in the pediatric, maternal, and obstetric clinical setting in order to understand the disparity.

Methods

Information Sources

PubMed and CINAHL were searched systematically for this review using mesh terms and subheadings with certain applied filters. Access to otherwise inaccessible articles was granted through University of Arkansas Interlibrary Loan. Supplemental studies were reached using manual web searches held at the discretion of researchers from already published studies or articles.

Search Strategy

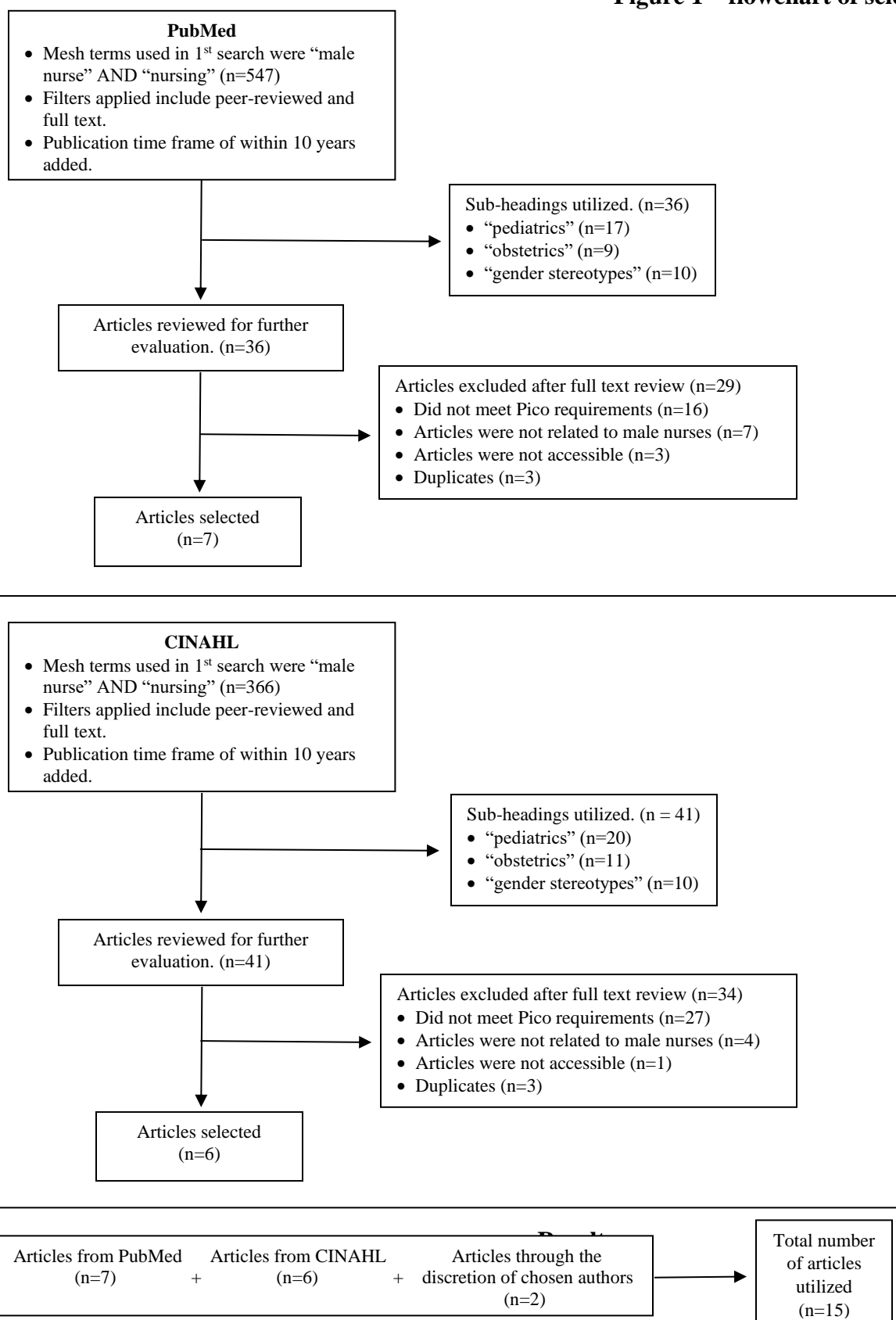
In both PubMed and CINAHL, the search terms utilized were [“male nurse” AND “nursing”]. To narrow down more specific articles needed, subheadings of “pediatrics”,

“obstetrics”, and “gender stereotypes” was used. Each subheading was searched individually, resulting in four separate searches through each database. Filters applied prior to initial searches were a publication date of within 20 years and a peer-reviewed requirement. An added filter of nursing discipline was applied during searches if results came back too broad. Important filters that were not applied include texts in English and of United States origin. International texts were selected to have access to a greater number of studies regarding this topic. A visual pathway of the search strategy can be seen in the **Figure 1** flowchart below. **Figure 1** provides detail to the number of articles that each search engine resulted separately, as well as how each search engine was navigated to select the chosen articles. The final article selection is also calculated in **Figure 1**.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Study eligibility was determined if the article or study captured one of the following PICO elements: (a) the study was conducted on male nursing students or current male nurses in a child, maternal, or obstetric clinical setting (P); (b) the study presented qualitative or quantitative data that examined males in the nursing profession through statistical or narrative analyses of interviews, surveys, or phenomenological observations, and included both subjective and objective research (I); (c) the study showcased male nursing experiences, as well as female nursing experiences related to their opinions of men in nursing (C); (d) the study reviewed outcomes detailing the results in regards to male nurses in the pediatric and obstetric nursing field (O). Studies were excluded automatically if its topic pertained to a nursing field other than pediatrics, maternal or obstetrics, or did not include data or research from men in those nursing fields.

Figure 1 – flowchart of selected articles



Summary of Quantitative Studies

Two quantitative studies about male nursing students were analyzed. The first study was a cross-sectional examination on male nursing students in Taiwan. The researchers of the study (Hung, et al., 2019) found that male nursing students who scored high on a nursing image study engaged in greater caring behaviors throughout their clinical experience. The nursing image was determined using a questionnaire that made connections between nursing care, caring behaviors, and gender-friendliness barriers. Caring behaviors examined were actions such as displaying empathy, compassion, and benevolence care. Throughout the study, results showed that the male nursing students' nursing image and caring behaviors decreased when gender-friendliness barriers were present throughout their clinical experience (Hung, et al., 2019).

A second study from Tollison (2018) was a randomized control observational study of male nursing students in the United States. The researcher (Tollison, 2018) found that empathy was the most significant interaction among male nursing students in a clinical simulation. The other measures for the study were patient management and a control group, with empathy serving as the stereotype threat. Male nursing students were most attentive during simulation while within the empathy framework (Tollison, 2018).

Summary of Qualitative Identified Studies

Five studies that were analyzed attained data through structured interviews. One study by Arreciado Marañón et al. (2019) interviewed 12 male nurses working in maternal and child health fields in the United States to seek what would determine the basis of the relationship with their patients or patient's families. The participants expressed a common answer that the basis of their relationship was built by their personality rather than their gender (Arreciado Marañón,

2019). However, all the participants mentioned to have set more concrete boundaries with their patients due to the gender difference. The second study by Mitra et. al (2018) sought to examine the experiences of male nursing students who had participated in an obstetric clinical rotation at universities in the Southeastern region of the United States. With 7 responses, the common themes noted between the participants were preconceptions of the obstetric profession being associated and expected more for the female nurse, not feeling welcomed within their role during clinical rotation, and a perceived feeling of rejection from their fellow classmates towards the rotation (Mitra, 2018). General thoughts of the maternity care unit were that female nurses rather than male nurses are often expected to fill that position (Mitra, 2018). The third interview study by Christensen and Knight (2014) sampled 5 baccalaureate nursing students from New Zealand. A common theme of male bias was noted. One student experienced gender bias when he was instructed to care for only male newborns in a post-partum setting (Christensen & Knight, 2014). The participants also recognized unwritten rules regarding assessing female patients' perineal area, but not seeing the rules applied to female nurses assessing male perineal areas (Christensen & Knight, 2014). On developing relationships with female colleagues, one male student stated "I have been told on a number of occasions that nursing is no place for men" due to the feminization of nursing care on a maternity unit (Christensen & Knight, 2014). The fourth study by Jodal and Heggen (2015) was a narrative approach that documented the stories of two nursing students. These two students both had similar experiences that drew them to pursue nursing as a career. For instance, one participant had previously viewed a nurse calmly communicate and control a violent situation with a patient undergoing a mental health crisis. The other participant had witnessed therapeutic communication, patience, and warmth provided towards an aggressive patient with late-stage dementia. These stereotypically feminine traits of care are what drew

these participants to nursing. The authors state that the participants' view on nursing care comes from empathy and closeness rather than typical masculine features such as capacity, insight, decisiveness, and action (Jordal & Heggen, 2015). These men thus narrate their stories about care as a negotiation, both within and outside traditional masculine roles with a need to find balance in traditional feminine roles (Jordal & Heggen, 2015). A fifth focus group study by Evans (2002) on male nursing students in Canada reported fearing that their touch would be perceived as sexual rather than professional; these students said they tended to seek help from female colleagues when performing intimate assessments (Evans, 2002). Here, Evans coins the term of "cautious caregivers" to describe male nurses. The participants had developed a strategy demonstrating a series of steps to maintain a level of professionalism between themselves and their patients; 1) build trust prior to touch 2) maintain formality 3) project a traditional nursing image 4) work with female colleagues when needed 5) delegate tasks that required intimate touch to female colleagues and 6) modify techniques when intimate touch was needed to maximize patient comfort (Evans, 2002).

In addition to the previous five interview studies, three more studies were analyzed which attained their data through focus groups. One study with 11 participants from members of American Association for Men in Nursing (AAMN) concluded that its members' role expectations were most influenced by professional acceptance from peers and patient perceptions (Smith, Lane, Brackney, & Horne, 2020). These participants stated how workplace expectations did in fact have a direct correlation with being male, and despite having positive interactions with their patients, their work environment sometimes lacked social support from peers which led to feelings of isolation. In another focus group study, Meadus and Twomey (2011) sought to explore the experiences of 27 male nursing students. These participants determined their

maternal clinical rotations were heavily influence by their gender (Meadus & Twomey, 2011). Gender stereotypes were present in the form of side comments from peers or instructors. One participant expressed their obstetric clinical experience as feeling like a “fish out of water” due to having peers point out he was the only male on the floor in a constant but negative manner. Other participants agreed that they stood out during school, feeling that clinical instructors would more often point them out in class since they were usually the only male in the room and easily recognizable. One male student from this focus group stated feeling like he was “under a microscope” during school since teachers would address the rest of the class as a whole unit but point him out singularly much more often. These participants also agreed on feeling judged when they expressed caring aspects during their maternal rotation. Ironically, one study by Petges and Sabio (2020) with 13 male nursing student participants from a Midwestern university in the United States said one of the most common factors for why men chose the nursing profession were for the caring aspect of the profession, as well as the perceived job security and financial reward (Petges & Sabio, 2020). In that same study, responses from females were similar in reasons for choosing nursing, however, the men in this study stated how they still received gender bias in the clinical setting despite those similarities to their female counterparts.

Furthermore, three online survey studies were selected for analysis. One survey study conducted by Bly et al. (2020) examined the attitudes of male and female midwives who were members of the American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM). The results from 864 respondents with 97.4% identifying as female, 2.5% identifying as male, and 0.1% as other, concluded that 71.4% of the respondents believed men belonged in the midwife profession while 9.9% did not believed men belonged in the profession; 39.5% also stated that gender had an influence in midwifery education (Bly, Ellis, Ritter, & Kantrowitz-Gordon, 2020). A great

number, 72%, supported gender diversification by allocating resources towards education and recruitment of males to the midwife profession (Bly, Ellis, Ritter, & Kantrowitz-Gordon, 2020). The other online survey study selected was conducted by Stanley et al. (2016) and was for male and female nurses who worked in Western Australia. 247 males responded and researchers found that only 3.2% worked in pediatrics and 0.8% worked in maternal care (Stanley, et al., 2016). Despite the low turnout in those professions, 50% of the male participants did respond with ‘a desire to help’ as the primary reason for choosing a nursing career, with the desire for a stable career as the second most common reason, a similar characteristic from the findings of Petges and Sabio (2020). The third study utilizing surveys as their means for data was conducted by Kantrowitz-Gordon et al. (2014) and had 31 respondents, 26 of which were members of the ACNM and 5 were students in an accredited midwifery program. The common findings between the respondents were feelings of being singled out during their education, a lack of social support from peers, and feelings of exclusion during education or work. However, all participants responded in agreement to having pride in their work despite the paradox of being a minority in their field as a male.

Data Extraction

Of the 15 studies selected for review, the authors names, year of publication, country of origin, study design, and sample size was examined to ensure search criteria was being met. The purpose of the study, description of participants and the study’s results were examined to ensure that they answered the predetermined PICO requirements. The information extracted from the studies can be found in **Table 1** listed in alphabetical order.

Table 1 – characteristics of study findings

Authors, Year of Publication, Country	Study design, Sample size	Purpose of the study	Participants	Abstract Results
Arreciado Marañón, A. Rodriguez-Martín, D. Galbany-Estragués, P. 2019 United States	Descriptive qualitative research through semi-structured interviews N = 12	To learn how male nurses view and manage their work relationships with families of hospitalized children and see if any influence of gender roles and stereotypes are present.	Male nurses who worked in maternal and child health	Key results were that the male nurses' work relationship with the families was attributed to personality rather than to gender. Male nurses also claimed to set more concrete limits between families than their female coworkers.
Bly, K. C. Ellis, S. A. Ritter, R. J. Kantrowitz-Gordon, I. 2020 United States	Data analysis from qualitative responses from online survey N = 864	Assessed attitudes and experiences towards male midwives, opinions of whether men belonged in midwife profession, whether gender impacts quality of care, and see if exposure to male midwives impacts attitudes towards gender diversification on ACNM.	69, 965 surveys were sent to members of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM); of which 864 completed the survey.	71.4% of respondents think men belong in midwifery, 74% think that gender does not affect quality of care, 72% think ACNM should support gender diversification.
Christensen, M. Knight, J. 2014 New Zealand	Narrative analyses N = 5	To examine the experiences of men in a baccalaureate program within a regional New Zealand context	Male nursing students in a BSN program	Four key themes identified: the want of a flexible career with promise, perceived gender inequality when providing care, the need to develop boundaries with female colleagues and patients, and

				unique advantages to being male
Evans, J. A. 2002 Canada	Narrative analysis through semi-structured interviews N = 8	To explore the experience of men nurses and the ways in which gender relations structure different work experiences for women and men in the same profession	Male nurses who have a license and work in Canada	Stereotypes such as men being sexually aggressive, or homosexual create a complex and contradictory situation of acceptance, rejection, and suspicion of men as nurturers and caregivers
Hung, C. Wu, P. Liu, N. Hsu, W. Lee, B. Pai, H 2018 Taiwan	Quantitative cross-sectional research N = 141	Data collection was utilized with the Caring Assessment Report Evaluation Q-sort (CARE-Q), Gender-Friendliness Barriers in Nursing Programs (GFB-NP), and Nursing Image as a Profession Questionnaire (NIPQ) in order to discover the relationship between nursing image, caring behaviors, and gender-friendliness barriers.	Male nursing students with at least 1 month of clinical experience	Male nursing students who scored a high nursing image on the study engaged in greater caring behavior, while at the same time, gender-friendliness barriers decreased students' nursing image and caring behavior.
Jordal, K. Heggen, K. 2015 Norway	Narrative analyses through interviews N = 2	To view male students' understanding on male-based caregiving as part of nursing care through illustrative storytelling	Male nursing students who are in their first year of nursing training at a Norwegian institution	Male nursing students enter the profession with a feminized understanding of care and lack male mentors, curriculum, and stories to provide experience-based

				meaning to nursing care
Krantrowitz-Gordon, I. Ellis, S. A. McFarlane, A. 2014 United States	Qualitative description through surveys N = 31	To identify common themes throughout the midwife profession regarding the impact of gender on education and practice	Male or transgender male midwives who are members of the American College of Nurse-Midwives or students of an accredited midwife program	5 related themes were identified: feeling singled out, lack of social support, feeling excluded, having pride in work, a paradox of man as a minority
Meadus, R. J. Twomey, J. C. 2011 Canada	Phenomenological research done through focus groups N = 27	To explore the lived experiences of men in a predominately female-concentrated baccalaureate nursing program.	Male nursing students in a 4-year program who were in different years.	5 common themes were highlighted: why students chose nursing, the challenges faced becoming a male nurse, expressing caring traits within the nursing role, gender-based stereotypes, feeling visible/invisible.
Mitra, J. M. L. Phillips, K. Wachs, J. E. 2018 United States	Phenomenological research done through individual interviews N = 7	To describe the experiences of male nursing students who are men at a Southeastern university before, during, and after their obstetric clinical rotations.	Male nursing students who participated in obstetric clinical nursing rotation	4 common themes were highlighted: preconceptions regarding obstetric profession, expression of feeling welcomed within role, perceived rejection from participants, thoughts on maternity unit culture.
Petges, N. Sabio, C. 2020 United States	Phenomenological research done through focus groups N = 13	To determine if progress had been made toward a goal of an improved clinical experience of male nursing students	Male nursing students who had completed 3 semesters out of the required 5	Males choose nursing for the caring aspects of the profession, perceived job security, and

		attend a Midwestern university		financial reward. Highlights that men experience gender bias in didactic and clinical education.
Smith, C M. Lane, S. H. Brackney, D. E. Horne, C. E. 2020 United States	Interpretive descriptive methodology using focus groups N = 11	To investigate the lived experiences of male nurses in order to understand persistently low male census on nursing profession	Male nurses who are members of American Association for Men in Nursing	Role expectations were influenced heavily by sociocultural views, professional acceptance by peers, and patient perceptions while workplace relations were associated with being male, social cliques and peer support.
Stanley, D. Beament, T. Falconer, D. Haigh, M. Saunders, R. Stanley, K. Wall, P. Nielson, S. 2016 Australia	Non-experimental, comparative, descriptive research through survey N = 1055	To explore the perception of men in nursing from the perspective of male and female nurses.	Mix of male and female nurses in Western Australia of different areas of profession, years of experience, age, and education.	Influencing factors for choosing nursing were similar between males and females, but misconceptions of males in nursing remain present. The limited awareness of career opportunities offered to men in nursing results in reduced recruitment potential.
Tollison, A. C. 2018 United States	Randomized controlled observational study; quantitative N = 183	To determine the presence of stereotype threat in 3 evaluative themes: patient management, empathy, or control, with empathy serving as a form of stereotype threat.	Male nursing students assigned to a random group	Interaction effect observed between male students and empathy simulation. Students were the most tentative in simulation within the empathy frame.

Discussion

Three common themes can be seen through the articles selected for review.

- 1) The societal view of sexualized male touch is transferred to the nursing profession. Men in nursing face a balancing act while working or studying in the maternal, pediatric, or obstetric clinical setting. The fear of overstepping a boundary of patient comfort risks them being seen as borderline predatorial (Christensen & Knight, 2014). Men tend to encounter situations where their professionalism will be monitored more closely and potentially scrutinized by peers or the patients themselves when assigned to female patients to a greater extent than their female colleagues who are assigned to male patients (Mitra, 2018; Smith, Lane, Brackney, & Horne, 2020).
- 2) Personality and character have a positive impact in the building of trusting relationships with patients and their families, but awareness of gender still elicits a mental conflict and merits a difference in care (Arreciado Marañón, 2019; Evans, 2002; Golden, 2018; Petges & Sabio, 2020). Throughout the selected findings, participants were able to establish professional relationships with their patients. With nursing still seen as a profession that requires a caring approach, a commonly identified female trait, the difference between patient relationships established by men and those by their female colleagues is the need to constantly remember that their gender could be the difference in a patient receiving care at a level of comfort that otherwise would not be under threat if the case was a female nurse providing the care (Arreciado Marañón, 2019; Evans, 2002; Smith, Lane, Brackney, & Horne, 2020; Tollison, 2018).

- 3) Gender bias related barriers in the nursing profession leads to role strain. Nursing is a physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding job. The addition of constant awareness of being male needs to be taken into consideration when encountering patients and peers, leading to male nurses feeling hypervigilant. The role strain that comes with ensuring those around them of their well-intended professionalism may deter men from choosing fields such as pediatrics, obstetrics, and maternity care where certain caring type characteristics are viewed as exclusively female. This gender bias related role strain is present despite male nurses and nursing students continuously choose nursing for traits that are seen as more feminine (Jordal & Heggen, 2015; Meadus & Twomey, 2011; Petges & Sabio, 2020).

Limitations

Limitations identified were shortcomings from interview studies where authors did not include the entire manuscript from their interviews, but rather only highlighted the responses to which aligned with their intended goals. This did not allow a full review of the participants' responses which could have had an impact to the outcome of this analyses. Other limitations were that participant's answers to qualitative studies were held to personal experiences and opinions. This led to a wide range of differences in responses and a variation in the questions being asked. Additionally, the samples of the qualitative studies did not encompass a vast number of respondents, resulting in this analysis relying on the responses of a few to be the voice of many, leading to potential biases due to individual's own personal background, opinions, personality, and experiences.

Identified Gaps

The lack of research related to gender bias towards male nurses specifically in the pediatric, maternal, and obstetric profession is validated in light of the identified research findings. Mostly due to the small sample size of male nurses that is present in those fields, this analysis will aim to add to the scant literature regarding the topic of male nurses in those fields. Gender bias towards male nurses is an abundantly researched topic, but few studies highlight that bias in fields where men are an even greater minority, such as obstetrics, maternal care, and pediatrics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that society's gender bias towards males still plays a large role in the perception of a male nurse. Male nurses experience gender barriers from sexualized preconceptions, difference in treatment during education from peers, and questioning of their caring traits. Despite well intentions for reasons to join the nursing profession, males must take on the added measure of setting merited professional boundaries of extra caution to be perceived as well-rounded nurses. The reality for males in the nursing profession is that as long as females dominate the sector, society will view their presence as outliers and require them to make additional efforts in displaying professionalism in order to gain acceptance as competent nurses.

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