The Gendered Profession: Resuscitating the Value of the Male Nurse in the Pre-Health Undergraduate Eye

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Background

Gender Gap: Women represent 88.5% of registered nurses in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021)
- Nurses have been devalued and degraded socially, professionally, and economically, especially with COVID-19 (National Nurses United, 2020).
- Reflects gender roles and societal perceptions of women as "lesser" and thus nursing is avoided by men.

Role/Goal Congruence Theory
- According to role congruence theory, social roles direct individuals on their life path, most notably in their career choices (Diekman & Eagly, 2008).
- Goal congruence theory suggests men and women tend to chase careers that align with agentic or communal goals, respectively (Diekman et al., 2010).

Misconceptions of Nursing
- People generally perceive nursing as feminine and low in status.
- But the responsibilities of a nurse are as equally rooted in management and medical competence as they are in interpersonal care (Oldland et al., 2020).
- If people perceive nursing as more agentic based on the legitimate role nurses play on a day-to-day basis, given role and goal congruency theories, perhaps male students would be more interested in pursuing the career.

Stigma or Nursing itself?
- Objective: Will removing the potentially biasing label of "nurse" and reframing nursing in agentic language increase men's interest in the nursing profession?

Methods

2 (gender) x 2 (nursing description: agentic, communal) x 3 (interest in nursing: pre-description, with description, with label) mixed-model design
- **Participants**: USD Undergraduate Pre-health students (n=57)
  - 6 Male, 51 Female
- **Recruitment:** Pre-health newsletter & organization group messaging
- **Incentives:** Raffle, eight $25 gift certificates (Funding: Lawrence Hinman Research Grant)
- **Procedure:** Participants rated their interest in nursing at 3 points
  - Baseline interest of Pre-health specialties, including Pre-nursing
  - After reading an unlabeled nursing description, randomly assigned to be communal or agentic (see screenshots below)
  - After adding the label of "nursing" to the description

Communal Description of Nursing

In this occupation, the individual should hold these characteristics:
I. Compassionate
II. Organized
III. Responsible
IV. Competent
V. Careful

In this occupation, the individual should expect to:
I. Be responsible for patient care and help to create a plan for their patient in terms of diagnosis and prognosis.
II. Coordinate care and collaborate with a team.
III. Implement treatment plans with attention to detail & consistency.
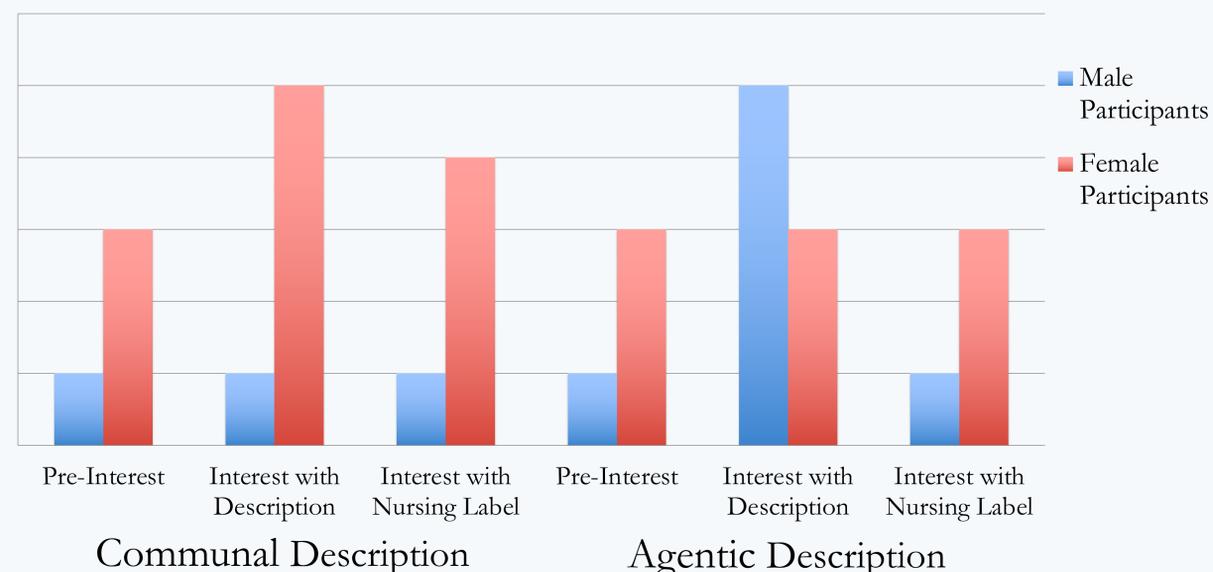
Agentic Description of Nursing

In this occupation, the individual should hold these characteristics:
I. Analytical
II. Articulate
III. Competent
IV. Responsible
V. Assertive

In this occupation, the individual should expect to:
I. Make critical decisions and diagnoses for the patient based on analysis of exams and histories.
II. Strategize patient plans with a team of practicing collaborators.
III. Implement treatment plans with attention to detail & consistency.

Expected Results

Communal Description — Agentic Description. Male Participants / Female Participants. Categories: Pre-Interest, Interest with Description, Interest with Nursing Label.

Discussion

Data collection is ongoing, however if the results match the expected results, then the data suggests male students are more interested in nursing when it is described with agentic language and the stigmatizing label is removed.
- In order to close the gender gap in the field of nursing, we must reframe its social understanding to ensure students believe that their career aspirations will fulfill their goals and make nursing a goal congruent choice for men and women.
- It will also be interesting to see if women's interest in nursing is impacted by the descriptions or label, as we do not want to turn women away from considering nursing as a career.

Future Directions

- This study should be repeated in an environment with more resources for accessing a larger male Pre-Health population, as the current sample of men is very small.
- Future studies should also explore stigma regarding nursing more directly to gather a clearer picture of the impact is has in deterring male students away from nursing.

Acknowledgements