

# **GENDER-ROLE IDENTITY AMONG JORDANIAN MALE NURSING STUDENTS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

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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 Jordanian nursing students recruited from two nursing schools in Jordan. 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 (means and standard deviations). Results revealed that the highest reported reason for choosing nursing to study was “I like the profession” (36.9 %) and the lowest reported reason was “The only specialty I got approval at the University” 3.3%. Results revealed that 43.44% of students were found to be masculine, 45.08% androgyny, 9.02% undifferentiated, and 2.46% were feminine. Results revealed also that nursing students’ masculine subscale had the higher average score (5.58) out of 7, followed that of the neutral subscale (5.25) and the feminine subscale (4.73). The study suggests that modification of the policies for recruitment of nursing students at the nursing schools in Jordan is needed to meet the gender- role requirements of the nursing profession to enhance male nurses’ retention and promotion in nursing.

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**Keywords:** Gender role, Nursing profession, role socialization, Male nursing students

## **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 (Evans, 2004) and the qualities she considered essential for caring such as

compassion, tenderness and unselfishness were in essence considered feminine (Brown et al, 2000 ). The concept of nursing as female work is influenced by society, politics and the economic system (Meadus, 2000; McMillian et al. 2006). The social construction of nursing as “woman’s work” has tends to inhibit men from entering the nursing profession (Meadus, 2000). Feminization of nursing is still an important issue (Davies, 1998; Harloyd et al. 2002). Over the past three decades there has been considerable attention in the nursing literature to the analysis of sex role characteristics (Galbraith, 1991) and role strain in male nurses (Fitzgerald, 1995). O’Lynn (2006) argues that the caring literature is generally associated with women and femininity.

Nursing is seen as a feminine occupation and is thus devalued in male dominated patriarchal society. It is stereotyped as having the traits of nurturing, caring, dependence and submission. This contrasts with the perceived male traits of strength, dominance and aggression. Nurses are considered to be compassionate, with a desire to care for and assist others in a motherly fashion (Kidder, 2002). Thus, the entrenched gender-based impression of nursing is particularly strong (Jinks and Bradley, 2004). Gender issues must be considered when looking at career development (Tracey and Nicholl, 2007). According to previous studies, male nurses usually perceive higher emotional labour and have better opportunities for promotion at higher level positions than female nurses (Tracey and Nicholl, 2007). Male nurses are continuously scrutinized for their ability to display both the feminine characteristics of a nurse whilst conforming to the hegemonic masculine ideology (Fisher, 2009).When males choose a traditionally female occupation, they tend to experience role conflict(Fisher, 2009). Men were less satisfied in nursing than women (Lambert and Lambert, 2001; Sochalski, 2002), and male nurses have greater turnover intentions than do female nurses. Simpson (2005) have interviewed men in female-dominated occupations argued that where negative stereotyping occurs then decisions to withdraw from the occupation are much more likely.

Nursing is considered to combine professional values as well as feminine values of caring and support. Surveys of nurses have shown significant differences in rates of leaving nursing between men and women: 8 % of men nurses dropped out of nursing within 4 years of graduating from nursing school compared with 4% of women (Sochalski, 2002). However, several studies have found no significant difference between male and female nurses in masculine and feminine characteristics, with both groups displaying a tendency towards androgyny (Fisher, 2009; Pontin, 1988). Loughrey (2008) found that male nurses identified themselves more strongly with the feminine sex role than they did with the masculine sex role. 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 administration.

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 (Streubert, 1994). 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( Oxford Dictionary, 2010). 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 affiliative and to be sensitive to needs of others (Strasen, 1992). 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.

As far as the authors are aware, this is the first study in Jordan that addressed the gender-role identity of male nursing students as they decided to enter a profession characterized with femininity. Such study can increase our understanding of barriers, the impact the recruitment and retention of male nurses in the profession. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To describe the reasons for choosing nursing to study among male Jordanian 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. The study was conducted among male Jordanian nursing students from two nursing schools in Jordan (the University of Jordan and Al-Ahliyyah Amman University). The target population was all male undergraduate nursing students and the inclusion criteria included being male undergraduate nursing students, willing to respond and give consent to participate in the study and have good command of Arabic Language that will help in understanding the personality characteristics included in the inventory used for the collection of data. 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 characteristics 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) . Bem (1974) reported high internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the original BSRI. Coefficient alphas computed for masculinity and femininity revealed high reliability (Masculinity alpha = .86; Femininity alpha = .82). However, through research efforts Bem developed the short form of the BSRI (Bem, 1981), in which half of the items from the original instrument were eliminated to form a 30-item inventory. The internal consistency of the short BSRI correlates highly around 0.90 with the original form ( Holt and Ellis 1998). This study found Cronbachs alpha to be 0.73 for the masculine subscale, 0.61 for the feminine subscale, and 0.65 for the neutral subscale. Forward and backward translation procedure was applied to original short BSRI to ensure its clarity and credibility of the content. This procedure is a standard procedure for

translating research questionnaire from the original language to other language (Beaton et al. 2000). Forward translation was carried out by three professional bilingual translators with excellent proficiency in English (native Arab-speaking people). None of them was familiar with this type of instrument. The investigators reviewed the translations to make cultural adaptations. Two other Arabic translators then carried out a backward translation of this revised version into English, to verify if the meaning of the items was preserved. Any discrepancy between the original and translated version was discussed and resolved based on the panel suggestions. The instrument was pilot tested on 10 nursing students to ensure being understandable and clear. Some of the statements of the instrument were modified based on the pilot test results to be more understandable for the students.

### **Ethical considerations and data collection**

The ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the scientific and research committee in the two nursing schools. Informed consent forms were obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary and students were assured that their responses will be confidential and their refusal has no consequences. Students were approached during their attendance to different classes. Questionnaires were distributed and students were briefed about the objectives of the study. The investigator was available during data collection to answer any questions from the participants and clarify any ambiguous items.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 19 software using the suitable descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for all the subscales and items characteristics for each subscale. In this study the average score for each subscale scores was obtained by adding the scores for all subscale items and dividing by the total number of items for each subscale. The cut-off score for short-form BSRI subscales and the items of each subscale was 4.8.

## **Results**

### **Participants characteristics**

Of the 170 distributed questionnaires, 122 completed questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 72%. The students average age was 22.7years (range= 18-34 years, SD= 2.96).

### Reasons for choosing nursing to study

Results revealed that the highest reported reason was “I like the profession” (36.9 %) and the lowest reported reason was “The only specialty I got approval at the University” 3.3%. Table1.

Table1: Reasons for the choice to study nursing among male nursing students (N=122)

Reason	n (%)
Like the profession	45 (36.9)
To earn a degree	23(18.9)
Easiness to get a job	17(13.9)
To help others	16( 13.1)
Encouragement by family and friends	11(9.0)
High secondary school Tawjihi achievement marks	6 (4.9)
The only specialty I got approval at the University	4 (3.3)

### Gender-role classification of male nursing students

Results of this study showed that the classification of male university to their gender-role students according to short-form BSRI were follows: 53 students (43.44%) masculine, 55 students (45.08%) androgyny group, 11 students (9.02%) undifferentiated group, and 3 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 5.58 out of 7 (SD=0.82). The highest masculine characteristics score (Mean= 6.11, SD=1.34) was for the item “Reliant “and the lowest masculine characteristics score (Mean= 5.09, SD=1.52) was for “Assertive”. The average score for feminine subscale was 4.73 out of 7 (SD= 0.63). The highest feminine characteristics score (Mean= 6.27, SD= 1.19) was for the item “Loyal” and the lowest feminine characteristics score (Mean= 2.13, SD= 2.00) was for the item “Feminine”. The average score for students' neutral subscale was 5.25 out of 7 (SD=0.70). The highest neutral characteristics score (Mean= 6.40, SD=0.84) was for the item “Truthful” and the lowest neutral characteristics score (Mean= 4.09, SD=2.07) was for “Theatrical”. Results revealed that nursing students' masculine subscale had the higher average score, followed that of the neutral subscale and the feminine subscale.

Table 2. Means and standards deviations of short-form BSRI subscales and subscales item characteristics (N=122)

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>m(SD)</b>	<b>Item Characteristic</b>	<b>m(SD)</b>
<b>Masculine</b>	5.58 ( 0.82)	Reliant	6.11(1.34)
		Defend own beliefs	5.71(1.46)
		Independent	5.45(1.75)
		Assertive	5.09 (1.52)
		Strong Personality	6.08 (1.08)
		Forceful	5.40 (1.63)
		Analytical	5.40 (1.27)
		Leadership abilities	5.48 (1.57)
		Willing to take risks	5.49 (1.45)
		Athletic	5.13 (1.86)
<b>Feminine</b>	4.73 (0.63)	Yielding	2.85 (2.05)
		Cheerful	5.61 (1.39)
		Shy	3.85 ( 1.83)
		Affectionate	5.61 (1.33)
		Flatterable	3.18 (1.99)
		Loyal	6.27 ( 1.19)
		Feminine	2.13 ( 2.00)
		Sympathetic	6.03 (1.16)
		Sensitive to others needs	5.51 (1.40)
		Understanding	6.24 (1.10)
<b>Neutral</b>	5.25 ( 0.70)	Helpful	6.11 (1.09)
		Moody	4.09 (1.78)
		conscientious	5.92 ( 1.63)
		Theatrical	4.09 (2.07)
		Happy	5.27 (1.66)
		Unpredictable	4.17 ( 2.03)
		Reliable	5.83 (1.29)
		Jealous	4.94 (2.07)
		Truthful	6.40 (0.84)
		Secretive	5.72 (1.58)

## Discussion

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study that aimed to explore Jordanian male nursing students' gender-role characteristics according to short-form BSRI characteristics, which is considered the first Jordan study in this field. The study findings revealed that more than one third of the sample chooses the nursing as a field of specialization because they like the profession which ranked the highest reasons for studying nursing. This finding is consistent with (Eley et al. 2010) who found that the vocation, altruism and self-interest were identified by nurses as the main reasons for entering nursing. Perceptions of nursing have linked to student's decisions to enter the nursing profession (Graiger and Bolan, 2006), while in another

study the highest percentage of participants joined nursing because of financial reasons and availability of work (Aljarrah, 2013)

The study findings indicated that the overall description of the gender-role of nursing students in this study was masculine according to short-form BSRI. However, the study findings indicated that nursing students also possess feminine characteristics such as: understanding 55 %, being affectionate 35%, loyal 61%, sympathetic 43 % and sensitive to other's needs 27%. 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 (McLaughlin et al. 2010; Lou et al. 2007).

The masculine characteristics are needed by male nurses who are working in administrative and specialized areas. Tracing the professional choice and career path development in nursing it was found that most male nursing students want to occupy administrative positions in health care settings after graduation (Ozdemir et al. 2008). Also, male nurses were found to be over representative in technical wards such as intensive care units and coronary care units which was explained by culturally determined differences between men and women with respect to career perspective and development (Dassen et al. 1990). The masculine characteristics help nursing students to use strategies to choose specialized units as a suitable environment for personal and professional growth and development (Yang et al. 2004). Some male nursing who possess feminine characteristics such as shyness and yielding make them not tolerate work stress and quit to other professional fields other than nursing (Lou et al. 2007).

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 androgenous sex-role characterization of male nurses and its degree held to be desirable for nurses. That is represented with the presence of most of the masculine characteristics and some of the feminine ones which was found in this study and it was consistent with Pontin (1988), 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 presence of males in the nursing profession makes care providers not all women as male nurses also assume caring roles, they are immersed in a stereotypically caring career that they actually occupy the female gender role, and being identified with more female than male gender roles (Loughrey, 2008). The male nurses' characteristics of being affectionate help them in providing protection and defense as key aspects of care (Kumpula and Etal, 2009). Also being athletic makes them physically strong and gives them status and authority through their physical strength ( Kumpula and Etal, 2009). 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 (Prideaux, 2010). 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 (Harding et al. 2008). There is a need for change to legitimize men's involvement in physical caring (Harding et al. 2008). However, male nurses find difficulty to provide nursing care involving physical touch with patients especially for female patients which is culturally not accepted in Jordan, and this was described by Sigma Theta Tau International (2006) results which described such difficulty and this requires further research.

This study has important implications. Nursing educators needs to develop their abilities to understand and describe male nursing students from the gender-role perspective better than the stereotype image which is present nowadays. 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.

This study provides important information about the gender-role identity of Jordanian male nursing university students, however, the following limitations should be considered when interpreting the study

findings. This study used cross-sectional research design and self-report questionnaire which precluded the ability to infer causal relationships. Also, it is realized as this study utilized the convenience sampling method of recruiting students from two university; its results may not be generalized to the population of male university students in Jordan. However, the results of this study overall provide some useful information regarding these male nursing students gender-role identity. Nevertheless, replicating of this study with a large and more representative sample from many universities is recommended for future research and would be more informative.

### **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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