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## Male Nursing Students in the Community College and the Struggle to Completion

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Geri Brewer

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Male Nursing Students in the Community College and the Struggle to Completion

by

Geri Brewer

MA, Walden University, 2013

BS, Elmhurst College, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2023

## Abstract

Despite significant contributions to healthcare made by male nurses throughout the centuries, nursing is a female-dominated profession, creating challenges for male nursing students. The problem addressed in this study was that male nursing students experience challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program. Guided by the nursing undergraduate retention and success model, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges within two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Thirteen male nursing students who were enrolled in associate degree nursing programs completed semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using inductive, open coding to identify themes. Results indicated that male nursing students were reluctant to enter the nursing profession because men are underrepresented, experienced feelings of stigma created by the persistent stereotypes assigned to male nurses in society, and expressed a need for and importance of having a male nursing student program support system. In light of these findings, nursing program leaders have critical information they need to enact systems aimed at improving male nursing student enrollment, retention, and graduation thereby contributing to positive social change in the healthcare industry over time.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Colin Brewer. He has always wanted the best for me and never stops encouraging me to use my talents to the best of my ability. You have gone through this journey with me every step of the way understanding the frustrations as well as the celebrations. You have always been my best friend, and I am forever thankful for your endless faith and your constant support. I love you, Colin.

## Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge my Lord and Savior who lives within me. God has given me the strength, wisdom, and power to achieve this honorable degree. He has provided me with family and friends who have endlessly supported and encouraged me to reach this milestone. I will use this gift to honor His name.

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I am grateful to my mom and dad (RIP) Mary and Bob Woods, who adopted me as a little girl and have seen me rise above all the atrocities of life. Thank you for giving me a second chance at life, for showing me Jesus, and for allowing me to reach my greatest potential! Thank you to my father-in-law Al Brewer who saw the potential in me from the very beginning and urged me to enroll in the doctoral program. You saw the importance of education and you believed I could achieve the goal even when I was doubtful. Thank you for encouraging me and always seeing the best in me. Thank you to my friends for their support and understanding along the way. A tremendous gratitude goes to Jon (JA) and Di for their encouragement, guidance, and teaching me some important tools of writing, all starting with the Water Lily Pond.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Registered nurses (RNs) are one of the largest professions in America (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). However, the nursing profession faces a 5.9% shortfall of retiring nurses, nurses burning out due to COVID-19, and being short-staffed (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). To maintain a high quality of healthcare, there must be an increase in nursing graduates by 8% per year (WHO, 2020).

Incidentally, the nursing workforce does not possess an equitable demographic with a representation of male nurses. Approximately 10% of practicing nurses are male nurses (Carson-Newman University Online, 2021; Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, 2017). Moreover, men in nursing education encounter many challenges to the completion of nursing programs. These obstacles include a shortage of male nurse educators as role models, role strain in a female-dominated class, and the need for inclusion (Abshire et al., 2018; Whitford et al., 2020; Younas et al., 2019). The lack of male nurses within the workforce results in a disconnection of identifying with male patients and specific gender needs while providing patient care (Kronsberg et al., 2018).

According to Powers et al. (2018), male nursing students make up 10%-15% of enrollment in college nursing education programs. After decades of study, not much has changed in recruiting male nurses to the profession or the successful completion of the nursing program, which leads to graduation (Powers et al., 2018). The culture of a female-dominated profession has left male nursing students feeling isolated (Hodges et al., 2017), feeling discriminated against, and lacking role models (Hung et al., 2019). In addition, male nursing students expressed their need for faculty to take note of the current

female-dominated culture (Hung et al., 2019) and provide more inclusion or classroom engagement with male nursing students as well as an added sense of support and confidence to the male nursing student (Hodges et al., 2017).

### **Background**

There was a time in history when nurses were primarily male. Dating before Christ (BC), only men could enroll in nursing schools in India because leaders thought men had the adequate skills to be nurses (O'Lynn, 2013; Sealy, 2020). O'Lynn (2013) discussed more historical findings of Romans training male nurses for the military as well as religious sectors, known as the Alexian Brothers, who built hospitals in Europe (O'Lynn, 2013; Sealy, 2020). In the 1500s (O'Lynn, 2013), male nurses continued practicing and would be recognized by the Pope as *The Brothers of a Happy Death* and given a red cross to indicate their profession, becoming known as the international icon of the red cross (Sealy, 2020). During the U.S. Civil War, the military, including the Union and the Confederates, had men serving as nurses on the front lines while female nurses served in the hospitals (O'Lynn, 2013; Sealy, 2020; Smallheer et al., 2020).

Nursing transformed during the 19th century when the Crimean War took place. Florence Nightingale led the way in nursing, changing, and improving conditions for patients during the Crimean War (Tan & Holland, 2006). Later, Nightingale became the founder of modern nursing as a profession called the Nightingale Training School for Nurses (Tan & Holland, 2006). The founder of Nightingale's school of nursing closed doors to men because of Nightingale's opinion: women are better suited as nurses (McDonald, 2021). This changed the ideological perceptions of male nurses.

The increase of men in nursing is slowly improving. Men account for approximately 10% of nurses (Carson-Newman University Online, 2021; Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, 2017). Unfortunately, looming stereotypes of men in nursing consist of the person must be homosexual or even a failed medical student (Hodges et al., 2017; Kiekkas et al., 2016). These stereotypes can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and walking away from nursing (Carnevale & Priode, 2018). Once male nursing students can overcome these stereotypes and enter nursing school, a new set of challenges begin, as they face many other barriers associated with these stereotypes (Hodges et al., 2017). These barriers include the absence of male nurse role models, role strain, gender discrimination, and isolation (Hodges et al., 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

Male nurses have been part of the nursing profession since before Christ (BC); however, their path to becoming nurses remains a challenge in the female-dominated profession (Carnevale & Priode, 2018; McDonald, 2021). Researchers continue to point to challenges related to gender role strain, self-esteem, professional academic growth, and other challenges faced by male nursing students (Christensen et al., 2018; Hung et al., 2019; Younas et al., 2019). As the call for nurses had increased during the pandemic, understanding and overcoming challenges faced by male nursing students is critically important (Carnevale & Priode, 2018; International Council of Nurses Policy Brief, n.d.). According to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (2017), male nursing students remain the minority comprising 12.9% of students in Illinois nursing education programs as compared to their female counterparts. Associate degree

nursing programs share similar experiences with the challenges of male nursing students completing the nursing program (Powers et al., 2018).

Researchers have shared their observations regarding obstacles male nursing students face in their respective college of nursing programs and workplaces, but conclude more research is necessary (Carnevale & Priode, 2018; Christensen et al., 2018; Watson, 2017; Younas et al., 2019). Christensen et al. (2018) described academic issues in the gender-role strain as male learners attempt to merge with a female-dominated profession. Watson (2017) studied the characteristics of students and the connection to high attrition rates and found early interventions with male nursing students can decrease attrition rates. Younas et al. (2019) gained a better understanding of male nursing students' obstacles and called for changes in policy allowing male nursing students to engage equally in all areas of nursing as female nursing students do. Hung et al. (2019) discussed difficulties in gender-role strain and addressed decreased self-worth, self-esteem, along with professional academic growth in male nursing students.

While researchers investigate male nursing students' challenges, a gap in practice remains: How can male nursing students overcome the challenges of nursing school and be successful? Understanding the challenges male nursing students encounter is important to research and finding solutions to improve completion rates within community colleges while contributing more nurses to reduce the nursing shortage nationally. The problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was that male nursing students experience challenges that impede their success in completing their urban Midwest community college nursing programs. The Illinois Department of Financial and



Professional Regulation (2017) recognized the enrollment of male student nurses has remained at 12.9%, less than the national average of 15% (p. 3). The evidence depicts the problem of this study exists at the local level and is worthy of doctoral research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. With the understanding and knowledge gained from this study, nursing program leadership can apply findings from this study to improve completion and graduation rates among male nursing students. Furthermore, community college nursing programs can contribute to the global nursing shortage by graduating more nurses, specifically more male nurses (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

Throughout this study, I used the following research questions (RQs) as my guide to keep interviews, data analysis, and myself focused and cohesive.

RQ1: What do male nursing students perceive to be the challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing programs?

RQ2: What are the male nursing students' recommendations about the supports they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at their urban Midwest community college nursing programs?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The conceptual framework supporting this study was the nursing undergraduate retention and success (NURS) model. This concept addressed key areas of the study with a focus on encompassing student characteristics and student retention (Jeffreys, 2015). The NURS model focuses on the interaction of student profile characteristics, student affective factors, academic factors, environmental factors, academic outcomes, psychological outcomes, outside surrounding factors, and professional integration factors (Jeffreys, 2015). Jeffreys (2015) looked at different components of the NURS model, such as student characteristics determining undergraduate and graduate nursing student retention and success. Another aspect of this model, which made it a good match for the study, was the focus on student retention rather than attrition, keeping the attention on why students stay (Jeffreys, 2015). Jeffreys urged faculty to generate and consider new approaches while revising nursing curricula, creating strategies for student success, and working creatively within classrooms as positive influences on nursing education.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative design. This method allowed me to better understand male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Participants were in the nursing programs when interviews occurred. Each participant received an email invitation to participate in my research study along with an explanation of the purpose of the research study. Through semistructured interviews, and with a well-

planned and executed approach, I gained a deeper understanding of the academic challenges male nursing students encounter within the nursing program that hinders their success in the program.

### **Definitions**

*Associate Degree Nursing (ADN):* An associate degree nursing program is a two-year program providing an undergraduate degree (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Students seeking an ADN will gain the nursing skills and knowledge needed to become a registered nurse. Once students have successfully graduated from the program and earned their ADN, they will be eligible to take the NCLEX-RN examination (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

*Diversity:* Diversity in any workplace means having a workforce comprised of multiple races, ages, genders, ethnicities, and orientations (Jordan, 2020). Although ethnicity and culture frequently connect with diversity, the National League of Nursing (NLN) defined diversity as inclusive of life experiences, socioeconomic position, gender identity, political opinions, and religious beliefs (NLN, 2016). Within this study, the male gender was the diverse population.

*Gender Bias:* Favoritism or preference given to one gender versus another gender is gender bias (Kiekkas et al., 2016). Gender bias can result in learning barriers (O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007). In this study, male nursing students experienced gender bias.

*Gender Stereotypes:* The assumption of a group that does not stem from fact but rather a prejudged opinion could be gender stereotypes (Hodges et al., 2017). Gender stereotypes can be assumptions or generalizations (Folami, 2017). The impact of gender

stereotypes more specific to male nursing students impedes men from going to nursing school (Folami, 2017).

*Role Strain:* An individual who is the minority of a group experiencing tension in the presence of majority roles is experiencing role strain (Folami, 2017). Role strain is any actual or perceived emotional anguish caused by social isolation, gender stereotypes, and discomfort experienced by males who work in a primarily female-dominated field (Hung et al., 2019). Role strain among male nursing students was consistently a repeated theme throughout the research.

*Nontraditional Student:* A nontraditional student has one or more of the following characteristics: “older than 25 years of age; commuting to class; enrolled part-time; male; member of an ethnic or racial minority; English as a second language; having dependent children; having an equivalency diploma (GED); and requiring remedial classes” (Priode, 2019, p. 25). For this study, the nontraditional student referred to male nursing students. Academic success for the nontraditional student, hence the male nursing student, organizes their studies around their personal lives because this tends to have a direct impact on their success in the nursing program (Priode, 2019).

*Student Retention:* Student retention is an important metric used when measuring student success rates in universities and colleges (Roberts, 2018). Within this study, I looked at student retention specific to challenges male nursing students must be successful in the nursing program. The factors contributing to increased male nursing student retention were a focus of this research.

### **Assumptions**

One assumption of this study was male nursing students demonstrate higher levels of stress related to gender bias within nursing programs. Much of the literature refers to the existence of gender bias within these programs (Kiekkas et al., 2016; Kirk et al., 2013; Whitford et al., 2020; Younas et al., 2019). With knowledge from the literature, participants in this study may have experienced some gender bias within the nursing program was an assumption. Another assumption was faculty are more attentive to female students because they are the majority in the classroom, lab, or clinical. According to Whitford et al. (2020), faculty labeling male students in the clinical setting sets them apart from their female counterparts. While in another study, instructors singled out male nursing students because of their gender (Hoffart et al., 2019).

A second assumption was that the nursing curriculum is directed more toward female nurses. Researchers have described the nursing curriculum as written by women for women, with pictures of female nurses and pronouns of she or her (Hoffart et al., 2019; O'Lynn, 2004). There are few references made about male nurses nor pronouns of him or he. The male nursing student cannot identify himself with the nurses described within the current nursing curriculum. Fontenot and McMurray (2020) described the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty who can accurately identify with the student population. Fontenot and McMurray (2020) further mentioned, having male nursing faculty to identify with male nursing students can bridge the diversity gap and lead to more successful mentoring for male nursing students.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Male nursing students enrolled in urban Midwest community colleges were the focus of this study. While challenges are associated with nursing students in all nursing programs, this study focused on male nursing students at two community college nursing programs. Male nursing students that participated in this study had to be in at least their first semester within their programs. While this study provided some insight into the challenges male nursing students face toward completion in nursing programs, it did not provide all the solutions to the problem. Yet, findings from this study provided a framework that may contribute to future studies. Future research on challenges experienced by nontraditional nursing students other than male nursing students would be beneficial to nursing schools but was outside the scope of this study.

The NURS model served as the conceptual foundation for this study on male nursing students' views of the challenges they experience that impede their performance and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs (Jeffreys, 2015). Jeffreys (2015) examined several NURS model elements, such as the factors affecting the retention and achievement of undergraduate and graduate nursing students. This research may have used a variety of frameworks to examine challenges posed by male nursing students in nursing school, including Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model, or Tinto's conceptual model of student retention and persistence (2017). While these models are excellent options, the NURS model was specific to gender, nursing, and retention.

### **Limitations**

Men in nursing programs are not the only minority group encountering challenges (Jordan, 2020). Ethnic and racial shortages are apparent in nursing education programs (Jordan, 2020). With the nature of this study, I did not evaluate other levels of nursing education programs such as bachelors and master's degree nursing programs. Another limitation was a target population of 13 male nursing students enrolled in and attending community college nursing programs. Findings from this research, while small, contribute as a working frame of reference that could affect other research studies. My personal bias was in check, as I have seen challenges male nursing students experience throughout my professional career. I remained focused with my prewritten interview questions without leading participants.

### **Significance**

Coupled with the rising national nursing shortage and the expected 1.09 million job opportunities before 2024, understanding the challenges faced by male nursing students to increase their success rates in nursing programs is increasingly important (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2020; O'Lynn, 2004). An understanding of perceived challenges influencing program completion for male nursing students could lead to design strategies and opportunities to support male student success in nursing programs and contribute to addressing this national shortfall (Smith et al., 2021). To meet the demands of the national shortage of nurses, continuing research and applying findings to improve conditions and lessen challenges for male nursing students is imperative.

As a nurse and an educator, I have observed disparities in equity and lack of resources between genders. My goal is to ensure all students have the resources available to be successful in nursing programs. The goal of this research study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. The results of this research will support Walden University's mission of generating positive social change by establishing mentoring programs specific to male nursing students. The health care system and society will benefit when more male nursing students graduate from nursing programs and begin their journey in the nursing profession.

A stronger presence of male nursing students in the classroom and male nurses at the bedside can improve community perceptions of male nurses and provide a greater understanding of male-to-male nursing care (Younas et al., 2019). Male nurses are role models for male students considering the profession (Moore et al., 2020). Gaining a better understanding of challenges male nursing students perceive may help faculty provide more resources and guidance for male nursing students, which could lead to student retention and success (Hodges et al., 2017). Increased graduation rates among male nursing students should help level the distribution of male and female nurses at the bedside, and create more appreciation for nurses regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their



recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. This basic qualitative research design provided opportunities for learning that school leadership could apply to associate degree nursing programs. The findings from this study could expand the knowledge gained through the perspectives of male nursing students. Furthermore, the results offered practical information to address the challenges male nursing students experience in a female-dominated profession. Diversifying the associate nursing program will help increase self-efficacy, self-image, and self-confidence among male nursing students who have been the minority since the days of Nightingale (Hung et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2020).

Chapter 2 presents a literature review on the challenges male nursing students experience toward the completion of associate nursing programs. The six sections within Chapter 2 include the history of men in nursing, conceptual and theoretical framework, the nursing shortage, perception of male nursing students, retention, and a summary including the gap in practice evident in the literature and effects of positive social change. A current review of the literature supports the problem statement and the need for more research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have thoroughly studied the challenges of male nursing students, yet a gap in practice remains regarding how male nursing students can overcome the challenges of nursing school and be successful. Understanding the challenges male nursing students encounter is important to research, to find solutions to improve completion rates within community colleges and graduate more nurses to help reduce the national nursing shortage. This basic qualitative research study explored male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. With the application of learned concepts, community college nursing programs can be part of a solution to the global nursing shortage (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2020). Male nurses currently represent only 10.7 % of the population of nurses (Smallheer et al., 2020; Younas et al., 2019). As recent as 60 years ago, 1% of the nursing population was male (Hodges et al., 2017). There has been slow growth in the male nursing population in recent decades, and researchers have consistently concluded more research is necessary (Younas et al., 2019).

This chapter consists of a review of the literature on difficulties faced by male nursing students in completing their nursing programs. The following literature review has six sections: history of men in nursing, conceptual framework, nursing shortage, perception of male nursing students, retention, and a summary including the gap in the practice and effects of positive social change. Finally, this chapter explains why this study concerning student retention is necessary.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

A thorough literature review occurred using a variety of databases, including PubMed, Education Source, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, ERIC, ProQuest Nursing, and Google Scholar. Keywords used for the search included *men in nursing, gender barriers, gender bias, nursing, nursing education, male nurses, nursing history, gender role stress, associate degree nursing, inequality in nursing, nontraditional student, role strain, and nursing shortage*. The search history resulted in the following themes: definitions related to male gender inequality; undergraduate nursing education; and perceptions of male nursing students.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The nursing universal retention and success (NURS) model was the foundation of this research. The developer of the framework examined various factors affecting undergraduate nursing students with retention and success in nursing programs (Jeffreys, 2015). When considering the various factors, Jeffreys (2015) mentioned student characteristics played a significant role in the retention and success of the nursing program. The goal of the NURS model is to provide a universally applicable model (Jeffreys, 2015): a paradigm for looking at multifaceted elements influencing nursing student success and retention, identifying students at risk of attrition, providing diagnostic-descriptive strategies to aid performance, influencing educational research and teaching innovations, and assessing the efficacy of implemented strategies. The NURS model brought together global professors and scholars to share ideas, communicate outcomes from research, and encourage collaboration (Jeffreys, 2015). This model helps

create partnerships beyond geographical lines where program leadership comes together with a common goal, optimizing student retention and success (Jeffreys, 2020).

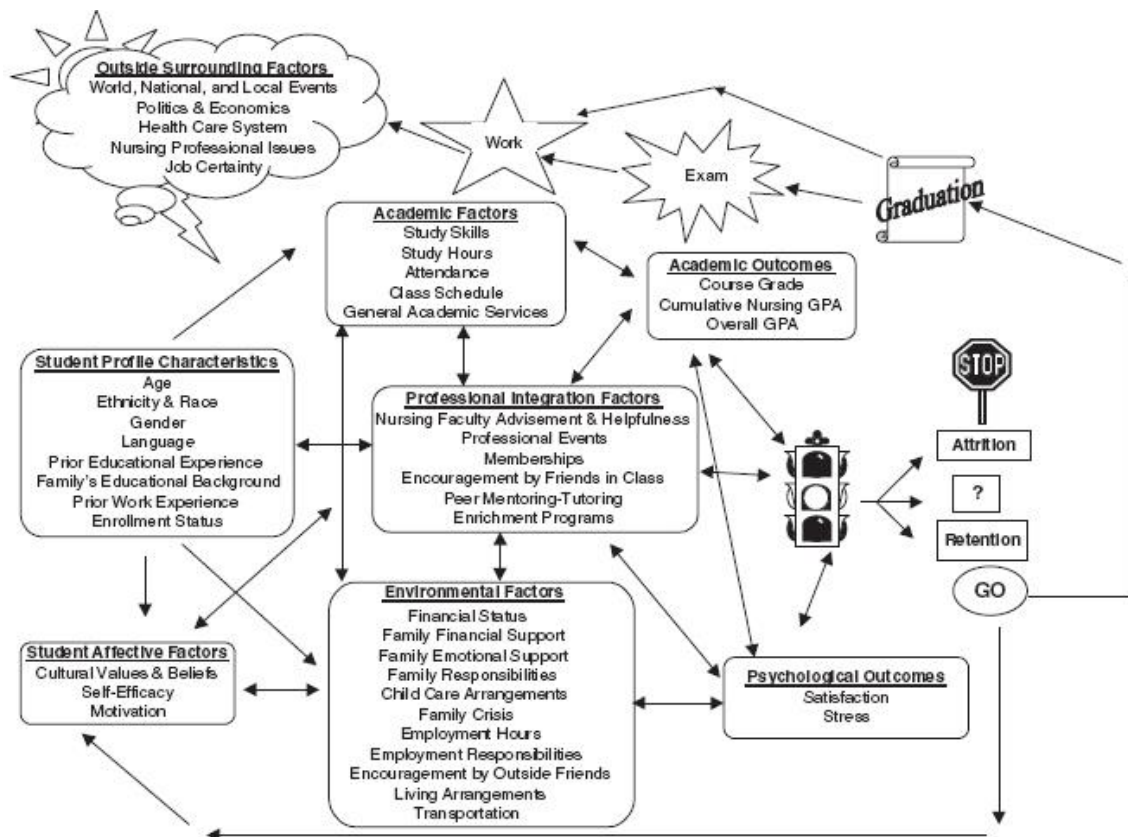
NURS focuses on retention (rather than attrition) and includes discipline-specific elements (Jeffreys, 2015). The focus of this model is “why do students stay” rather than “why do students go” (Jeffreys, 2012, p. 11). Jeffreys (2015) critically considered measures to improve retention, persistence, success, and the best possible results. Furthermore, Jeffreys emphasized personal responsibility as well as requiring a well thought out and coordinated strategy for student success. Throughout classes, there is an action plan for optimizing outcomes as well as a curriculum inclusive of faculty members (Jeffreys, 2020; Zerquera et al., 2018). Jeffreys emphasized the goal of the NURS model was to provide a universally applicable model for looking at multifaceted elements influencing nursing student success and retention.

The NURS model, foundational for this study (see Figure 1), looks at students at risk of not completing nursing programs, establishes an action plan to increase retention and success, drives educational research and instructional innovations, and assesses the efficacy of the strategy (Jeffreys, 2020). According to the evidence-based model, student success stems from interactions among student profile characteristics, academic behaviors and values, professional integration factors, academic supports, environmental factors, psychological outcomes, and outside factors, regardless of the nursing program (Jeffreys, 2020). If researchers can discover the most important elements creating these components, improvements can occur to help students succeed (Hoffart et al., 2019). Jeffreys’ approach drives integrative reviews, evaluate academic factors in associate

degree nursing students, and research on English language learner nursing students (Hoffart et al., 2019; Jeffreys, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Jeffery's Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) Model*



*Note.* The adaptation from Jeffrey's NURS model identifies the key areas including gender that affect student outcomes in the nursing program (Jeffreys, 2015).

There has been a need for this universal framework to guide the future development of college student retention research, theory, and practice applications including features addressing the diversity of students, faculty, and institutions and are adaptable within and between disciplines, program formats, and degree programs

(Jeffreys, 2015; Xu & Webber, 2018; Zerquera et al., 2018). Members of higher educational institutions must review the needs of students and update non applicable theories (Hoffart et al., 2019). Hoffart et al. (2019) used Jefferey's NURS model to guide their study to identify gender-based differences based on characteristics, perceptions, and program experiences for nursing students in an accelerated nursing program.

Findings from this study indicated more research in this area is needed and nursing faculty who are predominantly female need to recognize subtle biases occurring within nursing academia. Furthermore, through perceptions of male nursing students, researchers identified feelings of isolation, biases, and a feminized curriculum. Educators can help student retention if they know how students think and how their actions affect those perceptions (Hoffart et al., 2019). This method helps institutions to better understand student needs and increase retention and success as well as close the gap between nontraditional students (Hoffart et al., 2019).

How students see their curriculum influences their motivation to persevere (Hoffart et al., 2019). Based on the NURS model framework, institutional leadership must acknowledge, and review student success is a result of interactions among student profile characteristics, academic behaviors and values, professional integration factors, academic supports, environmental factors, psychological outcomes, and outside surrounding factors (Jeffreys, 2012, 2015; Priode, 2019).

Faculty development programs and a conceptual model stemmed from a response to a need to understand student perceptions of factors supporting or restricting nontraditional nursing students' retention and success better (Priode, 2019). Grants

funded the research. The conceptual model helped researchers understand students' perceptions of factors supporting or restricting nontraditional nursing students' retention and success (Ocean, 2017; Priode, 2019). More than 70 published research articles in the United States and elsewhere have used the NURS model (Jeffreys, 2012, 2015, 2020).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

Male nurses may seem like a new concept; however, most people do not realize the importance of male nurses in nursing. Historians have failed to mention the important works male nurses contributed to building the profession of nursing. However, historians emphasized the victories of women in nursing (Ashkenzi et al., 2017; Hodges et al., 2017; O'Lynn, 2013; Smallheer et al., 2020). Interestingly, Florence Nightingale has been highly regarded for her impact on nursing; many believe nursing began with her (McDonald, 2021; O'Lynn, 2013).

The history of male nursing goes back to the days of religious sectors where male nurses were initially described (Smallheer et al., 2020). Hospitallers was the name for male nurses coming from military backgrounds to care for pilgrims in the Holy Land and Europe dating back to 1080 (Smallheer et al., 2020). Smallheer et al. (2020) mentioned the presence of medicine men, shamans, and other male tribe members, who cared for the sick, in many societies. Men's contributions to nursing are frequently overlooked and unmentioned in nursing curricula (Ashkenzi et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2015). With a long history, men have made caring for others using their nursing skills to heal the sick, and assist the dying, which is problematic when left out of the nursing curriculum (Ashkenzi et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2015). Men working in religious and military organizations were

responsible for easing suffering and treating the ill and injured throughout the Middle Ages (Kronsberg et al., 2018; O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007). Nursing was not a suitable job for women until the time of Florence Nightingale when it became unsuitable for males (Kronsberg et al., 2018; O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007). Overlooking men's contributions reinforces the stereotype that nursing is primarily for women.

A major contributor to male nursing is the Alexian Brothers. They played a significant role in nursing history. The Alexian Brothers, known for building hospitals throughout Europe, eventually moved the role of nursing into public health where they took care of patients in their homes. Eventually, the Alexian Brothers migrated to the United States, building the first hospital in Chicago, Illinois, in 1866 (O'Lynn, 2013). The Alexian Brothers also built nursing schools for men in the United States. The Pope recognized the Alexian Brothers by presenting them with the red cross, which symbolized *The Brothers of a Happy Death* (O'Lynn, 2013; Sealy, 2020). Today, the red cross is an international icon founded by male nurses (Sealy, 2020). The history of male nurses should be recognized in nursing curricula, so nursing students, male and female, have historical nursing figures to look up to (O'Lynn, 2013).

Walt Whitman served in the American Civil War as a military nurse (O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007). Whitman, the American poet, wrote "The Wound Dresser," unfortunately, the part of his life where he saved lives is not recognized. These acts of military nursing went unrecognized as male officers, even though women acting as military nurses received recognition for their service (O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007; Whitford et al., 2020). Despite this injustice, it was there Whitman found his passion for



nursing and volunteered his services for seven years treating injured soldiers and saving countless lives (Moore et al., 2020; O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007; Smallheer et al., 2020). Whitman is another historical male nurse that should be recognized in today's nursing curricula, so all nursing students, male and female, have historical nursing figures to look up to (Younas et al., 2019).

After the Civil War, the role of male nurses received less recognition. Most opportunities for male nurses were in the military and mental health asylums (Moore et al., 2020). When Nightingale started her school of nursing, it was strictly for women, denying access to men (Moore et al., 2020; Smallheer et al., 2020; Tan & Holland, 2006). Society viewed women as more nurturing and caring, as they traditionally nurtured infants (Smallheer et al., 2020). Nightingale's reforms, where she addressed deplorable conditions to improve patient outcomes, dramatically changed nursing (O'Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007). Kronsberg et al. (2018) discussed Nightingale's intentions to take away male nurses' power and give it to the trained hands of female nurses. An example of this was the Nurses Act of 1919 in England where male nurses were required to be in separate units from women nurses (Kronsberg et al., 2018). This was where history was lost for men in nursing; this tradition continued into the 20th century (McDonald, 2021). With men taken out of nursing, female-dominated schools of nursing and practices of nursing, which feminized nursing, resulted (McDonald, 2021). Literature has provided more evidence of a historical time when men took a backseat to the nursing profession.

To further insult the integrity of male nurses, the United States military did not recognize the profession of male nurses as civilians during World War II and would not

allow men to be nurses in the Army (McDonald, 2021; Sealy, 2020). Therefore, male nurses in World War II would not afford the status of an officer if they performed nursing duties. However, their counterparts, female nurses were able to make rank with their professional nursing status, and serve as nurses in the Army (Sealy, 2020). This decision made by U.S. military leadership stereotyped the male nurse and hurt the industry of nursing up to the present day. It took President Eisenhower to sign a bill in 1955 recognizing male nurses in the Army and the Navy Nurse Corps (O'Lynn, 2013).

The shift of women taking over as nurses continued to exclude men in nursing schools much into the 20th century. In 1981, the Supreme Court ruled to allow men into state-supported nursing schools (Moore et al., 2020, p. 10). It has been an uphill climb to provide equality and diversity to healthcare ever since. Men received discrimination and could not enroll in nursing schools at the baccalaureate level. The few men allowed into nursing schools experienced inequality in clinical areas of nursing schools because they could not participate in caring for women (Moore et al., 2020). In the 1980s after the United States Supreme Court considered the practice of inequality of males entering state-supported nursing schools was unconstitutional, there was 4.1% of practicing male nurses (Moore et al., 2020, p. 10). Male nurses account for 11.7% (AACN, 2019, para. 6) of the nursing profession. This percentage has remained consistent for decades (Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, 2017; McDonald, 2021). This slow increase of male representation in nursing indicates more work is necessary to represent male nurses fairly.

## **Perceptions of Male Nursing Students**

Researchers studied ways to reduce and eliminate inequality in male nursing students' experience. Listening to male nursing students, who have experienced the realities of inequality, is essential for faculty and administration to improve nursing schools and curricula (Subu et al., 2022). For male nursing students, significant others, family members, and networking with other male nurses are important tools for success in nursing programs (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Male nursing students face gender stereotypes and work in less personal settings, such as critical care and mental health facilities, which makes research about male nursing students' challenges necessary (Juliff et al., 2017; Munnich & Wozniak, 2019; Subu et al., 2022).

Jamieson et al. (2019) investigated male nursing students' perspectives of gender stereotypes associated with nursing school. The purpose of this study was to learn from the perspectives of male nursing students and attempt to break gender stereotypes cycles (Jamieson et al., 2019). Findings indicated: (1) nursing is women's work, although some areas of healthcare are more appropriate for male nurses, (2) men who are nurses are homosexual, (3) existing stereotypes negatively affect career choices for males, and (4) existing gender bias did not affect participants personally (Jamieson et al., 2019).

Munnich and Wozniak (2019) would agree with these statements in that male nurses typically work in critical care or mental health settings. Jamieson et al. (2019) suggested more research is necessary to deconstruct misconceptions of exactly what men and women work with along with existing stereotypes for society, healthcare, and nursing education (Abshire et al., 2018). These studies provided more evidence from male

nursing students' perspectives, signifying the importance of continued research relating to male nursing students' challenges in nursing school.

Yuk-Chiu et al. (2021) explored male nursing students' perspectives on gender bias within clinical settings in Hong Kong. Knowing about the nursing shortage and male nurses consisting of only 10% of the global nursing population, school administrators, management, staff, and nursing school faculty must address this problem (Yuk-Chiu et al., 2021, p. 882). The purpose of this study was to raise awareness among nurses in healthcare, regarding gender bias in clinical settings (Yuk-Chiu et al., 2021). Similarly, Whitford et al. (2020) worked to understand the imbalance and inequity of male nursing students. A learning environment free of gender bias and stereotypes is necessary for future nurses (Yuk-Chiu et al., 2021). Whitford et al. (2020) learned participants backed the theory of societal stereotypes stating:

My dad wasn't happy about me taking the job in the hospital at first...we had a massive argument about it. My dad's been a mechanic all his life and he didn't see that nursing as being the type of work he expected me to do. (p. 3)

A teacher indicated, "There are few role models, and career guidance, and teachers know little about the contemporary career" (Whitford et al., 2020, p. 3). Perceptions from male participants described feelings of isolation due to gender inequality and feeling "feminized" through the curriculum (Hoffart et al., 2019). Whitford et al. (2020) concluded societal views have an overwhelming influence that nursing is a female profession. Results from these studies align with societal views that

nursing is not a job for men and signified the importance of continued research relating to the challenges male nursing students experience in nursing school.

Hoffart et al. (2019) performed a study using Jeffrey's NURS model. Jeffrey's (2015) NURS model focused on optimal outcomes for nursing students that fall under some of the profiled characteristics of age, ethnicity, race, and gender. Hoffart et al. (2019) conducted one of the largest studies about men in nursing schools; the objective was to address the current nursing shortage, increase enrollment in nursing programs, and increase diversity within nursing workplaces. The goal was to recognize gender inequalities based on profile characteristics, perceptions, and outcomes (Hoffart et al., 2019). Hoffart et al. (2019) recommended more research guided by modern theorists, such as Jeffrey's NURS model, should occur. Furthermore, more faculty development (who are primarily female) must occur to provide faculty with the evidence provided by the male nursing students that gender inequality occurs in nursing programs and has for decades (Hoffart et al. 2019). These research studies share comparisons to my research study because the NURS model developed by Jeffrey's (2015) was the same model.

Younas and Sundus (2018) performed a mixed-method study to investigate patient experiences and satisfaction with care provided by male nurses. The common theme throughout the study indicated patients' perceptions of the care provided by male nurses stemmed from cultural beliefs and perceptions about gender roles (Younas & Sundus, 2018). Younas and Sundus (2018) indicated male nurses are as caring as female nurses specifically in areas of support and comfort. Spending time and caring for the needs of patients was common during patient interviews. Younas and Sundus (2018)

indicated gender stereotypes exist, and more work is necessary to portray the male nurse in a positive light. Smith et al. (2021) had similar findings concluding gender stereotypes are present in the workplace and the classroom, and more work needs to be done. Palazzo and Erickson (2022) had similar concerns about stereotypes that exist for male nurses and male nursing students. Palazzo and Erickson (2022) focused their study on the high school level to gain a better understanding of the male students' perspective on nursing as a career. These studies provided more evidence of stereotypical behavior against male nursing students as well as the need for more male nurses at the bedside.

Petges and Sabio (2020) expanded research on male nursing students by examining male nursing students' unique experiences in the female-dominated school of nursing. Male nursing students face gender-related barriers, which directly affect their professional self-image and perceptions of nursing (Hodges et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2019). Petges and Sabio (2020) examined male students' impressions of nursing school and discovered they were influenced by isolation and bitterness associated with sentiments of being regularly used for strenuous physical effort. Powers et al. (2018) explored the lived experiences of 11 male nursing students in nursing school. Like other researchers, Powers et al. (2018) found similar themes such as gender bias exists, doing manly things, limitations in clinical settings, and no male role models.

Researchers discovered themes such as, expectations men should work in the intensive care unit (ICU) or the emergency department (ED), and they should do the heavy lifting (Petges & Sabio, 2020). A participant commented, "We are still in a female-

dominated profession adhering to cultural expectations” (Petges & Sabio, 2020, p. 4).

Another participant stated:

I think it is a cultural thing, the people in nursing know that men can do a good job, we just have to educate the rest of the world ... My dream is one day, a guy will say he is a nursing student, and all his guy friends won't look at him weird or reference the Fockers. (Petges & Sabio, 2020, p. 4)

With a different perspective, Cui et al. (2021) researched male nursing students attending a male-only nursing class and gathered evidence on their experiences and perceptions. Results of this study indicated male nursing students felt a sense of unity with fellow male students; however, they felt criticized by outsiders being in a nursing program as male students (Cui et al., 2021). Additionally, Cui et al. (2021) investigated male nursing students who belonged to the American Association for Men in Nursing (AAMN) and felt supported. This is an organization to support men and their initiatives to meet their goals in nursing school (AAMN, 2018). Participants from these studies have indicated the need for more role models and nursing mentors (Cui et al., 2021; Petges & Sabio, 2020). Perceptions of male nursing students are valuable, and action must occur in nursing schools' didactic and clinical areas to decrease challenges male nursing students experience. These are significant studies indicating the challenges male nursing students experience in nursing programs. Results from these studies conclude male nursing students describe outside influences as negative and stereotypical but internal support from nursing organizations such as the AAMN can help male nursing students overcome challenges (Cui et al., 2021). Male nursing students indicated their allocation to care for

male patients and shared that when assigned to care for female patients, they are excluded from providing intimate care such as catheter care or toileting (Powers et al., 2018).

Due to common experiences of prejudice, the maternal clinical context is a cause of stress and anxiety for male nursing students (Carlsson, 2020; Powers et al., 2018).

Male students frequently described exclusion from patient care and having their presence questioned by new moms and nursing personnel (Powers et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2017).

Discrimination, lack of representation, and social isolation are barriers to attracting underrepresented, diverse students (Carlsson, 2020; Hodges et al., 2017; Powers et al., 2018). Reframing public perceptions of nursing, providing mentoring, deconstructing stereotypes, enhancing faculty diversity, and increasing the visibility of diversity in the nursing workforce are strategies to improve nursing diversity (Hodges et al., 2017).

Fontenot and McMurray (2020) described the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty who can accurately identify with the student population. An action plan for optimizing outcomes for male nursing students as well as a curriculum inclusive of faculty members is imperative (Jeffreys, 2020; Zerquera et al., 2018).

Another strong recommendation from Powers et al. (2018) was to provide faculty development that is more inclusive for male nursing students. To increase self-awareness of gender bias and increase the knowledge of challenges male students experience in nursing education is a necessity. The results of this study will help develop retention and success strategies by establishing mentoring programs specific to male nursing students (Powers et al., 2018). These studies strongly indicate the need to decrease gender bias and improve male nurses' success within nursing programs.



Younas et al. (2019) conducted a literature search using 6 quantitative studies and 36 qualitative studies. Researchers considered the challenges of male nursing students during their education and aimed to address the nursing shortage and provide balance and diversity in nursing workplaces (Younas et al., 2019). Younas et al. (2019) extracted and identified common themes from 43 studies. One theme was male nurses are better suited to work in mental health (Carnevale & Priode, 2018; Powers et al., 2018). Another common theme was male nurses are expected to work in specific units such as the intensive care unit and emergency department (Powers et al., 2018) while misidentified as being doctors (Liu & Li, 2017), and textbooks use gendered terms such as she or her pronouns (Carneval & Priode, 2018; DeVito, 2016; Powers et al., 2018). These studies signified the importance of continued research relating to the challenges male nursing students experience in nursing school.

“Female students-centered teaching practices” and “feminine culture in nursing education” were two descriptive topics (Younas et al., 2019, p. 263). Feminism in nursing education was visible from the beginning of students’ nursing programs (Younas et al., 2019). Male students claimed courses contained terminology more appropriate for females (Younas et al., 2019). There is a need for more male influences in nursing education for males (Younas et al., 2019). There must be faculty development to address the need for gender equality in the classroom as well as the clinical setting (Kane et al., 2021; Younas et al., 2019). Kane et al. (2021) similarly found stereotypes and misconceptions addressed to male nursing students and discovered common themes such as nursing being a female profession, and the negative influences of family and public

perceptions. Addressing these barriers could address diversity in nursing, recruit more men, and retain male students to meet the nursing shortage's dire demands (Kane et al., 2021; Younas et al., 2019).

During the last decade, efforts to attract diverse, underrepresented students into health professions have resulted in a slightly increased representation in the nursing workforce (Kovner et al., 2018; Snyder et al., 2018; Zangaro et al., 2018). Present nursing students are more diversified than the nursing workforce is (AACN, 2019). Men are slowly becoming more prevalent in nursing, with males accounting for 9.1% of nurses in 2013, up from 6.6% in 2013 (Smile et al., 2019, para. 5). However, the growth of men in nursing is slow. Male enrollment in nursing school programs is comparable to female enrollment, ranging between 10% and 15% (Powers et al., 2018), with a much higher turnover rate than females (Kiekkas et al., 2016). As a result, men participating in nursing schools face the reality of being the minority in a predominantly female-dominated learning environment. These studies signified the importance of continued research relating to the challenges male nursing students experience in nursing school.

Nursing school leadership teams must constantly evaluate and improve their recruitment techniques to attract a varied group of applicants (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). Palazzo and Erickson (2022) similarly considered recruiting male nursing students and focused on male high school students. The focus must expand to different areas of recruitment to increase male nursing student enrollment. Providing a positive and more manly approach to nursing was the approach for this study (Palazzo & Erickson, 2022) Although there is a growing body of literature to support recruiting and retention methods

to improve diversity, a focus on gathering recommendations and guidance from the target demographic may be beneficial (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). Student perceptions on how to increase the recruitment of minority nursing school candidates might lead to new techniques for achieving diversity goals in nursing (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020).

A multifaceted strategy is necessary to increase the number of men in nursing. Perceptions of gender roles originate at a young age (Palazzo & Erickson, 2022; Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). Children learn what roles are suitable for their gender through seeing parents, family, and community members. Individuals' early perceptions of gender roles and the media affect whether they consider nursing a suitable profession (Palazzo & Erickson, 2022; Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). One technique for increasing men in nursing is to raise awareness of available options (Powers et al., 2018; Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). However, it will take time for societal perceptions to shift and become more inclusive of men in nursing.

Nurse educators must first understand male students' perspectives to influence gender bias in nursing education (Palazzo & Erickson, 2022; Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). Understanding gender bias hurdles that male nursing students face is critical to improving how they perceive, comprehend, and overcome their unique problems. Nurse educators, advisors, and counselors can reduce or intensify gender bias hurdles male nursing students face in their education as role models who have a huge influence on nursing students and the learning environment (Palazzo & Erickson, 2022; Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). These studies provided more evidence for the current study indicating challenges male nursing students experience in nursing programs.

Christensen et al. (2018) explored male nursing students' lived experience of communication within a nursing context. The first theme stemming from the study was "Men are from Mars" (Christensen et al., 2018). This title came from participants describing feeling like outsiders in a room full of female students (Christensen et al., 2018). Male students felt they could not voice opinions without female students dismissing them. This left male nursing students isolated, frustrated, and angry (Christensen et al., 2018). Calling a spade, a spade in a world of shovels, was another theme (Christensen et al., 2018). The most striking component of this theme was how participants described communication with female students: interactions occasionally fraught with anxiety and tension (Christensen et al., 2018). Petges and Sabio (2020) examined male students' impressions of nursing school and discovered they were influenced by isolation and bitterness associated with sentiments of being regularly used for strenuous physical effort. In the same manner, Kane et al. (2021) reported, male nursing students, are tired of being addressed as the "male nurse" or feeling isolated when the nurses are referred to as "she" (p. 24).

While the male nursing students experimented with ways to communicate with female colleagues, several individuals expressed concern others may view their interactions negatively, they may be misunderstood, or they may be misinterpreted (Christensen et al., 2018). The important message from these studies was the disparity in how males and females perceive language and how they interact and participate across the gender barrier (Christensen et al., 2018; Kane et al., 2021). Women tend to use interactions as a way of integrating groups, establishing a shared good fostering intimacy,

and the female speaking style nurtures and develops relationships (Christensen et al., 2018). Men, on the other hand, are significantly more aggressive and competitive with one another, always attempting to gain the upper hand, fiercely independent, and rely on plain and succinct language to convey their message (Christensen et al., 2018). These studies signified the importance of continued research relating to the challenges male nursing students experience in nursing school.

Kronsberg et al. (2018) performed two phenomenological studies on lived experiences of male nurses, in educational and clinical settings. According to Kronsberg et al. (2018), with 14 participants, three themes arrived: discrimination, lack of support, and negative effects. Participants described feeling like “second-class citizens” and being asked “again and over” why they wanted to be nurses (Kronsberg et al., 2018, p. 49). Participants perceived nursing professors had a negative attitude toward males interested in nursing (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Participants claimed it was challenging to be a male in a woman’s profession (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Luis (2022) conducted a similar study addressing bullying in the healthcare setting and the experiences of male nursing students. Again, similar themes arose indicating “the sins of my gender,” “unpleasant stress from teachers and classmates,” and “looked down upon” (Luis, 2022, p. 5).

Kronsberg et al. (2018) found discrimination against male nurses at educational and practice levels is a serious issue that nurse educators, supervisors, and practitioners must address and acknowledge (Kronsberg et al., 2018; Luis, 2022). These studies demonstrated conclusively and collaboratively that discrimination against male nurses is a prevalent problem having a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of this

underrepresented group in the nursing industry (Kronsberg et al., 2018; Luis, 2022). Male nurses continue to face discrimination, social isolation, gender stereotypes, and lower work satisfaction than female nurses (Kronsberg et al., 2018; Luis, 2022). Male role models are few and recruiting tactics for males are insufficient (Kronsberg et al., 2018).

To recruit more male nurses, shifting perceptions of men in nursing is critical (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Male nurses' loving nature is critical, but they should not be used for their physical strength (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Organizational leaders should recruit male nursing students directly out of high school; instructors should avoid referring to nurses as *women*; academic and clinical settings should have more male nurse role models (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Morgan et al. (2019) conducted a study with a comparable theme of gender-associated incivility in the classroom, simulation lab, online and clinical setting. Strategies for reversing negative stereotypes and gender bias must begin by recognizing incivility and its effects on nursing education (Morgan et al., 2019).

Male nurse discrimination has many negative implications for nursing. Kronsberg et al. (2018) discussed because recruiting and retaining male nurses is one method for addressing a severe nursing shortage, overt or subtle discrimination against males in nursing has a detrimental effect on recruitment and retention, impeding attempts to overcome the nursing deficit (Kronsberg et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2019). Men's participation in specific areas of nursing practice and education (e.g., labor and delivery) severely limits their ability to function as nurses and deprives nursing of an untapped resource (Kronsberg et al., 2018).

## **Nursing Shortage**

Illinois Council of Nurses (ICN; n.d.) discussed the major impact Covid-19 had on the nursing workforce. The ICN (n.d.) investigated the devastation the pandemic had on the nursing workforce, including deaths, infections, burnout, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Nurses are still in jeopardy and the ICN pleads with global governments for increased protection and support for nurses (Illinois Council of Nurses, n.d.). Before Covid-19, the U.S. had a critical nursing shortage. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN; American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2020) projected there will be 1.09 million registered nurse employment opportunities by 2024. Post Covid-19, WHO estimated the global workforce would lack 5.9 million nurses (ICN, n.d.; Nursing in Practice, 2021; WHO, 2020). Furthermore, the WHO expects 17% of the workforce globally to retire within the next couple of years (ICN, n.d.; WHO, 2020). The WHO estimated approximately 4.7 million nurses are necessary to maintain safe working conditions and workforce numbers (ICN, n.d.; WHO, 2020).

Men represent such a low number of nurses, increasing the percentage of male nurses in the workforce could significantly address global and local nursing shortages (Petges & Sabio, 2020). Addressing the challenges male nursing students experience academically is a start to the solution. For Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA), the male population is catching up with the female population representing 40% of male nurse anesthetists (Petges & Sabio, 2020, p. 1). Moore et al. (2020) conducted a study on how to address the nursing shortage and concluded increasing diversity with improved strategies to reach more male nursing students. This could occur by creating

positive community perceptions and eliminating false stereotypes, reaching high school faculty to promote nursing as a desirable profession (Moore et al, 2020). Lastly, involve male graduates to be inspirational speakers at high schools and colleges (Moore et al, 2020). These studies indicated the importance of understanding the challenges male nursing students must overcome to be successful in nursing programs.

### **Student Retention**

Hafer et al. (2021) studied student retention. Much research discovered competence, autonomy, and relatedness positively affect student success and retention (Hafer et al., 2021). Hafer et al. (2021) discussed basic psychological needs that can positively influence academic performance thus increasing student retention. Looking closer at competence, academic integration and engagement must exist (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Male nursing students often withdraw from programs between the first and second semesters of nursing school (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Male nursing students must experience true diversity and all levels of nursing care early in the nursing program to remain male nursing students beyond the first year (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Autonomy is a student's choice to select pathways best representing themselves and feel respected for self-reliance and freedom of choice (Roberts, 2018), and for male nursing students, their level of autonomy should be gradually introduced (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Individuals associated with male nursing students frequently profile them as strong and assumed higher levels of acuity of patient assignments in clinical environments (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). This level of acuity leads to student withdrawal (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021).



Increased GPA scores, improved study habits, and increased student retention are associated with student autonomy (Hafer et al., 2021). Relatedness is the students' feeling of inclusion with faculty, students, and family. Relatedness increases academic achievements along with perseverance (Beachwood et al., 2011). The lack of male nurses in the workforce disconnects from identifying and relating with male patients and specific gender needs while providing patient care (Kronsberg et al., 2018). The lack of male nurses in the workforce limits male nursing students during clinical in nursing school (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021). Clinical rotation is a vital aspect of learning on the job and relating with other healthcare workers.

These obstacles contribute to challenges male nursing students experience in nursing school and decrease male retention. Data revealed student characteristics specific to gender, credits completed, and age influenced the GPA, including nontraditional participants, specifically, male nursing students (Hafer et al., 2021). Discrimination, lack of representation, and social isolation are barriers to attracting underrepresented, diverse students (Carlsson, 2020; Hodges et al., 2017; Powers et al., 2018).

To increase retention and graduation rates, leaders must examine actions and create settings supporting such results (Powers et al., 2018; Roberts, 2018). Long-term retention and graduation improvements must begin with initiatives to create campus environments known to foster student success (Powers et al., 2018; Roberts, 2018). Optimizing male nursing students' retention and success should be a goal at each level (Zerquera et al., 2018). According to the evidence-based NURS model, student success stems from interactions of student profile characteristics, academic behaviors and values,

academic supports, professional integration factors, environmental factors, psychological outcomes, and outside surrounding factors, regardless of program type (Jeffreys, 2020).

Institutional leadership can help retention if they know how students think and how their actions affect perceptions (Hoffart et al., 2019). Through perceptions of male nursing students, researchers identified feelings of isolation, biases, and a feminized curriculum (Hoffart et al., 2019). Christensen et al. (2021) led a study to understand the perceptions and attitudes of first-year male nursing students in a Bachelor of Nursing program in London, England. The purpose of this study was to analyze discriminatory behaviors men in nursing school and practice still experience. Results of this study indicated male nursing students in the first semester who felt supported do not experience gender-role conflict. There were male lecturers/tutors as 100% of students acknowledged this in their surveys (Christensen et al., 2021). Having this kind of support and role model for male nursing students is an important factor in the success of male nursing students (O'Lynn, 2004). Male nursing students have expressed their need for faculty to take note of the current female-dominated culture (Hung et al., 2019) and provide more inclusion or classroom engagement with male nursing students as well as an added sense of support and confidence to the male nursing student (Hodges et al., 2017).

Zapko et al. (2018) conducted a study evaluating students' experiences using simulation for two years during their nursing program. The purpose of this study was to observe and evaluate student satisfaction and self-confidence using four simulations (Zapko et al., 2018). Because of their positive experiences, students had a high degree of confidence in their abilities and believed simulations were useful to student learning.

Simulations in the classroom can improve student satisfaction, self-confidence, and retention (Zapko et al., 2018). Finding what can increase male nursing student retention rates will increase self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and autonomy (Priode, 2019). Changing public perceptions of nursing, providing mentoring, deconstructing stereotypes, enhancing faculty diversity, and increasing the visibility of diversity in the nursing workforce are strategies to improve nursing diversity and increase male student retention in nursing programs (Guy & van der Krogt, 2021; Hodges et al., 2017).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Common themes in the literature review indicated nursing education is mostly female. Well-documented educational hurdles based on gender exist in nursing schools (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Male students enrolled in nursing school have reported feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness because of these obstacles (Hung et al., 2019). This resulted in difficulties in the pursuit of academic achievement (Hung et al., 2019; Priode, 2019). Most nursing professors are female; they frequently overlook the specific learning needs of male students (Hodges et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2019). Furthermore, the lack of male nursing professors and tutors has failed to provide role models to male nursing students (Carlsson, 2020; Hodges et al., 2017; Powers et al., 2018).

In nursing education, male students are at a disadvantage because of stereotypes such as male nurses are failed medical students, or male nursing students are gay (Clow et al., 2015; Kiekkas et al., 2016). In a curriculum and learning environment customized to female learning preferences, male nursing students find themselves in the minority on the first day of class (Kiekkas et al., 2016). The imagery and pronouns used to refer to

nurses in nursing textbooks and educational materials are frequently female (Ashkenzi et al., 2017; Clow et al., 2015; Kiekkas et al., 2016). Nurse educators serve as role models for nursing students, helping to shape attitudes and views about nursing; however, male role models are missing from education (Gibbs & Kulig, 2017). Nurse educators influence students' attitudes either favorably or negatively (Gibbs & Kulig, 2017). According to Hodges et al. (2017), fostering a welcoming and inclusive learning environment is an important part of promoting gender equality in nursing.

Before conducting quantitative studies on male nursing students' gender experience, researchers must identify variables and tools to gather data. Surveys and checklists are typical instruments to improve the validity and reliability of data collecting. In a real-world situation, quantitative research helps quantify traits of individuals or to characterize a phenomenon such as gender prejudice. For example, there were three study tools used by Ashkenzi et al. (2017), the Likert scale survey with noteworthy reliability, attitudes toward men in the nursing scale, and perceptions of the professional status of the nursing scale. Based on their findings, male nursing students faced challenges and often felt a sense of social exclusion (Ashkenzi et al., 2017).

Researchers examined male nursing students' experiences using a wide range of qualitative methodologies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The smaller sample size is common in qualitative studies, and interviews provide researchers with a wealth of information on the perspectives of nursing students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Continued discussions in research occur regarding gender-based educational hurdles and their influence on nursing education on male students rather than nursing faculty. Nurse

educators may not be aware of real or perceived gender-based educational challenges experienced by male nursing students as well as the role they may unknowingly play in maintaining gender stereotypes. Despite this, research showed nursing professors frequently overlook male nursing students demonstrate care in different ways and communicate in ways that might lead to misunderstanding in a setting predominately composed of women (Abshire et al., 2018; Whitford et al., 2020; Younas et al., 2019).

Until nursing faculties acknowledge the harmful effects of gender prejudice (Petges & Sabio, 2020) and educational hurdles based on gender, nursing education and the nursing profession will continue to be dominated by women (Christensen et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2020). Nurse educators need to be aware of the challenges presented in this study. The importance of promoting inclusivity needs to be communicated and acted upon so male nursing students are supported throughout their nursing education.

The next chapter includes the methodology and processes used to plan and implement this basic qualitative research study. A description of the data collection and analysis design follows an assessment of the research questions. The criteria for how individuals were recruited and selected will also be addressed. Lastly, Chapter 3 finishes with a consideration of the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the semistructured interview methodology.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success in nursing programs and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome those challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Nursing programs can utilize acquired concepts to increase completion rates among male nursing students using the understanding gathered from this qualitative study. Furthermore, associate degree nursing programs can contribute to the solution to the worldwide nursing shortage by using the concepts learned leading to more successful nursing graduates (AACN, 2020).

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following two research questions guided this qualitative research study:

RQ1: What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program?

RQ2: What are the male nursing students' recommendations about the supports they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at their urban Midwest community college nursing programs?

There are various methodologies to consider when planning a study. Time constraints, along with the size and aim of the study, determine the methodology (Gray et al., 2020). The quantitative design consists of a larger participant pool and considers the frequency of occurrence of the phenomenon to be researched and then statistically

analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The quantitative methodology does not allow for the personal narratives of the male nursing students that are pertinent to this study.

Qualitative research designs considered for this study were phenomenological, case study, and generic designs. The phenomenological approach uncovers the human experience: the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological studies are rigorous and typically require experienced researchers with a good understanding of philosophy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach is most specific to medicine or law and consists of in-depth evaluations of people in their environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies can be time-consuming, leading to declined participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The basic qualitative design, however, consists mainly of interviews and a smaller participant pool (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was the best choice with my experience in research and for the study. This approach best answers the research question as to what male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success in completing their college nursing program.

To analyze the perceptions of male nursing students enrolled in nursing programs, a basic qualitative research design was used. Research questions were specifically created to provide a clear picture of the challenges male nursing students face in nursing school. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how researchers use basic qualitative research to get a comprehensive understanding of behavior or practice. A basic qualitative design was used to examine what male nursing students perceive as challenges impeding their success in completing their nursing programs. This design provided a lens into the

meaning of lives providing firsthand knowledge of problems or even successes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned the lens of the world includes tools such as field notes, interviews, conversations, and recordings. Qualitative research investigates the meaning of problems, develops assumptions and a framework, develops a plan, and begins to collect the data, followed by the analysis and search for patterns and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Basic qualitative research was the best methodology to address the research questions: What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success and what are the male nursing students' recommendations about the supports they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at their urban Midwest community college nursing programs?

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role in qualitative research is to conduct a study that may lead to findings contributing to the profession's research. To understand life events, the researcher accepts and respects each individual's unique perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The direction I took as the role of the researcher was to collect data from people who have personally experienced the topic of the research study, then assess the data to identify common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I had to maintain an impartial view and acknowledge there are many points of view.

My beliefs, opinions, and assumptions may have affected the study's design and perception due to the subjective nature of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed researchers might mitigate negative impacts by



employing self-reflection to identify biases. Powers et al. (2018) gave a detailed explanation of ways to maintain confidentiality and trustworthiness in the study design as well as strategies to avoid bias. Understanding ideas and assumptions, as well as the resulting implications, was important to maintain. To encourage ethical conduct throughout the study, I implemented measures to mitigate risks to validity and bias through reflexivity journaling and self-reflection.

Other validity risks must be considered with the understanding that the researcher was the primary data-gathering tool. The impact on the study's environment and participants was another possible threat to qualitative research validity (Yin, 2016). However, as a qualitative researcher, the purpose was not to eradicate participants' impacts. Instead, it was important to concentrate on comprehending and successfully using the participant's impact on the study (Priode, 2019). Recognizing my assumptions and viewpoints was necessary to exclude from the study (Merriam & Tisdill, 2016). As a result, a reflexivity journal was kept throughout the study to track and reflect on individual assumptions and opinions to minimize their impact on the research.

Journaling was another strategy employed to lessen the effects of researcher bias. Butin (2010) investigated the benefits of keeping a reflective research journal. Petges and Sabio (2020) addressed the need of recording nonverbal and emotional cues observed during interviewing in a reflective diary. The reflective notebook helped track the development and acquired insight into the intricacies of this qualitative study (Butin, 2010). Documented methods and decisions were made throughout the development of the research design, as well as participant comments and nonverbal interactions. This

documentation included perspectives on the research process and exploratory approach. The interview questions reflected the research questions and helped establish sufficiency once data saturation occurred. Data saturation occurred once no new information came from participants (Yup Yik, 2021). Data saturation occurred at 13 participants.

Personal experience in nursing education as a career was a possible bias. While I have no connection to the research site, I have experience as a nurse and as a nurse educator. I reflected on the literature on gender bias in nursing education, as well as the implications that could result in increased prejudice. Avoidance of any personal biases and viewpoints occurred by carefully ensuring my reactions and results would not be presented within the context of the study. Reflexivity journaling is one strategy for minimizing personal assumptions and prejudices (Butin, 2010). Current literature guided this basic qualitative research study. For example, Creswell and Poth (2019) discussed certain approaches that should be considered based on the experience of the researcher. The exhaustive literature review provided many studies of various methodologies to capture the right approach for this research study specific to my experience.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

Because this is a relatively understudied group of students at community colleges, male associate degree nursing students were the population of the present study. Researchers use purposeful sampling to provide context-rich data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants had to be male nursing students enrolled in at least one semester, at community colleges, in a fully accredited associate nursing program in an urban Midwest

area of the United States. The data that was collected, described what male nursing students consider challenges within nursing programs; this type of purposeful sampling was the primary contributor to the research study. During the interview process, observations were made for any nonverbal responses that can accentuate the narrative indicating signs of interest or noninterest based on facial expressions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). A smaller sample size delivers more context-rich data, whereas a larger sample size may lead to data generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The relationship with participants is critical to a study's effectiveness (Gray et al., 2020). The interaction between the participants and myself was professional while providing a comfortable environment for participants to provide full disclosure of challenges in nursing school (Gray et al., 2020).

### **Instrumentation**

Because this was a qualitative research study, I was the primary research instrument. As Yin (2016) mentioned, the researcher is typically the main instrument when it comes to data collection. Through semistructured interviews, questions were carefully designed for each participant and each participant was overserved for their body language as well as how they answered each question. Guided questions were another important instrument used for this basic qualitative research study. Along with guided questions, a reflexivity journal was maintained to capture significant observations from the interviews by writing statements important to the data collection and allowed me to easily refer to the narration with those significant statements.

Semistructured interviews were the main research tool to answer research questions for this study. Interview questions, which reflected the basic qualitative research, guided the research to answer each research question. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the support they need to overcome these challenges at urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Male nursing students described their perspectives of the nursing program and challenges faced through semistructured interviews, offering a thorough and vivid picture into their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I developed the interview questions by synthesizing research questions into specific open-ended questions (Yin, 2016). The purpose of these questions was to gather evidence to enhance the study (Yin, 2016) and gain an understanding of male nursing students' perceptions of challenges they face that impede their success and the recommendations for the support they need to overcome these challenges. The use of participant interviews was a form of data collection communicating the true lived story (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The guided interview question protocol, which was designed to gather information connected to the research questions, helped me stay on topic and focused during interviews while offering the chance to reply freely to participants' response. The development of the interview questions needed to provide the most reliable information from the participants as they described their challenges in the nursing program occurred under the supervision of my doctoral committee. The doctoral committee and I reviewed

each question for accuracy and logical flow. Additionally, each question was reviewed for alignment to ensure the collection of data would answer the research questions guiding this study. According to Yin (2016), interview questions must be open-ended and reflect the research questions and are the anchor for the study. The completed interview questions were piloted with another nursing educator for timing, accuracy, and a manner of logical flow. In-depth documentation with the use of a reflexivity journal was another form of data collection used to capture my actions, thoughts, and observations, during the interview process (Janesick, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Another instrument used was Zoom, which was downloaded to my computer and tested to assure proper installation. I downloaded the recorded interviews, so I could replay and ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions completed by Rev Transcription Services. The interview questions were developed to align with the research questions (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Research Question and Interview Question Alignment*

Research Questions	Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions
RQ1. What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program?	Q1. Please describe your experience as a male nursing student in the associate degree nursing program. Q2. Different generations view nursing through a narrow lens. What are your thoughts on the role and expectations of the male nurse? Q3. Discuss a time you felt isolated or ignored in nursing school and how this challenged your success in the program. Q4. Describe a time when you have been singled out in class, lab, or clinical because of your gender. How did you feel? How did you respond? Q5. As a male nursing student, how have you overcome the challenges of completion in the nursing program?
RQ 2. What are the male nursing students' recommendations about the support they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at their urban Midwest community college nursing program?	Q6. What resources do male nursing students need to be supported and complete the program successfully? What might these look like? Q7. How can faculty and staff help male nursing students complete the nursing program successfully? Q8. What can improve the nursing curriculum for the success of male nursing students?

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Thirteen male nursing students from accredited associate degree nursing programs, at two community colleges located in an urban Midwest area of the United States, participated in the study. These students enabled me to acquire precise data compatible with basic qualitative studies. Participants needed to be enrolled in an associate degree nursing program and identify as a male, to offer a holistic understanding of the challenges male nursing students face. According to Powers et al. (2018), roughly 10% of nursing students enrolled in nursing schools are males. The research sites used for this study have a larger student enrollment for their nursing program as compared to other surrounding community colleges. Participants were not chosen, nor data collected until

authorization from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB) committee was obtained. In addition to receiving IRB authorization from Walden University, I also obtained approval from the community colleges where I recruited participants.

Following IRB approval (# 11-15-22-0352617), I selected and invited participants using the student rosters provided by the chairpersons of the nursing departments by purposefully selecting each of the male-identified students enrolled in the nursing programs at community colleges in an urban Midwest community. After the selection process was complete, I sent these students an email inviting them to voluntarily join my study. Each participant was guaranteed that the interviews and identities would remain confidential by not using actual names or identifying information such as addresses, phone numbers, or email addresses. In the invitation, participants received an explanation that participation was optional, and they had the right to terminate the interview or their participation in the study at any time without repercussions.

There was a 72-hour window for participants to respond to the invitation and consent by responding to the email, "I consent." Throughout the study, precautions were used to protect and maintain participant confidentiality. Before consenting to participate in the study and performing interviews, I defined the study's purpose and reviewed the consent form with participants to ensure a clear understanding. This included information such as the type of Zoom interview, the expected length of the interview, and the audio recording. The consent followed the invitation in the email, so participants could easily reply via email. All information gathered will be stored safely on a password-protected

computer. The data will be retained for 5 years before being removed and destroyed, according to Walden University's IRB procedures.

Using Zoom, I met virtually with each participant. Interviews occurred at a private office, while participants used a private place of their choice. The use of Zoom offered more opportunities for participants providing convenience and comfort for their honesty (Gray et al., 2020). Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes; the length was dependent on how in-depth participants' responses were when combined with their descriptions of the challenges they encountered in the nursing program.

Data collection ceased when data saturation occurred after interviewing 13 participants, seven participants from College A and six from College B. At the end of each interview, the participants were assured that all information collected would be confidential. At the conclusion of each interview, my appreciation was expressed to the participants for their participation and time devoted to the study. Mott and Lee et al. (2018) discussed the importance of protecting all information pertaining to participants. I reviewed the considerations throughout the research.

To maintain confidentiality, each participant's identity and personal information were protected during the study's data collection and analysis processes by replacing the participant's identity with an alphanumerical code (SN1...SN13). I remained the only individual to handle the transcripts and audio files during data collection and analysis, which were kept on a password-protected device. Consequently, all data obtained within the study will dwell in a locked filing cabinet in my home for 5 years after the study is published and will be shredded after this period.



## **Data Analysis Plan**

Participants were carefully selected to meet the study's qualifications. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), discrepant cases can occur, which are participants who do not provide data needed to answer research questions. Furthermore, vetting discrepant cases to ensure participants are truthful, professional, and forthcoming is important. All participants for this research study met the criteria as they displayed professionalism throughout the interviews.

Semistructured interviews were the data collection method for this study. Rev Transcription Services was used to transcribe each recording. The interview transcripts were then sent to all participants for verification to ensure accuracy. Upon receipt of the verified transcripts, I further reviewed the transcriptions and compared each transcript with the reflexivity journal to have a complete understanding of participants' responses. Each transcription was manually coded using an inductive, open coding process, to find response patterns. Using Microsoft Word, each transcription was placed in a column where I read line-by-line highlighting trends, and documenting categories in another column. In addition, I highlighted and color-coded themes and codes for analysis. This process was reviewed and intricately analyzed several times for accuracy and immersion of the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Saldaña, 2015). A thematic analysis was the driving force to organize the data to interpret the conclusions of the study.

Yin (2016) described a five-step process to conduct organized data analysis. These five steps include compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. This method was followed to maintain an organized process for data

analysis. Compiling the data consisted of notetaking and transcripts from interviews. Next, disassembling data consisted of coding. Using this process, I generated codes by comparing notes and listening to the transcripts. Reassembling and interpreting the data led to grouping codes into emerging themes (Yin, 2016). The last step was the conclusion, which included the final interpretation of the data collection (Yin, 2016).

To ensure the accuracy of data specific to the research questions, I listened to each recording at least three times to establish familiarity with the data (Yin, 2016). Immersing myself in the data revealed codes and then themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). Close examination of the data analysis and repeating the steps described by Yin (2016) provided a comprehensive interpretation of the data collection.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research relies on trustworthy data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questioning any underlying assumptions that could potentially dictate my actions to lead participants from their own perspectives was necessary to maintain trustworthy data. Keeping a reflexivity journal allowed for self-reflection throughout the interview process. I was alert to tone, non-verbal language, and potentially leading participants toward my biases of being a nurse educator (Yin, 2016). A trustworthy study must include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Credibility**

To establish credibility, the weight of the evidence should develop themes of recurring discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Much like detective work, I compiled evidence through the reflexivity journal, interviews, and comparisons to the extensive

literature review (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data saturation occurred at 13 participants when the same themes consistently arose (Subu et al., 2022). The credibility of the research was established by carefully reviewing the accuracy of recorded interviews multiple times after each interview (Cui et al., 2021). Upon the thorough review of each transcript, I sent the interview transcripts for transcript verification to all participants immediately to ensure accuracy and alignment with the audio recording. Subu et al. (2022) mentioned that ideally, credibility occurs using field notes, recorded data, and participants' perspectives, experiences, and feelings.

### **Transferability**

Transferability assists in creating similar studies that result in similar findings. Data must be descriptive and detailed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The rich detailed description of research studies enables readers to transfer the information to their settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). For example, while this study was specific to associate degree nursing programs, male nursing students in bachelor's degree nursing programs could experience similar challenges toward success in the nursing program. Another example of transferability could identify with nontraditional students other than male nursing students. For example, first-generation students who are nontraditional may experience the same challenges male nursing students experience toward success in the nursing program. According to Yin (2016), transferability is a "working hypothesis" (p. 106) indicating the need for continued research.

**Dependability**

To develop dependability, the researcher must fully engage in the research and formulate a triangulation of data using a myriad of sources, methods, and in-depth investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) discussed the authenticity of research coming from data collection. When participants identify with collected data, this is one way to demonstrate authenticity and dependability (Yin, 2016). While compiling the data for this research study, it was apparent the participants in this study related to the literature and shared many similarities.

**Confirmability**

To maintain confirmability, I was aware of personal biases as a nurse educator while conducting interviews. This included refraining from personal opinions and assisting or leading participants to answer questions in a certain way. I did not share any personal experiences or discuss my role as an educator or nurse. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), confirmability occurs with a thorough review of the recorded audio, field notes, and demonstrating beyond any doubt the value of the data collected.

**Ethical Procedures**

To safeguard participants and respect ethical standards throughout the study, I identified and assessed ethical challenges connected to the sample population and data collection. The study's participants were male nursing students enrolled in associate degree nursing programs. They were not deemed a vulnerable demographic; therefore, they did not require any special measures while participating during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, participants were individuals older than 18 who did not

experience any dangers that would interfere with their daily lives because of taking part in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Identifying conflicts of interest is an important aspect of research. To ensure transparency of the research design and adherence to ethical norms, full disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, coercion, or risk of influence was monitored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purposeful sampling for this study was limited to male nursing students enrolled in a nursing program. Before initiating data collection, I received approval for the proposal through Walden University's IRB approval (# 11-15-22-0352617), as well as from both community college locations. At the start of the interview, the participants were asked to verbally consent to proceed with the interview. Once the participants consented to proceed, they were given an opportunity to ask any questions. Also, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin 2016). Participants had the option to remain in the research or quit at any time, with no repercussions.

Privacy was crucial to ethical concerns throughout this study. Interviews with participants took place at my private residence via Zoom. Interviews were audio-recorded and kept with alphanumeric codes in place of the participants' personal information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For added privacy, I saved electronically generated data on an external, offline, password-protected hard drive at my home office. I removed personally identifiable information regarding participants from the data, and alphanumeric codes were used in their place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical conduct is an integral part of this research study. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point. Throughout

the research study, the participants were all professional and respectful toward the questions and responses, and I was aware and sensitive to any potentially uncomfortable situations that could arise.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3 the qualitative methodology was defined by the research question framing the basis for this research design. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the support they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Manual coding of transcripts was used to establish common themes and codes as related to challenges male nursing students experience during nursing school. To create a trustworthy research study, self-reflection on any biases of being a nurse educator occurred while conducting the research study. I received IRB approval before any interviews occurred. Lastly, ethical considerations were taken to ensure the participants' confidentiality. Next, in Chapter 4 the discussion of results from the interview process are presented.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the support they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs. Throughout this study, the following RQs were used to serve as a guide during the interviews and analysis of the data.

RQ1: What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program?

RQ2: What are the male nursing students' recommendations about the support they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at their urban Midwest community college nursing program?

Chapter 4 includes the setting, data collection, data analysis process, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

### **Setting**

At the time of the study, there were no negative influences, such as budget cuts or changes in personnel, which would affect the collection data and the interpretation of the study's findings. Following IRB approval, 13 interviews occurred via Zoom. The semistructured interviews occurred in a private office to ensure confidentiality. As the researcher, I have 20 years of nursing experience, along with 9 years of teaching experience in nursing programs. My experience as a nurse educator guided my focus on male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success

and their recommendations for the support they need to overcome these challenges at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs.

Participant demographics included male-identified nursing students enrolled in nursing programs at community colleges in the urban Midwest. Thirteen students from two different associate degree nursing programs in a Midwest community participated in this study. I interviewed seven male nursing students from College A and six male nursing students from College B. Participants were actively enrolled first through fourth semesters in the nursing programs.

### **Data Collection**

Following approval from Walden University's IRB, I began data collection. Approval from both community colleges' IRB was received to begin the data collection for this research study. Initially, in the first college (College A) there were 55 email invitations sent to all male nursing students leading to three responses. There was another email invitation sent out a week later, with a better response rate of four more students. This delayed response time prompted me to investigate an additional college site for data collection. During this time-lapse, I modified the original IRB application approved by Walden University. Permission from Walden's IRB was granted to access an additional college for data collection. An email was sent to the dean and chairperson at the second college site (College B) for their approval to contact male nursing students for this study. Upon receiving approval to move forward with the data collection at College B, 45 email invitations were sent with an immediate response from six students. This met my combined target number of 13 participants to interview.



I conducted each interview via Zoom in a closed private office. Interviews lasted from 30-45 minutes. Prior to each participant interview, the purpose of the study was reviewed, and I again asked for their verbal consent. Each participant was reminded they could end the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The participants were reminded that their identities would remain confidential. Each interview was audio recorded via Zoom with the knowledge and consent of each participant. Prewritten interview questions and protocol helped lead to a consistent and organized semistructured interview allowing for clarification and follow-up questions. During interviews, a reflexivity journal was maintained to stay on task and capture vital details from the participants. Interviews were of a relaxed nature that allowed full disclosure. After each interview, there were follow-up questions, and my appreciation was expressed to participants for their willingness to participate in the study. The participants conveyed interest and enthusiasm to receive the results from the research study. The participants were assured that the results would be emailed to them once the study was completed.

There was a slight variation in data collection from the initial plan presented in Chapter 3. Instead of using only one community college for data collection, I sought approval from Walden's IRB to include an additional college. The second community college provided the number of participants needed to obtain a rich set of data. This allowed me to compare responses from two community colleges rather than one. Data collection occurred without any unusual circumstances and participants were interested in the topic and thanked me for my interest in their success in the nursing program as male

nursing students. The interview questions were developed to align with research questions (see Table 1).

### **Data Analysis**

Upon completion of data collection, Rev Transcription Services transcribed the recordings from each interview. Each transcription was sent to the participants for verification. Once the participants approved the transcription, each individual transcription was uploaded and put into a table using Microsoft Word. Three columns were created: column one for the transcription, column two for coding and the third column identified the themes. Each individual transcription was reviewed line-by-line, highlighting repeated common keywords, and written in the reflexivity journal. After defining the codes, emerging themes were recognized through the repetitive statements made from the participants. Table 2 represents College A and lists interview questions and codes.

**Table 2***College A: Interview Questions and Codes*

Interview Questions	Codes
Q1. Please describe your experience as a male nursing student in the associate degree nursing program.	“Apprehensive” “Pressure to do better as a male student”
Q2. Different generations view nursing through a narrow lens. What are your thoughts on the role and expectations of the male nurse?	“I’m aware of the strenuous nature of nursing” “There is a stigma” “My family has been very supportive”
Q3. Discuss a time you felt isolated or ignored in nursing school and how this challenged your success in the program.	“Never felt ignored” “I don’t allow myself to be ignored.” “I like to work alone”
Q4. Describe a time when you have been singled out in class, lab, or clinical because of your gender. How did you feel? How did you respond?	“Never felt singled out” “Used for lifting patients in clinical” “In OB the nurse would talk to the female students”
Q5. As a male nursing student, how have you overcome the challenges of completion in the nursing program?	“Reach out to others” “You have to be a self-starter”
Q6. What resources do male nursing students need to be supported and complete the program successfully? What might these look like?	“The AAMN has provided a lot of support” “Nothing-I just feel completely supported”
Q7. How can faculty and staff help male nursing students complete the nursing program successfully?	“More male professors”
Q8. What can improve the nursing curriculum for the success of male nursing students?	“Test question referred to male nurse-that was empowering”

Similarly, data from College B was uploaded into Rev Transcription Services. Each transcription was emailed to the participants for verification. Upon participant approval, each transcription was uploaded and put into a table using Microsoft Word. Again, three columns were created: column one for the recorded transcription, column two for coding and the third column identified the themes. Each individual transcription was reviewed line-by-line, highlighting keywords that were commonly repeated and written in the reflectivity journal. After defining the codes, emerging themes were recognized through the repetitive statements made from the participants. Table 3 is from College B and lists the interview questions and codes.

**Table 3***College B: Interview Questions and Codes*

	Interview Questions	Codes
Q1.	Please describe your experience as a male nursing student in the associate degree nursing program.	“Apprehensive” “Overwhelming” “Juggling act”
Q2.	Different generations view nursing through a narrow lens. What are your thoughts on the role and expectations of the male nurse?	“Sexism from older patients” “Why aren’t you a doctor” “Viewed as a homosexual” “Asked to move patients more”
Q3.	Discuss a time you felt isolated or ignored in nursing school and how this challenged your success in the program.	“First semester felt ignored by the professor who worked more with females than the males”
Q4.	Describe a time when you have been singled out in class, lab, or clinical because of your gender. How did you feel? How did you respond?	“Clinical-used for all the lifting of patients” “Guys depend on each other for support” “Family support”
Q5.	As a male nursing student, how have you overcome the challenges of completion in the nursing program?	“Have to be outspoken” “Mandatory guy events” “Mentorship program”
Q6.	What resources do male nursing students need to be supported and complete the program successfully? What might these look like?	“Treat us like everyone else” “More male instructors” “Need male lab techs”
Q7.	How can faculty and staff help male nursing students complete the nursing program successfully?	“More gaming in class like Kahoot” “More kinetics in classroom and lab”
Q8.	What can improve the nursing curriculum for the success of male nursing students?	

Comparing College A and College B allowed me to identify similar and different themes. Both sites represented a similar percentage of enrolled male nursing students, which is approximately 15%. The difference between the two study sites is that College A has an AAMN chapter, which provides support and mentoring for male nursing students, and College B does not.

### **Results**

The purpose of this research study was to answer: What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program; what are the male nursing students' recommendations about the support they need to overcome the challenges that are impeding their success at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs? Participants who volunteered for this study provided valuable data to answer these questions. Interview questions were developed to align with research questions.

When reviewing responses from the 13 participants, many of the participants had similar responses addressing their challenges in their respective nursing programs. Some of the categories that developed from the data reflecting RQ 1: Reflections of the barriers that male nursing students experience and inclusion versus exclusion in a female-dominated profession. This sample of categories were derived from many responses participants provided describing their feelings about the nursing program. Some of the comments reflecting their barriers included, "as men, we are taught to be seen and not heard," "I refuse to be ignored," "I ignore the stigmas," "the social norms are changing, and we can ask more questions without being ignored." Other comments from

participants referring to their barriers in the nursing program were fear, being overwhelmed, and intimidation. As a result, two themes emerged reflecting RQ 1; one is male nursing students are reluctant to enter the nursing profession because men are underrepresented, and the other is male nursing students experience feelings of stigma created by the persistent stereotypes assigned to male nurses in society.

**Theme 1: Male Nursing Students are Reluctant to Enter the Nursing Profession Since Men are Underrepresented.**

Male nursing students tend to be reluctant to enter the nursing profession because men are not well represented in a female-dominated profession of nursing. As Kronsberg et al. (2018) stated, male role models are few and recruiting tactics for males are insufficient. Participant SN3 shared, “We just have to have more men in the nursing program to get the actual number of men that succeed to move forward. If there were more outreach programs and get into the high schools.” SN3 further indicated, “I didn’t know that nursing was an option when I was 16.” These statements indicate the need to review the recruiting process, so that it is an equitable option for all students at the high school level. Based on SN3 comments, bringing more male recruits and male faculty into nursing programs would be beneficial.

SN12 provided more insights on how insecurities can affect young men in high school and beyond:

Growing up, especially in high school, you don’t really talk about men going into nursing. And even in media, you see a lot of females representing that career. So,

to me, it was like, oh, people expect female presence because that's a very female-dominant career. So, that was my expectation.

These comments expressed the raw feelings and thoughts of the male participants who were interviewed. It is important to stress that not everyone had the same feelings. Participants who felt confident in the program had a strong support system at home. Some had parents and spouses who were nurses. For example, SN3 stated, "I am married to a nurse, so I interact with nurses frequently ... so far my experience, I don't honestly feel much different from my position as a male student than I do any of my peers." Another participant added, "My mom who is a nurse encouraged my dad to become a nurse, he became a CRNA, so I definitely come from a unique background ... in school, I feel we are on the same team."

## **Theme 2: Male Nursing Students Experience Feelings of Stigma Created by the Persistent Stereotypes Assigned to Male Nurses in Society.**

The second theme, male nursing students experience feelings of stigma created by the persistent stereotypes assigned to male nurses in society, was mentioned throughout interviews. As I was carefully listening and watching the participants throughout the interview, I sensed an undercurrent of stereotypes that were not easily expressed by the participants. Many participants stated the following: "I ignore the stereotypes," "I think they were joking when they thought I was gay," "pink-collar field of nursing," "confused me as a doctor because I had to wear my lab coat in clinical." The reactions from participants were to ignore comments and move on.



Participant SN7 stated, “I am bigger than the stigma.” This statement indicated another challenge male nursing students must endure in addition to the already in-place rigors of nursing school. The male nursing students who were interviewed had a determination to succeed. In my conversations, more emotions were captured about overcoming stereotypes. SN2 shared, “I knew that nursing is a female-dominated role. It did not change my viewpoint as to wanting to become a nurse.” SN3 shared a slightly different perspective:

We have to go out of our way to represent ourselves. I’m constantly having to prove that I’m not a complete moron. Anytime you walk into a room where you don’t know anybody, you have to prove that you belong to be there, that you are meant to be there as a male nurse.

These statements described the challenges male nursing students face in nursing programs. No one should have to prove his belonging. Male nursing students face gender-related barriers, which directly affect their professional self-image and perceptions of nursing (Hodges et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2019). SN4 added, “I do still feel like there’s some stigma that males can’t be as empathetic as females or that they view males as just muscle mass helping to lift or turn heavier patients.” This statement reflected the theme of stereotypical behavior male nursing students endure in the nursing programs that impede their success in nursing programs. Finding ways to increase male nursing student retention rates will increase self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and autonomy (Priode, 2019).

Reflecting on RQ2, what are male nursing students' recommendations about supports they need to overcome challenges impeding their success at urban Midwest community college nursing programs, some categories that emerged from the interviews include, isolation, loneliness, inclusiveness, exclusion, and the importance of a male nursing student program support system. Each participant expressed the importance of belonging to a group, or club for male student support. A group provides a sense of belonging where people gather to gain support and encouragement which in turn provides a sense of social inclusion (Ashkenzi et al., 2017). The final theme was male nursing students expressed a need for and understand the importance of a male nursing student program support system.

**Theme 3: Male Nursing Students Express a Need for and Understand the Importance of a Male Nursing Student Program Support System.**

Participants unanimously stated nursing programs need more male professors, in theory, lab, and clinical. Moore et al. (2020) stated, male nurses, are role models for male students considering the profession. Some participants shared examples of connections they made with male nurses. SN12 stated, "That's part of the reason why I also wanted to become a nurse. When I was a transporter, a male nurse influenced me to go into the nursing career." SN12 now pays it forward and "encourages other men who are undecided to consider nursing, because it's a good career." Participant SN13 recommended, "having more male influences in theory, lab, and clinical" is essential. The participant, who is a senior in the program, stated he has had only one connection throughout the program with one other male nursing student.

Other participant comments included: “lonely”, “ignored by strong cliques”, “difficult to make friends”, and “guys depend on each other.” These strong statements signify the necessity for male mentorship for men in nursing school. Most of these comments came from College B. Listening to male nursing students from College A, a different narrative was heard: “I don’t feel alone”, “Open and supportive”, “never felt ignored”, “network with other males in the AAMN”, “good support system”, and “good support for males in the program”. The differing experiences from College A and College B starkly contrast with each other. Having a mentor that the male nursing student can identify with is important to the success of the program. Participant SN6 talked about a test he took and pointed out a test question that referred to the nurse as “he”. SN6 went on to say how he felt “inspired and empowered” by this small, yet significant advancement in understanding gender equality in nursing programs.

Participants willingly shared what resources are necessary to help support their success in the nursing program. SN1 forthrightly shared:

Our school has a club called a male nursing student association or something like that. And they have shown that they’re very willing and very open and supportive of both male and female nurses. But they do emphasize that they do have an association with male students. So, they do acknowledge that nursing is still a female-dominated industry, and they’re there to provide support for any male students who happen to need additional support in whatever capacity.

Mentoring and further conversation with SN1 indicated the value and positive influence this association has on male nursing students. SN4 enthusiastically shared, “I

definitely encourage an AAMN program because that just shows that there are other male students out there and you can help each other.” Again, SN4 indicated the importance for male nursing students to have a mentor. In agreement, SN6 elaborated:

The one thing that I would recommend to future classes would be to set up a mandatory fund essentially for the male nurses where they have to get together and go do something where you can all hang out and where guys can all be together and still talk shop and still talk about everything going on ... But that way you’ve got some sort of mandatory activity that will then help reinforce the relationship, and then that will help with the classes as they get harder.

SN6 emphasized, “reinforce the relationship” adding to the importance of mentoring. Relatedness increases academic achievements along with perseverance (Beachwood et al., 2011).

SN10 strengthened the theme of male nurses expressing a need and understanding for the importance of a male nursing student program support system. by adding:

We do have our own group chat and we’ll like we’ll talk about, whatever. But yeah, we’ll have our own little click, but we are not exclusive to only guys even though the group just started with guys, but then we added some female nurses as well.

Comradery and mentorship are essential to developing men within nursing programs.

SN8 indicated:

I did recently see a male professor in the nursing program. Yeah, seeing him kind of made me happy. I was like, oh man, I hope he’s teaching something in the third

or fourth semester because I want to know his experiences. ‘Cause he has been a nurse, so I want to know his experiences and what he can give me advice in the future for me as a male nurse.

I captured SN8’s vulnerability as he indicated his happiness to see a male faculty member and hope to have him as a teacher as he progresses in the program. Having a male role model to be a mentor with whom SN8 can identify connects to the theme of mentorship. The lack of male nurses in the workforce disconnects from identifying and relating with male patients and specific gender needs while providing patient care (Kronsberg et al., 2018).

The interview process was important to remain organized and on task. Staying on topic with the formatted questions at times was challenging because participants sometimes went off-topic and needed to be redirect back to the questions. I did not have any discrepant cases, and each participant was professional and respectful. The contributions each participant provided to the advancement of this study.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

During the interviews, a trustworthy study was established by keeping a meticulous reflexivity journal, verifying the accuracy of transcriptions, comparing the reflexivity journal with transcriptions, and establishing categories, codes, and themes. Consistently reflecting on my views throughout interviews was important. Self-reflection kept me in check from potentially leading participants toward my views (Yin, 2016). A trustworthy study must include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Credibility**

To gain substantial credibility for the study, I practiced the interview questions with a colleague to assure the questions flowed in a logical sequence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the practice interview allowed me to assess for time management. The credibility of the research study was also maintained from the weight of the evidence that developed categories, codes, and themes from recurring discussions (Subu et al., 2022). The evidence was compiled in a reflexivity journal, and interviews, and comparisons to the extensive literature review were made. The credibility of the research continued through carefully reviewing the accuracy of recorded interviews multiple times after each interview. Additionally, comparing the reflexivity journal with the transcriptions, identifying categories and codes, then finally identifying common themes presented by the participants increased the study's credibility.

**Transferability**

Researchers could transfer the data collected from this study to nursing programs involving male nursing students. While this study was exclusive to associate degree programs, the results could relate to other nursing programs as well. For example, while this study was specific to associate degree nursing programs, male nursing students in bachelor's degree nursing programs could experience similar challenges toward success in the nursing program. Transferability assists in creating similar studies that result in similar findings. The honesty and vulnerability of participants created a detailed description enabling readers to transfer the information to their institution of study.

**Dependability**

Upon completion of the data collection, I reviewed the literature review and found comparable information relating to responses from participants of this research study. These findings demonstrated the validity and dependability of my data collection. The validity of the research formulated a triangulation with the combination of interviews, an exhaustive literature review, and the reflexivity journal. When research participants identify with the literature of previous research studies, there is a demonstration of authenticity and dependability (Yin, 2016). The responses from the participants of this study correlate with the literature of previous research and many similarities ensured dependability for this study.

**Confirmability**

To maintain confirmability potential biases as a registered nurse and a nurse educator, my personal opinions or experiences needed to be neutral while conducting interviews. This included refraining from personal opinions and leading participants to answer questions in a certain way. Confirmability occurs with a thorough review of the recorded audio, reflexivity journaling, and demonstrating the value of the data collection through concise organizational methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Summary**

The purpose of this research study was to answer two questions: What do male nursing students perceive to be challenges that impede their success toward completing their urban Midwest community college nursing program; what are the male nursing students' recommendations about the support they need to overcome the challenges that

are impeding their success at two urban Midwest community college nursing programs? The 13 participants who volunteered for this research study provided valuable data. During the interviews, I established a precise method for keeping the reflexivity journal, verifying the accuracy of the transcriptions from the interviews, comparing the reflexivity journal with the transcriptions, and establishing categories, codes, and themes from the data collection.

During the interview process, I used a scripted interview protocol that reflected the research questions, capturing truthful and honest perspectives from the male nursing students. It was important to consistently self-reflect during the interviews as to not project bias. Upon completion of the data collection, recorded data was transcribed using Rev Transcription Services. The transcription was then uploaded into a table using Microsoft Word where the transcription was reviewed line-by-line, highlighting keywords that were repetitive from other participants, aligned with the research questions, and noted in the reflectivity journal.

The results of this study led to three common themes: males nursing students are reluctant to enter the nursing profession since men are underrepresented, male nursing students experience feelings of stigma created by the persistent stereotypes assigned to male nurses in society, and male nursing students express a need for and understand the importance of a male nursing student program support system. When participants identify with previous research and the data collection, this is one way to demonstrate authenticity and dependability (Yin, 2016). Authenticity and dependability were established when the literature review was compared with the data collection and many similar themes



throughout data collection were identified. Chapter 5 will include the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the potential impact this research study can offer for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges in community college nursing programs. With the understanding and knowledge gained from this basic qualitative study, nursing program leadership can apply findings to improve the completion and graduation rates among male nursing students. Furthermore, community college nursing programs can contribute to the nursing shortage by graduating more nurses, specifically more male nurses (AACN, 2020). The data collection in Chapter 4 discussed results of the research study. A summary of results including interpretations of findings, limitations, recommendations, and implications from this research study will be discussed in this final Chapter 5.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this study correlate with the research provided in the literature review, focusing on the challenges male nursing students face during their program. Understanding the specific challenges this population of nurses face can help administrators and faculty in developing solutions to improve the completion rates of male nurses within their respective community colleges. These developing solutions may lead to graduating more nurses to help reduce the nursing shortage. Findings from this study have solidified the findings of previous studies and revealed some of the challenges male nursing students encounter in nursing school. The evolving themes of males nursing students are reluctant to enter the nursing profession since men are underrepresented,

male nursing students experience feelings of stigma created by the persistent stereotypes assigned to male nurses in society, and male nursing students express a need for and understand the importance of a male nursing student program support system, stereotypical behavior toward male nursing students, and importance of a male nursing student support system, voiced from the participants, not only mirror the literature of previous studies, but signify the male nursing student population must be heard and necessary changes implemented in nursing education programs.

### **Interpretation of Theme 1: Male Nursing Students are Reluctant to Enter the Nursing Profession Because Men are Underrepresented.**

Theme 1's interpretation developed as the participants addressed that visualization and vocabulary emphasized the prevalence of female nurses sending messages to potential male nursing students that they are not welcome in the nursing profession. The participants voiced their opinions that they would like to see more visualization of masculine men and improve terminology by using more male pronouns equally in nursing recruitment materials, textbooks, and curriculum resources that inclusively target males and females equally. Participants from the study also indicated a limited representation of male nurses in power points, textbooks, and recruiting materials.

Some participants commented they did not realize nursing was an option for them to consider during high school career days. Imagery and pronouns used to refer to nurses in nursing textbooks and educational materials are frequently female (Ashkenzi et al., 2017; Clow et al., 2015; Kiekkas et al., 2016). Connections between this study and the literature review have identified with other researchers, such as Moore et al. (2020) who

conducted a study on how to address the nursing shortage and concluded increasing diversity with improve strategies to reach more male nursing students. This could occur by creating positive community perceptions and eliminating false stereotypes, reaching high school faculty to promote nursing as a desirable and equal opportunity nursing profession for males and females (Moore et al., 2020).

**Interpretation of Theme 2: Male Nursing Students Experience Feelings of Stigma Created by the Persistent Stereotypes Assigned to Male Nurses in Society.**

The interpretation of Theme 2 emerged from the culmination of comments from the participants as they described various stereotypes and stigmas that are present in society. Listening to male nursing students who have experienced the realities of inequality is essential for faculty and administration to improve nursing programs and curricula (Subu et al., 2022). SN4 stated, “I do still feel like there’s some stigma that males can’t be as empathetic as females or that they view males as just muscle mass helping to lift or turn heavier patients.” Many participants stated the following: “I ignore the stereotypes”; “I think they were joking when they thought I was gay”; “pink-collar field of nursing”; “confused me as a doctor because I had to wear my lab coat in clinical.”

SN10 stated, “almost every day when I was a [certified nurse assistant] CNA in senior year at high school, my coach called me “nurse”, and the other guys asked me where my skirt was on the football team.” Participant SN7 stated, “I am bigger than the stigma.” Barriers specific to gender affect the professional self-image and nursing attitudes of male nursing students (Hodges et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2019). SN4 added, “I still feel that there's a mentality that men can't be as empathic as women, or that they

regard men as just muscle mass assisting to move or turn bigger patients." Through this research study, the application of the positive changes could contribute to increased male nursing student retention rates while increasing self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and autonomy (see Priode, 2019).

Hoffart et al. (2019) used Jefferey's NURS model to guide their study to identify gender-based differences based on characteristics, perceptions, and program experiences for nursing students in an accelerated nursing program. Findings from the study by Hoffart et al. indicated more research in this area is needed and nursing faculty who are predominantly female need to recognize the subtle biases that occur within nursing academia. However, responses from participants in my study indicated male nursing students were satisfied with the curriculum and did not feel it was biased.

**Interpretation of Theme 3: Male Nursing Students Express a Need for and Understand the Importance of a Male Nursing Student Program Support System.**

Lastly, the interpretations of Theme 3 described the findings that suggest leaders from nursing programs must consider implementing a mentoring program specifically for male nursing students. There is a value in hearing the perceptions from male nursing students and addressing their challenges and apply the findings to nursing programs and improve success rates. Male nursing students have underscored the need for more male role model representation within nursing programs. According to my observations and conversations with participants, there is a collaborative feeling of familiarity and understanding between male faculty and male nursing students.

Listening to participants use words such as “supported,” “happy,” and “included” as they referred to having a male support network or male faculty as a teacher were key indicators of the benefits of mentoring programs for male nursing students. If more nursing programs implemented a support network such as the AAMN, they could have positive implications for programs and the success of male nursing students. These changes could lead to positive social change by drawing more male students into the program, creating a sense of belonging, and potentially ensuring male nursing students’ success in nursing programs.

Further conversations from the participants added to the research unanimously by emphasizing the need for more male role models in nursing school. Participants presented the desire to see additional male faculty, male lab technicians, and male clinical professors. Leaders of higher education institutions can help student retention if they know how students think and how their actions affect perceptions (Hoffart et al., 2019). Perceptions of male nursing students are valuable, and actions leading to positive social change must occur in nursing schools to decrease challenges male nursing students experience. Results from the literature review and this study concluded male nursing students need support from nursing organizations such as the AAMN chapter, which can help male nursing students overcome numerous challenges, have a sense of belonging, and potentially be successful in their nursing programs (Cui et al., 2021).

Cui et al. (2021) focused on male nursing students attending a male-only nursing class found their collective experiences and perceptions resulted in a sense of unity with their fellow male students. Additionally, Cui et al. investigated male nursing students

who belonged to the AAMN chapter, and all stated that they felt supported by this association. Literature review findings align with results of my study where participants who belong to the AAMN consistently recorded feelings of being supported. For example, SN4, stated, "I definitely encourage an AAMN program because that just shows that there are other male students out there and you can help each other." SN2 added, "The AAMN is here to support each other and just make sure everyone's staying mentally, physically, and academically fit." To improve retention and success rates for male nursing students, then we must listen and act upon the perceptions of the students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations to this basic qualitative study were notable. The size of the participating population was the first limitation. The initial plan was to conduct interviews with male nursing students enrolled in a community college's accredited associate degree nursing program. However, due to the lack of response, it was necessary to investigate another accredited associate degree nursing program. Due to the nature of this study, only male nursing students from an associate degree program were selected and interviewed as participants for this study. I did not research other levels of nursing programs such as a bachelors and master's degree nursing programs. I had to monitor limitations to trustworthiness carefully because I have 9 years of experience as a nurse educator. I had to adhere to interview questions that were carefully constructed and professionally reviewed. Self-reflecting and keeping a detailed reflexivity journal allowed me to stay focused and not lead participants in any biased manner.

## **Recommendations**

Further research is recommended based on the results of this study. Researchers who are seeking to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in support of male nursing students and the nursing field must have a lens that is in search of improving the dynamics of men in nursing schools. Jamieson et al. (2019) suggested more research is necessary to deconstruct misconceptions of exactly what men and women work with along with existing stereotypes for society, healthcare, and nursing education (Abshire et al., 2018). These studies from Jamieson et al. (2019) and Abshire et al. (2018) provided more evidence from male nursing students' perspectives, signifying the importance of continued research relating to male nursing students' challenges in nursing school. Viewpoints of male nursing students can be a significant source of data for future research. Research incorporating student voices and their lived experiences could provide new perspectives on nurse training.

If this study were repeated with male participants at all levels of nursing programs, results could have contributed to a greater understanding of male nursing students at all levels of nursing education. For example, researchers could question if male nursing students at bachelor's or graduate levels have higher male student enrollment and if these programs have more support programs in place for male nursing students. Further investigation should include if male nursing students at the bachelor's level or graduate level have the same or similar challenges toward completion in their nursing programs.



Researchers could repeat the current study in other healthcare programs such as certified nurse assistants (CNA), surgical technicians, and emergency medical technicians (EMT) programs. Researching other levels of healthcare could explore the possibility of additional challenges for male students. These recommendations are directly from some of the participants who indicated when they were in CNA programs; they were the minority and felt isolated leading to an increased fear of moving to the nursing program. Another participant suggested having a bridge program for emergency medical technicians (EMT) to RN programs since most EMTs are male. Replicating the current study to compare lived experiences of all nontraditional students participating in the same program is another research recommendation. Exploring challenges of nontraditional students in the nursing programs could indicate if there are more areas of improvement to research. For example, low self-efficacy is not just a challenge for male nursing students but could be a challenge for nursing students of an ethnic group, or single parents (Tinto, 2017). Utilizing the current study's dimensions and broadening the inclusion criteria could improve success rates reaching more nontraditional students and not just male nursing students.

Future research could also build on the results of this study by investigating more on the success of rate of male nursing students in mentoring programs. The findings could further answer the questions if male nursing students have a higher rate of success if they enroll in mentoring programs. Comparing the data from schools with and without mentoring programs for male nursing students could offer more information on how

nursing programs can decrease the challenges for male nursing students and improve success rates based on these recommendations.

Results and implementation of future studies could contribute to the knowledge of the nursing profession regarding challenges male nursing students face that impede their success and the support they need to overcome these challenges. With the learned knowledge and implementation of the results in nursing programs could help lessen the gap of gender inequity within nursing programs. This would also contribute to more gender-diverse nurses going into nursing and help to reduce the nursing shortage.

### **Implications**

The goal of this study was to understand how male nursing students perceive the challenges to their completion at two urban Midwest community colleges and what supports they feel are necessary to help them do better. Findings provided an understanding of the challenges experienced by male nursing students. Seeing a full picture that described the positive implications from the participants who felt fully supported in their program, then hearing the negative implications from the participants who did not have the support that was needed to feel connected as a male nursing student was particularly valuable for this study.

If there was more exposure to the nursing profession or career pathway for all high school students and not limited as a female profession, it could lead to a more equitable profession for all potential young people interested in a nursing career. Comments from the participants indicated counselors, high school teachers, and administrators should promote the nursing profession as an equal opportunity for all

students and not just to the females. Listening to the participants from this study who have experienced the realities of inequality is essential for faculty and administration at the high school and college levels to improve equities in nursing schools (Subu et al., 2022). Implementing these changes could promote social change across multiple levels of education such as high schools, and colleges of all levels, as well as provide male patients with more male nurses that can better relate to and understand their needs. A clearer representation of the nursing profession to all high school students could help eliminate the stigma and stereotype that the profession of nursing is not just for women, but for men as well. A stronger and more equitable representation of men in nursing schools will increase the self-image, self-efficacy, and autonomy among male nursing students.

Administrators are the change agents at the forefront of nursing programs. Administrators have the capacity to advocate for programs at the organizational level. Results of this research indicated the needs of nursing programs to hire more male faculty, to represent more male nurses in recruiting high school students and put into place a male support network system. Participants provided valuable insights on how to get the support they require, including recruiting more male professors to teach in clinical, didactic, and lab settings. Fontenot and McMurray (2020) researched the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty who can accurately identify with the student population and concluded there is a need for more male nurse role models. Nursing school leadership teams must constantly evaluate and improve recruitment techniques to attract a varied group of applicants (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). Palazzo and Erickson (2022) similarly considered recruiting male nursing students and focused on

male high school students. The literature aligns with administration from nursing programs to evaluate and improve their recruitment techniques to attract a more equitable applicant pool (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020).

Participants suggested a support network system such as the AAMN chapter. Participants from the study stated they felt a sense of brotherhood being a part of the AAMN chapter. Implementing the recommendations stated by the participants in this study could have a significant positive social change in the field of nursing by addressing nursing shortages in the surrounding hospitals in the urban Midwest areas by contributing more qualified and gender-diverse nurses to the field. The lack of male nurses within the workforce results in a disconnection of identifying with male patients and specific gender needs while providing patient care (Kronsberg et al., 2018). Making more connections between the literature and results of this study, as a participant described his story as he took care of an older male patient and identified with him as a male nurse when female nurses could not as effectively, is critical.

The results of this study can provide positive social change by offering more information to a more diverse recruiting pool allowing high school students to see themselves in the faces of male nurses and female nurses equally. Furthermore, the results of this research study have clearly defined recommendations from the participants as they have experienced the lack of representation at the high school level that has failed to promote male nurses as an equal opportunity. Community colleges must share the importance of increasing the diversity of nursing schools and healthcare institutions with high school administration, teachers, and counselors to promote nursing for everyone.

Although there is a growing body of literature to support recruiting and retention methods to improve diversity, a focus on gathering recommendations and guidance from the target demographic may be beneficial (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). A participant from the study indicated having more male representatives engage with high school students to promote nursing as a profession. Student perceptions on how to increase the recruitment of minority nursing school candidates could lead to new techniques for achieving diversity goals in the field of nursing (Woods-Giscombe et al., 2020). When students see their peers and can identify with those in the nursing program, have a sense of relatedness, which in turn could increase academic achievements along with perseverance, knowing they are not alone (Beachwood et al., 2011).

Another finding that could promote a positive social change is increasing the social network system in nursing schools specifically for male nursing students. Listening to male nursing students indicate they were well supported in the AAMN chapter and have the support of other male nursing students from College A that has the AAMN chapter in place was an interesting finding because it showed the importance and value of this support system. However, listening to participants from College B without a support system in place for male nursing students had quite a different narrative where they described feelings of isolation and loneliness. These messages are important for nursing programs in the urban Midwest area to hear and consider implementing for male nursing students' success.

The AAMN chapter not only supports male nurses in nursing programs but also supports professional male nurses in the field of nursing practice. The AAMN also

provides resources and scholarships and aims to help improve healthcare systems (AAMN, 2018). Memberships to the AAMN chapter could prove to be an investment for more community colleges in the urban Midwest area as they work toward building a stronger, more equitable nursing program. Nursing program administrators could investigate grants to offset the cost to students. Instilling a support network for all nursing programs offering a support system for male nursing students could provide an increased retention rate and higher success rate for male nursing students.

The final positive social change this study provided is more qualified and gender-diverse nurses to the nursing profession. With a local nursing shortage at hand, it is more important than ever to put into practice some of the recommendations mentioned throughout this research study. The AACN (2020) projected there will be 1.09 million registered nurse employment opportunities by 2024. Post Covid-19, WHO estimated the global workforce, would lack 5.9 million nurses (Illinois Council of Nurses, n.d.; Nursing in Practice, 2021; WHO, 2020). The nursing shortage could decrease by increasing the number of qualified men who enter nursing and promoting greater gender diversity (Petges & Sabio, 2020). As a researcher, nurse, and educator, I desire to be a part of this positive social change.

As a nurse educator, I will put forth the recommendations from this study and work to implement a support system for the male nursing students in my nursing program. The recommendations from this study were clear, and it is my responsibility to implement these changes to improve the support system for the male nursing students. As a registered nurse, I want patients to have a choice of a male or female nurse who can

better relate and identify with their gender; therefore, graduating more male nursing students will improve patient care while addressing patient needs. Decreasing the challenges male nursing student experience through the implementation of a support network system, will improve their outlook in the nursing program and increase their self-efficacy. Additionally, with more male nursing students graduating there will be more male nurses to consider the educational field of nursing and provide the much-needed male nursing role model that is needed in the nursing programs. The degree of positive social change this research study offers has the potential to affect students who otherwise may not have been successful positively.

### **Conclusion**

Researchers have extensively studied challenges of male nursing students, yet a gap in practice remains regarding how male nursing students can overcome challenges of nursing school and be successful. Understanding the challenges male nursing students encounter is important to research as is finding solutions to improve completion rates within community colleges and graduate more nurses to help reduce the national nursing shortage. Using this basic qualitative research study, I explored male nursing students' perceptions of the challenges they face that impede their success and their recommendations for the supports they need to overcome these challenges at urban Midwest community college nursing programs. With the application of learned concepts, community college nursing programs can also be part of a solution to the nursing shortage (AACN, 2020).

Results of this study will help support Walden University's mission by creating a positive societal change in nursing programs and health care systems. A stronger understanding of the challenges male nursing students perceive and listening to their recommendations could help them overcome these challenges and be successful in the nursing program. Graduating more male nurses will create more male nurse role models, a more equitable field for patients, and more male nursing professors.

My reflections throughout this study provided me with a deeper insight into what male nursing students perceive as their challenges in nursing programs. This study gave me a new perspective on the importance of a built-in support system designated for male nursing students. Interviewing participants from two community colleges was intuitive to see that differences exist, with College A having a support system in place specific for male nursing students and the College B without a support system for male nursing students. As a practitioner in nursing education and as a researcher, I now have a greater appreciation for promoting change. I can be part of that change through my newly learned research skills and working as a team with my colleagues. I will continue to promote gender equity by advocating and working with the administration to instill programs such as the AAMN.

I have a deep appreciation for both community colleges that allowed me to perform my research with their students. I also have a great appreciation for each participant in this research study. I have heard your voices and will work on your behalf to make male nursing students more visible to high school students as well as in



community colleges. Your voice as male nursing students has an integral part in promoting positive social change for community colleges and healthcare organizations.

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