



Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand). This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library

[Thesis Consent Form](#)

Constructing the “other”:
On being a man and a nurse

Thomas S. Harding

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing,
The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, 2005**

ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of men who are nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand. Utilising discourse analysis a social constructionist reading of men, masculinity and nursing is provided to offer an alternative reading to much of the extant literature with respect to men in nursing.

The study draws upon a number of different sources of “text”, including over 600 written works, two films and interviews with eighteen men who currently are, have been or are intending to be, nurses. Drawing primarily upon the “literary” textual sources a number of themes were identified for further exploration in interview with the co-researchers. These themes were the construction of masculinity, the construction of images of the nurse, the reaction to men who are nurses, sexuality issues, career development, and men and caring.

The findings of this thesis reveal that the literature pertaining to men in nursing is replete with paradox and contradiction and fails to adequately account for the male experience. It is argued that the images and arguments provided in the literature with respect to men in nursing are based on out-of-date models and understandings of gender relations, masculinity and nursing. It is suggested that rather than enjoying patriarchal privilege, men who enter nursing must contend with being constructed as both an inferior man and inferior nurse. Their careers are not, as is alleged in the literature, based on developing “islands of masculinity” and male privilege, nor upon the avoidance of the emotional labour of nursing but reflect a belief that career is one way of *doing* care.

It is argued in this work that men in nursing have fewer “taken-as-givens” upon which to base work and that they work to develop trusting relationships with their patients that are based on communication and empathy within a context defined by the patients’ circumstances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While I take responsibility for what appears in the following pages it has been a process of co-creation that would not have evolved without the contributions and support of many people.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to the men whose narratives inform this work. Their generosity, honesty and encouragement while telling their stories reassured me that this was a study worth undertaking and that the voices of such men deserved to be heard.

I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Judith Christensen, who was my supervisor in the initial phase. She sowed the first seed of confidence. I am thankful, too, that when Dr. Christensen was unable to continue she persuaded Dr. Nicola North to take me on. She in turn brought in Dr. Rod Perkins and I have been very fortunate to have them both involved in this project. Their support and enthusiasm was constant while gently yet rigorously challenging with their questions and comments.

“Sister” Susanne Trim has long been my nursing mentor and she continued that role during the writing of this work. Her generosity in reading the work as it progressed, her challenges and comments, many of which are incorporated into the final work, proved a vital ingredient as I endeavoured to make sense of so many seemingly disparate threads.

Thank you to Jill Phillips, Maurice Drake, Dr. Elizabeth Niven and so many other friends and colleagues in New Zealand for their willingness to debate my ideas and exhortations to persevere. In particular, I am incredibly thankful that Frances Dower undertook the editing of this work. Gratitude must also be extended to a group of friends and colleagues in Norway who similarly challenged and supported me during the 12 months I worked there during the writing of this study; “Tusen takk til” Annars Lerdal, Sissel Hoftun Knudsen, Unni Jenssen, Heid Aasgaard, Ellen Karin Grov and Linda Nielsen.

Lastly, an enormous debt is owed to my whanau; thank you “Aunty” Noeline for the kai and to Mark for patience, loving support and the honesty to tell me when I was making no sense whatsoever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	ix
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Overview	1
<u>Preamble</u>	1
<u>Contextual issues</u>	2
<u>A gendered profession.</u>	2
<u>Early assumptions.</u>	4
<u>The aims of the research.</u>	5
<u>Overview of the chapters</u>	7
<u>Conclusion</u>	10
CHAPTER TWO: Philosophical context	11
<u>The emergence of social constructionism</u>	11
<u>Knowledge as socially determined.</u>	12
<u>The construction of self.</u>	14
<u>Postmodernism and the mirage of objectivity</u>	15
<u>The emergence of empirical science.</u>	16
<u>The disappearance of science?</u>	17
<u>The end of ideology.</u>	17
<u>Critical theory</u>	19
<u>Social constructionism and language</u>	22
<u>The influence of poststructuralism.</u>	22
<u>An overview of structuralism.</u>	23
<u>Cutting loose: The challenge of poststructuralism.</u>	25
<u>Deconstruction.</u>	25

<u>“Snips of snails and puppy dogs tails”: Essentialism in question.</u>	27
<u>The social critique</u>	28
<u>Beyond <i>text</i>.</u>	31
<u>Social constructionism: The refuge of the <i>laissez faire</i>?</u>	32
<u>Conclusion</u>	34
<u>CHAPTER THREE: Theory to methodology</u>	35
<u>Social constructionism and discourse</u>	35
<u>The meaning of discourse</u>	36
<u>Text.</u>	37
<u>The social constructionist approach to discourse analysis</u>	38
<u>The emergence of modern discourse studies</u>	39
<u>The influence of Foucault.</u>	40
<u>The extra-discursive.</u>	43
<u>The influence of Derrida.</u>	43
<u>Parker’s criteria for discourse analysis.</u>	45
<u>The displacement of objectivity</u>	48
<u>The influence of feminist research.</u>	49
<u>Researcher – co-researcher interaction.</u>	51
<u>Reflexivity.</u>	52
<u>Conclusion</u>	56
<u>CHAPTER FOUR: Undertaking the study</u>	57
<u>Approval processes</u>	57
<u>Text collection</u>	57
<u>Written material sources.</u>	59
<u>Spoken discourse: Interviews.</u>	59
<u><i>The co-researchers</i></u>	59
<u><i>Selecting the co-researchers</i></u>	62
<u><i>Criteria for participation</i></u>	62
<u><i>Gaining consent and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity</i></u>	63
<u><i>The interview process</i></u>	65
<u><i>Transcribing the interviews</i></u>	68

<u>Other spoken discourse.</u>	69
<u>Analysis</u>	69
<u>Literature analysis.</u>	69
<u>Organising the interview data.</u>	70
<u>Conclusion</u>	70
CHAPTER FIVE: Being a man	71
<u>Defining masculinity</u>	71
<u>Sex role theory</u>	73
<u>A brief history of Western masculinity</u>	78
<u>Empire building.</u>	79
<u>Enclosure and industrialisation.</u>	80
<u>The emergence of the European male stereotype in New Zealand.</u>	81
<u>“Work hard and be a good boy”: Capitalism and the gender division of labour.</u>	83
<i>Being the “breadwinner”</i>	84
<i>Maintaining the breadwinner role in nursing</i>	87
<u>Conclusion</u>	88
CHAPTER SIX: The image of the nurse	89
<u>What is a nurse?</u>	89
<u>Before the “Angel”</u>	94
<u>A brief history of men in nursing.</u>	95
<i>Men in nursing before the Common Era</i>	95
<i>The Common Era prior to the Crimean War</i>	95
<i>Nursing care in colonial New Zealand</i>	97
<u>The emergence of the modern era in nursing: A female profession</u>	98
<u>The exclusion of men from general nursing in New Zealand.</u>	101
<i>The “male” nurse: An inferior type of nurse</i>	103
<u>Men in nursing in New Zealand: “Stepping away from the mainstream.”</u>	107
<u>The “Angel of Mercy”</u>	111
<u>Girl Friday</u>	115
<u>Mother</u>	116

<i>Mothering and the man in nursing.</i>	118
<u>Nursing as women's work: A world-wide paradigm?</u>	121
<u>Conclusion</u>	123
CHAPTER SEVEN: Why men become nurses	124
<u>Formative experiences</u>	124
<u>The distant father.</u>	125
<u>Sensitisation to nurturant abilities.</u>	126
<u>The "Call"</u>	128
<u>Expediency</u>	129
<u>Nursing as fulfilment</u>	134
<u>Personal acquaintance with a nurse</u>	135
<u>Conclusion</u>	137
CHAPTER EIGHT: Reacting to the man in a nurse's uniform	139
<u>Crossing the gender divide</u>	139
<u>The androgynous nurse</u>	141
<u>"Are you sure you don't want to be a doctor?"</u>	144
<u>"Are you man enough to do women's work?"</u>	147
<u>"I'm the only male nurse": Standing out</u>	152
<u>The ward "crane"</u>	156
<u>Standing out: A two-edged sword</u>	159
<u>Conclusion</u>	163
CHAPTER NINE: The paradox of care and horizontal violence	164
<u>Nursing: No place for a man?</u>	164
<u>"Why don't you just leave nursing?": Men's experience of horizontal violence</u>	135
<u>Oppression in nursing</u>	139
<u>"The heat is on you": Being watched</u>	171
<u>Being judged.</u>	174
<u>Proving oneself through work.</u>	176
<u>Being praised</u>	181
<u>A failure in education</u>	183
<u>Conclusion</u>	188

CHAPTER TEN: The problem of men, sexuality and nursing	189
<u>Constructing the man in nursing as homosexual</u>	189
<u>“You’d better watch out for them, you know what they’re like.”</u>	189
<u>Being “other”.</u>	192
<u>Homophobia and nursing</u>	192
<u>Challenging the stereotype of the homosexual male nurse</u>	200
<u>“We don’t want more of that sort here!”: The sexual harassment of men who are nurses</u>	205
<u>Conclusion</u>	209
CHAPTER ELEVEN: Career development	210
<u>Men in psychiatric nursing</u>	211
<u>Aggression and violence.</u>	212
<u>Abstaining from aggression.</u>	213
<u>“Othering” the mentally ill.</u>	216
<u>Men and “speciality” nursing</u>	218
<u>“Petticoat” rules.</u>	219
<u>Gender appropriate nursing</u>	220
<u>The allure of critical care.</u>	228
<u>Looking down through the “bed pan” ceiling</u>	231
<u>Stepping onto the “glass” escalator.</u>	231
<u>Pushed onto the glass escalator.</u>	235
<u>Stepping onto the “down” escalator.</u>	237
<u>Stalled on the glass escalator.</u>	238
<u>Creating “islands of masculinity” or being ghettoised?</u>	240
<u>Conclusion</u>	245
CHAPTER TWELVE: Men, nursing and care	247
<u>Toward an ethic of care</u>	247
<u>Defining care</u>	249
<u>The problem of men’s touch</u>	253
<u>The feminisation of touch.</u>	254
<u>The sexualization of men’s touch.</u>	257

<u>Nursing's collusion with the sexualization of men's touch.</u>	259
<u>Keeping oneself safe.</u>	264
<u>Men's different caring voice: career as a way of providing care.</u>	266
<u>Caring versus curing.</u>	268
<u>Caring as relationship.</u>	273
<u>Caring as "working with".</u>	274
<u>Caring as contextual.</u>	275
<u>Caring as empathy.</u>	277
<u>Do men care differently?</u>	278
<u>Conclusion</u>	281
<u>CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Conclusions and recommendations</u>	283
<u>Ensuring rigour in qualitative inquiry</u>	283
<u>Issues of trustworthiness</u>	284
<u>Credibility.</u>	284
<i>Activities in the field</i>	284
<i>Peer debriefing</i>	285
<i>Member checks</i>	286
<i>Negative cases analysis/deviant-case analysis</i>	287
<u>Transferability.</u>	288
<u>Dependability.</u>	288
<u>Confirmability.</u>	288
<u>Authenticity.</u>	289
<u>Coherence.</u>	290
<u>Synthesis</u>	290
<u>Outdated thinking about men, masculinity and nursing.</u>	291
<u>Challenging orthodox readings about men and nursing.</u>	292
<i>"Islands of masculinity" or gendered ghettos?</i>	293
<i>Ensuring masculine status or demonstrating an alternative masculine model</i>	294
<i>Avoiding intimacy or keeping oneself from harm?</i>	295
<i>Emotional labour or labouring to avoid emotion?</i>	295

<u>Limitations and suggestions for further research</u>	297
<u>Concluding statement</u>	299
<u>Appendix A: Participant information sheet</u>	300
<u>Appendix B: Consent form</u>	304
<u>Appendix C: Interview schedule</u>	306
<u>Appendix D: Key to transcriptions</u>	308
<u>References:</u>	309

LIST OF TABLES

1.1	<u>Men as a percentage of the nursing workforce</u>	3
4.1	<u>The co-researchers horizontal and vertical career locations</u>	60
6.1	<u>The construction of the image of the modern nurse</u>	92
6.2	<u>The orders of Angels</u>	114
11.1	<u>Perceived gender appropriateness of nurse specialisms</u>	226

LIST OF FIGURES

6.1	<u>A popular image of a nurse</u>	90
-----	-----------------------------------	----