

Nursing Student Perceptions of Health Care Worker Appearance and Compassion, Skill, Knowledge, and Trustworthiness

Sophia M. Quick, BSN student; Katherine C. Hall, PhD, RN-BC, CNE

East Tennessee State University

Background & Purpose

- The popularity of body modifications have surged within the past decade, and as “time and generational changes cause new cultures, trends, and issues to evolve and develop; nursing as a profession is not immune to these cultural shifts” (Dorwart, Kuntz, and Armstrong, 2010, n.p.).
- Many health care facilities enforce strict dress code policies prohibiting visible body modifications, including tattoos, piercings, and vibrant hair colors. While most literature focuses on patient perceptions of health care worker appearance, little is known about how nursing students perceive health care workers’ appearances.
- A difference in perceptions between the students and patients, nurses, and nursing faculty may be attributed to the fact that many students themselves have body modifications in addition to a difference in age or common practice among generations (Thomas et al., 2010).
- The purpose of this study is to better understand undergraduate nursing students’ perceptions of health care worker appearance and compassion, skill, knowledge, and trustworthiness.

Methods

Design

- Cross-sectional, descriptive design

Sample

- 137 undergraduate, pre-licensure nursing students from an institution in Northeast Tennessee.
- Participants were recruited through two emails inviting students to complete the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

- Data were obtained from three sources:

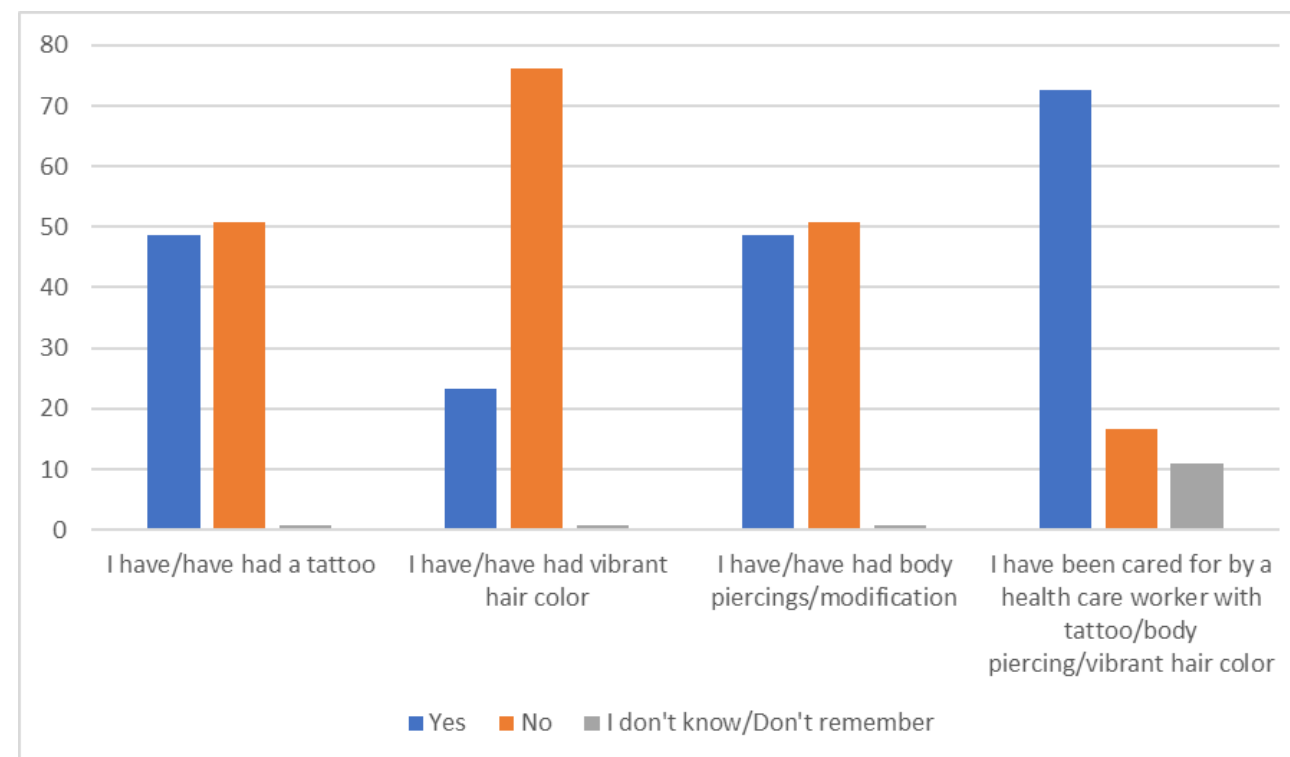
- Likert-type survey
- Yes-No questions
- Demographic questionnaire

- Demographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including percentages, frequencies, and means. An additional data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 25.



Results: Demographics & Yes-No Questions

- An overwhelming majority of participants were female (89.9%).
- Most students were 18 – 29 years of age (76.1%).
- 89.1% of respondents were White (non-Hispanic).
- A little over half of participants (56.6%) reported currently working in a health care facility.
- About half of students reported having a tattoo (50.7%). 23.2% of students reported having had a vibrant hair color currently or in the past. Almost half of respondents reported having a body piercing currently or in the past (48.6%).



Results: One-Way ANOVA

- There was a statistically significant difference between groups for each of the dependent variables: a) compassionate $F(7,1086) = 10.547, p = .000$; b) skilled $F(7,1088) = 9.228, p = .000$; c) knowledgeable $F(7,1087) = 9.523, p = .000$; and d) trustworthy $F(7,1087), p = .000$.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F
Compassion	Between Groups	35.749	7	5.107	10.547
	Within Groups	525.861	1086	.484	
	Total	561.610	1093		
Skill	Between Groups	32.021	7	4.574	9.228
	Within Groups	539.328	1088	.496	
	Total	571.349	1095		
Knowledge	Between Groups	32.593	7	4.656	9.523
	Within Groups	531.495	1087	.489	
	Total	564.088	1094		
Trustworthiness	Between Groups	37.638	7	5.377	10.510
	Within Groups	556.110	1087	.512	
	Total	593.748	1094		

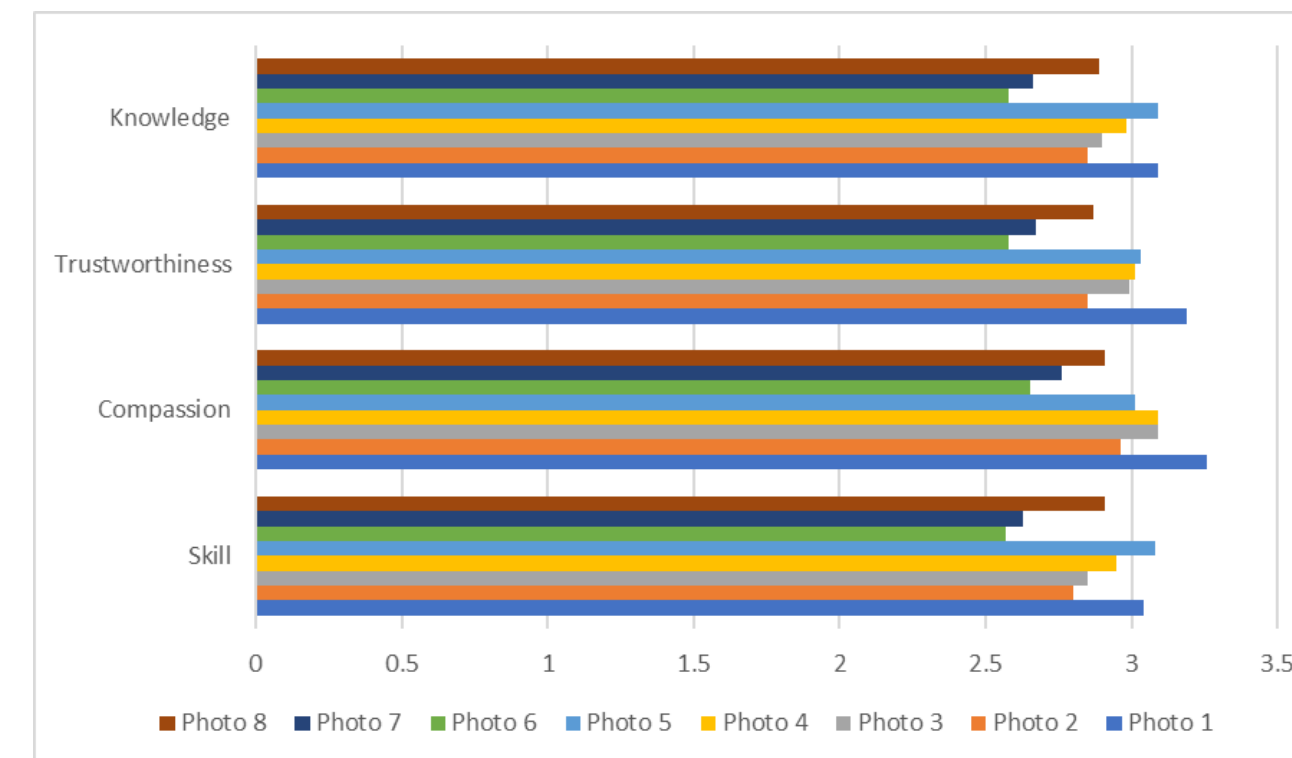
* $p < 0.05$

Results: Two-Way ANOVA

- This analysis revealed no statistically significant difference for any of the dependent variables between students in different nursing education program tracks. Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference for any of the dependent variables between students in various semesters.

Results: Dependent Variable Means

- Results for both descriptive and post-hoc analyses are reported for each dependent variable below.



Discussion

- Participants rated both the male and female without body modification highest on all four dependent variables.
- The male ($M = 3.08$) was rated slightly higher than the female ($M = 3.04$) health care worker in the skilled variable.
- The female ($M = 3.26$) was rated higher than the male ($M = 3.01$) in the compassion variable.
- The male and female with arm sleeve tattoos were rated the second highest.
- The male and female with facial piercings received the lowest ratings out of all photos for their respective gender.
- The female was rated higher than the male in all four variables for tattoos, piercings, and vibrant hair colors.

Implications & Limitations

- It is likely that students preparing to enter the work force and applying for admission into schools of nursing will have some type of body modification.
- It may be beneficial for health care facilities and schools of nursing to revisit their dress code policies to reconsider what is acceptable regarding body modifications.
- Changes in dress code policies regarding visible tattoos may be received positively by younger generations entering the workforce.
- An overwhelming majority (89.9%) of participants were female.
- An overwhelming majority (89.1%) of participants were White (non-Hispanic).
- There was unequal distribution of age groups, with 76.1% of participants being less than 30 years old.
- Results cannot be generalized to other schools of nursing because the study was conducted in only one institution in Tennessee.

References

- Dorwart, S. D., Kuntz, S. W., & Armstrong, M. L. (2010). Developing a nursing personnel policy to address body art using an evidence-based model. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 41(12), 540-6; quiz 547-8. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.3928/00220124-20100601-04.
- Thomas, C. M., Ehret, A., Ellis, B., Colon-Shoop, S., Linton, J., & Metz, S. (2010). Perception of nurse caring, skills, and knowledge based on appearance. *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 40(11), 489 – 497. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0b013e3181f88b48

Contact information

- Katherine C. Hall, PhD, RN-BC, CNE
 - hallkc1@etsu.edu
 - 423.439.4505
- Sophia M. Quick
 - quicks@etsu.edu

