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Religion and Gender in a Men's Hospital and School of Nursing, 1866–1969

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Abstract

Objectives—This article explores religious beliefs, practices, and representations of the Alexian Brothers, a religious order of Catholic nursing brothers, and the role of gender in this discourse.

Background—Nursing in the United States developed within a cultural framework of caring as part of women's roles in families and communities. Yet, a study of the Alexian Brothers challenges the dominance of the "female" in most gender analyses of nursing.

Methods—Historical methodology is used to evaluate and interpret data within the broader framework of historiographical literature on gender, religion, and nursing. In analyzing nursing, religion, and gender, attention has been paid to representations, mainly of women, through photographs and written literature. In this article, the same sources are used for men.

Results—The story of the Alexian Brothers and the men they educated is a testament to the power of gender and religion in nursing history. These men carved out a system of caring that recognized it as a responsibility not only of women but also of men. As they asserted that their paid work was a Christian calling, they renegotiated dominant notions of masculinity. In doing so, male nurses navigated among an array of representations, from nurse, to school administrator, to military soldier, to religious person, to professional practitioner of scientific medicine. These self-representations in the masculine spaces of the hospital and nursing school were designed to debunk stereotypes of feminine men, and they challenged traditional spatial boundaries.

Keywords

history; men in nursing; nursing image

In 1966, Brother Maurice Wilson, director of the Alexian Brothers School of Nursing for men in Chicago, Illinois, asserted that "there is a place for a masculine character in a predominantly feminine profession" (Diaconian, 1966, p. 59). Explored in this article is the history of men in nursing through the examination of the Alexian Brothers, a religious order of Catholic brothers: their religious beliefs, nursing practices, and representations to the public. Also considered is the role of gender in this discourse (Deutsch, 2007; Riches & Salih, 2002), asking how men's

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history in the middle 20th century squares with the narratives historians habitually use to frame nursing history. Representation is a concept that involves how people and institutions present themselves to the public through paintings, symbols, stories, photographs, written communications, and practices. In analyzing nursing, religion, and gender, attention has been paid to representations, mainly of women, through photographs and written literature. In this presentation, the same sources are used for men. Although such sources do not indicate actual lived experiences, they can be useful for investigating the role of religion and gender in constituting social interactions (Craig & Liberti, 2007; Riches & Salih, 2002; Solari, 2006).

Nursing in the United States developed within a cultural framework of caring as part of women's roles with families and communities (D'Antonio, 2007; Reverby, 1987). Yet, a study of the Alexian Brothers challenges the dominance of the "female" in most gender analyses of nursing. This study supports the work of Riches and Salih (2002) by arguing that men's pursuit of nursing and their representations to the public complicated the binary classification of gender into male and female. This study also adds to the theoretical understandings of how men negotiate gender identities when working in a female-dominated profession. For example, the Alexian Brothers' religious institutions defined nursing as Christian work. This definition influenced the secular men who began entering the hospital and nursing school in the late 1930s. However, building on Deutsch's (2007) work, an examination of different primary sources in the Alexian Brothers Archives showed that the men represented themselves to the public in ways that often separated themselves from female nurses. By the mid-20th century, male nurse graduates typically followed masculine paths of administration, anesthesia, highly technical roles, and military nursing.

Men have worked as nurses as far back as the 4th century. Bullough and Bullough (1993) noted the predominance of religious orders of men in medieval nursing in both Western and Eastern institutions. The Alexian Brothers, for example, organized care for victims of the Black Plague in the 14th century in Germany and the Low Countries (Kauffman, 1978). It was not until the 17th century when St. Vincent de Paul challenged this model that religious women became more prevalent. After the Reformation, secular nurses replaced religious women in Protestant countries such as England (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). In her *Notes on Nursing*, Florence Nightingale (1860) particularly highlighted the role of women as nurses. As empowering as this was for women, the work of Bullough and Bullough (1993) on medieval nursing showed that this role allocation was not always dominant.

Historical methodology was used in this presentation to evaluate and interpret data within the broader framework of historiographical literature on gender, religion, and nursing. The research was set against the evolving German American and Catholic communities in Chicago, as well as in the context of the advancement of modern nursing. Central to the argument is the way the Alexian Brothers responded to special needs of men. Also included are tensions that arose as the Brothers updated their ideals of religious service and, sometimes painfully, claimed a new identity based on professional and technological expertise over the course of the 20th century. Conclusions based on the research show that religion and gender held a both real and symbolic influence on men's nursing.

Settling in the New World

Early histories of the Alexian Brothers revealed them to be nonliterate men who organized in the early 14th century to bury the dead during the height of the catastrophic Black Death or bubonic plague. In 1472, they were recognized officially as a religious order. By the 17th century, they were caring for a variety of social outsiders, such as criminals and those with mental illness. As religious caregivers, they cared for the poor and sick, with prayer and preparation for a "good death" (Wieggers, 1955). The Alexian Brothers responded to a personal

calling and believed that they were doing God's will. In the 19th century, they followed the same tradition as women's religious nursing orders, establishing hospitals and providing nursing care in many countries. The Brothers' history in America began in 1866 when Brother Bonaventure Thelan established a hospital in Chicago, confirming their long tradition of caring for the poor and destitute. The challenge ahead was to maintain traditional ways while adapting to the American social and medical environment.

In the United States in the 19th century, new medical markets developed as immigration brought diverse cultures and religions (Wall, 2005). Between 1820 and 1840, the largest group was Irish, but another major Catholic immigrant constituency was the Germans, numbering approximately 1.5 million people by 1860. They settled mainly in the German triangle region of Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee, which included Chicago (Dolan, 1992). Immigrants' arrival in such large numbers strongly influenced the ethnic composition of many American cities and institutions.

The German immigrant community in Chicago was particularly conscious of its origins, which led to a preference for German institutions and the German language, and the community generously supported the Alexian Brothers Hospital. In the early years, most patients were of German origin, although men from dozens of ethnic groups came to the hospital (74th Annual Report, 1939; 63rd Annual Report, 1928). In 1942, the physical therapy department provided German Nauheim baths to 889 patients (Hospital Statistics, 1942). Admissions changed over time as more American-born patients were admitted.

The Brothers themselves came from Germany in the early years. When Brother Bonaventure arrived in 1866, there were over 100,000 Catholics in Chicago, and 20,000 were German. At that time, only one other Catholic hospital was in the city, established by the Irish Sisters of Mercy in 1852. As Chicago rapidly grew in size and numbers, healthcare problems arose that outgrew Mercy Hospital's capacity to handle, and this included a cholera outbreak in 1866. It was during this time that the Alexian Brothers solidified their reputation as male nurses (Davidson, 1990; Kauffman, 1978).

Male Caregiving

Care was an essential component of the Alexian Brothers' chosen ministry of nursing. It included tending the sick physically, psychologically, and spiritually. The Brothers occupied an unusual niche; they were part of a nursing tradition that was overwhelmingly female. Since the 19th century in Europe and the United States, most nursing was done by women who were regarded as "natural-born" healers and caretakers. Although this view applied in some situations, it is limited in that it omits any understanding of male caretakers. Still, in most aspects of society throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, women carried out the main caretaking roles.

The Alexian Brothers Hospital was unique in that the Brothers were the administrators, nurses, x-ray technologists, laboratory technicians, pharmacists, cooks, and physical therapists, and they cared only for men and boys. Thus, their nursing occurred in a masculine context, with the hospital excelling in departments such as urology, neurology, orthopedics, and physical therapy. The Brothers also opened a hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, which housed a large psychiatric facility. Not only did this extend their long ministry of caring for persons with mental illness, but it also provided a setting where male nurses traditionally had worked in large numbers. Until well into the 20th century, many male nurses graduated from schools often connected with psychiatric facilities (Gijswijt-Hofstra, Oosterhuis, Vijselaar, & Freeman, 2005; Roberts, 1955). Hospital annual reports revealed that, by the 1940s and 1950s, the Alexian Brothers Hospital was particularly well known for its care of industrial and

genitourinary injuries (85th Annual Report, 1950; Hospital Statistics, 1942; 75th Annual Report, 1940).

Wood (1994) theorized that “care, like any human activity, is constructed through the discourses of a culture” (p. 32). “It is in and through communication that we come to understand our own nature as well as what different interests, activities, and feelings mean and for whom they are ‘appropriate’” (Wood, 1994, p. 29). Questions persist, however, as to how our culture defines who the caretakers should be (McGraw, 2005; Wood, 1994). The feminist movement provided perspectives of caring that celebrated gender differences. A particularly influential book appeared in 1982 by Gilligan, whose dichotomous theory hailed women’s tendencies to care. Gilligan argued that it was something women always did and should continue to do. Her view reinforced caring’s traditional association with women and further buttressed age-old stereotypes. Noddings (1984) suggested that caring was feminine, but she insisted that it did not have to be gender based. Yet, as Wood (1994, p. 30) noted, “the nature of each gender—what it means to be a woman or man—is currently hotly contested.”

However, gender is only one category of analysis. Lorber (2005) argued that, to break down the dichotomous notion of gender, one must include multiple categories that intersect with it, such as social class, race, and sexual orientation. Adding religion to this mix also can create an alternative conception of gender. The Alexian Brothers pursued a religious life with vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; a communal lifestyle; and a mission of healthcare and evangelization. As members of a religious order, they carried out the traditional religious spirit of self-abnegation, charity, modesty, and humility. Although these appear to be the quintessence of feminine traits, all monastic orders of men and women developed religious identities based on obedience and submission of the will. Their conception of illness was not only in biological terms but also within a spiritual framework, and they viewed themselves as spiritual agents of care. It was not until February 1962 that the Brothers admitted their first female patient to their Chicago hospital, and that was in response to requests from physicians to have all their patients in one facility (Woman to invade a unique all-male stronghold, 1962). As Kauffman (1995) explained, “The presence of women in a male religious hospital would be, according to the traditional notion of women as descendants of Eve, inherently challenging to the brothers’ commitment to chastity” (p. 135).

Religious Representations

In the institutional context of the Alexian Brothers Hospital and their nursing school, people could experience the divine by interacting not only with religious men but also with what McDannell (1995) called a “created world of images and shapes” (p. 1). She argued that “experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps bring about religious values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes” (pp. 1–2), and this was never more evident than in the Alexian Brothers’ institutions in the first half of the 20th century. These places powerfully influenced patients and the meaning of nursing for the men who worked in them.

The Brothers built religion into their physical surroundings. The 86th Annual Report of the Alexian Brothers Hospital (1951) announced that “while the physical care of patients at Alexian Brothers Hospital is always of great importance, the Hospital is primarily a Religious Institution” (p. 7). Any visitor to a Catholic hospital in the first half of the 20th century would see fountains of holy water and the characteristic paintings of the bishop, the Virgin Mary, and other saints. In the Alexian Brothers Hospital, the chapel was located on the second floor, but it was readily accessible to patients from the third and fourth floors. The Brothers also kept Catholic literature in all the parlors.

Religious clothing was another physical representation of religion—a symbol of commitment that members of religious orders wore. It also served as a boundary between the Brothers and

the secular society. Yet, gender and ethnic differences also influenced this practice. At a Catholic Hospital Association meeting in 1920, Catholic sister nurses and their male superiors discussed the idea of wearing washable white habits instead of the traditional black ones. Physicians preferred the washable ones as a requirement of asepsis. Although many of the sisters agreed to the change, a spiritual director of a German community of women in Springfield, Illinois, did not. He saw the habit as an expression of the differences among religious congregations, and to change, it would interfere with community traditions and acquiesce to secular demands (Kauffman, 1995). How the German-born Alexian Brothers felt about this is unknown. It appeared, however, that the Brothers wore black habits for hospital work longer than did those in most women's nursing communities. It was not until sometime after World War II that white religious habits appeared in photographs (85th Annual Report, 1950; 75th Annual Report, 1940). This likely was a reaction to the postwar modernization of American hospitals in general, as well as the growing number of secular people who entered the Alexian Brothers' nursing program after the war.

Another way the Brothers represented religion to the public was through their nursing practices. The spiritual needs of all patients were given prime consideration. The Brothers often accompanied patients to mass in the hospital chapel. Their 85th Annual Report (1950) noted that every one of the 6,000 men admitted that year received a "simple prayer card and was asked to pray every day" (p. 9). A chaplain visited each patient upon admission. From the 19th to the mid-20th century, devotions were very much a part of Catholic spirituality. The church had revived exercises such as the rosary, 40 hours of devotion, and devotions to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Conception. These devotions were a form of personal piety that especially helped preserve the faith of immigrant Catholics displaced from their homelands (Dolan, 1992). At this time, religious devotions were associated particularly with women, but the Brothers also employed them in their hospital. For example, they held rosary devotions every evening in the chapel (85th Annual Report, 1950).

Secularization and Professionalization

In the first part of the 20th century, the Brothers were part of a Catholic tradition still trying to earn respectability. Thus, their annual reports highlighted to physicians and prospective patients that hospital personnel would practice scientific medicine (74th Annual Report, 1939; 61st Annual Report, 1926; 63rd Annual Report, 1928). These publications showed a blend of science and religion, with photographs of Brothers in their religious garb working in areas such as operating rooms and pharmacies (Figures 1 and 2). It was their attempt to represent themselves as proud members of the scientific professions of nursing and medicine. Photographs also emphasized masculine activities of men working in technical areas such as x-ray departments and physical therapy. These sources revealed that the aspiring professionals, albeit religious ones, saw themselves as participating in the expanding world of hospital medicine. At the same time, the patients admitted to the hospital received a high standard of care, with the Brothers continually updating their skills. Over the years, they constructed four different buildings as they kept up with modern technology (85th Annual Report, 1950; 95th Annual Report, 1960; 61st Annual Report, 1926).

The Alexian Brothers Hospital and School of Nursing for male students incorporated in 1898, and, similar to other schools, physicians initially provided lectures (Tranbarger, 2007). In 1899, a secular nurse, Mr. Hearst, from Mills Training School for men in New York, was hired as superintendent, although he stayed for only a year. In 1925, the State of Illinois accredited the school (School of Nursing Monthly Meetings, 1925). In 1926, the first class of Brothers took qualifying examinations to become registered nurses. Whereas their students could obtain psychiatric experience at their St. Louis hospital, the Brothers offered a general curriculum in Chicago. As nursing standards increased and science and technology expanded over the course

of the 20th century, the School of Nursing kept pace. This included requiring more intensive coursework, higher admissions standards, and licensure examinations (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, 1926, 1938; 91st Annual Report, 1956; 74th Annual Report, 1939).

Certain Brothers, however, opposed the school and the growing secularization that came from state regulation. They also objected to the potential corrupting influence from secular students. In the early 20th century, physicians periodically brought up the possibility of enrolling secular students into the school to meet the need for more nurses. As stated earlier, Mr. Hearst's appointment in 1899 was short-lived. As one historian noted, secular people did not fit into the closed unit that the Brothers had created—one in which strict monastic rules insulated against any "inbreeding" from seculars (Davidson, 1990, p. 64). In 1927, physicians convinced the Brothers to admit four secular students, but thereafter, the Brothers persisted in keeping the school open only to Brothers. During this time, tensions escalated between Old and New World ideas. The congregation's leaders in Aachen, Germany, upheld respect for authority, religious tradition, and loyalty to the congregation, and many of the Brothers in Chicago were grounded in this vision. Noted in the School of Nursing's diary (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, 1929) are the minutes of the Board of Trustees in January 1929, when the Brothers decided against admitting seculars to the program: "That secular nurses would be a great help in our hospital is undoubtedly true, but to have them train with the novices is a question open to discussion; it has some points not desirable." On the other hand, reformers in the American congregation focused on responding to the needs of the American situation, and this included respect for the values of democracy and education (Davidson, 1990). One of the leaders of the school was concerned that the Brothers would consider the school merely "good enough for our young men. This idea would be a big mistake. There is nothing too good for these young men in the educational line for on them the future of the Congregation depends" (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, 1929). Indeed, this writer wanted the Brothers to be as professional as their secular counterparts.

Although the American Brothers remained legally tied to the centralized authority structures in Germany until the 1940s, they Americanized professionally over the course of the 20th century. For example, Brothers earned their baccalaureate degrees and eventually served as officers in professional organizations (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, June 7, 1938; Diaconian, 1954, 1969). However, conflicts between the old and new persisted all along the way. The traditionalists resisted what they viewed as the pernicious trends of New World secularism and modernism, and they disapproved of nonreligious, academic goals (Davidson, 1990). As an example, in 1932, a General Chapter meeting in Aachen, Germany, decided that novices would do their novitiate in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, to insulate them from secular influences (Minutes of the General Chapter Meeting, 1932; Wieggers, 1955). This came about in 1938, and it made the novices unavailable as student nurses in Chicago (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, June 7, 1938). As hospital admissions decreased during the Depression, the small number of nursing Brothers and students could keep up with hospital requirements. However, as the patient load increased toward the end of the decade, the hospital faced a serious nursing shortage. It was at this time that a choice had to be made between religious tradition and daily staffing needs (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, January 12, 1939; Davidson, 1990).

The Alexian leaders held an important meeting on January 12, 1939, for the express purpose of "discussing the advisability of accepting secular nurses into the school of nursing." After much discussion, the Brothers decided to admit them the following September. They also began an affiliation with De Paul University for students to take biological and physical science courses, with the option of applying the credits toward a baccalaureate degree (74th Annual Report, 1939). In the fall of 1939, they registered 27 seculars. Still emphasizing the importance

of religion, the Brothers recorded each student's religious affiliation, and, by far, the largest numbers were Catholic (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, September 8, 1939).

The nursing shortage during World War II was potentially devastating to a hospital in which men were the only nurses. The draft loomed large in 1941, and the Brothers repeatedly appealed to the Draft Board for deferments for their students. Fearing a huge loss of students and nurses, the Brothers were able to obtain the services of conscientious objectors. Under the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, thousands of men were able to get IV-E classification and were drafted into "work of national importance"; men came from Mennonite, Quaker, Church of the Brethren, and Catholic organizations (Two year's service, n.d.). Eventually, as part of the Civilian Public Service, the Selective Service offered these pacifist conscriptees to the American Hospital Association. It was from this organization that the Brothers requested a unit. They provided an accelerated course in practical nursing, and over 100 men worked in the hospital from 1941 until the end of the war. Sixty-three did actual nursing, giving baths and backrubs, taking vital signs, making beds, charting patient's conditions, and assisting with admissions and discharges; 11 became students in the 3-year nursing program; 7 dropped out of the school or were transferred (Lion & Bell, 1945). Whether or not they viewed this hands-on care with patients' bodies as counter to the gendered expectations for men is unknown. Of the ones who remained, half planned to go to medical school, a more traditional profession for men. Still, many of the others remained in nursing until their retirement.

Although the school stopped admitting students for 2 years during World War II, it had its maximum enrollment after the war's conclusion when many ex-servicemen returned to school. Between September 1945 and February 1947, 88 students enrolled. A few left due to the difficulty of their studies, coupled with rigid school discipline, but most persevered (Alexian Brothers School of Nurses, February 14, 1947). By 1950, the nursing school had 72 students: 11 Brothers and 61 secular students, many of whom were training under the GI Bill of Rights (85th Annual Report, 1950). This brought about a significant change in the school's atmosphere as secular activities took on greater importance.

Masculine Representations

The Alexian Brothers Hospital and School of Nursing were masculine settings where men cared for other men. At the same time, the congregation's members inculcated their philosophy of nursing into their students through monastic rituals for the Brothers and spiritual retreats that later were required of all Catholic students, both secular and religious. Secular men's reasons for entering the nursing program varied. Many believed that they were called to the nursing profession just as one would be called into the ministry. Several had mothers or sisters who were nurses. One man specifically argued for men's rights to an education in nursing when he stated, "I think a man better understands a man and therefore is better able to help him back to the road to health." The desire to care for others was a recurring theme; most voiced their reasons for going into nursing as a felt "sense of duty to [their] fellow men." One student noted that in nursing, "by easing human suffering, we are fulfilling a command: 'Heal the sick'" (Now men assert rights, n.d.).

Williams (1989, 1995) and Leidner (1993) argued that men's need to interpret their work as "manly" is greater than women's need to see their work as "feminine." Solari (2006) asserted, however, that "gender dissonance does not mean that there is no room for variation in gendered interpretations of feminized work," and that workers often reinterpret their work "in ways that support their gender identities" (p. 311). For this reinterpretation to work, however, institutional support was required so that the person can be recognized as valid by others. The Alexian Brothers Hospital and School of Nursing provided this support. It allowed students to

renegotiate notions of masculinity to include nursing as manly work that followed a Christian calling.

After secular students entered the school, advertisements began showing the masculine aspects of nursing. To be sure, yearbooks and annual reports were still focused on the blend of science and religion. However, in the 1940s, due to the nursing shortage, the Brothers needed to attract more secular students into their school. Just as they built religion into their physical surroundings, the Brothers masculinized the spaces of the nursing school. They added pool tables, a large swimming pool, and a boxing ring that held student tournaments (85th Annual Report, 1950).

The publications were revealing in other ways. A section in the school yearbook titled “Memorable Events” described energetic men engaging in all manner of activities such as coed dances and parties, class picnics, and initiation rites. For example, one graduate recalled September 3, 1952: “faces smeared with shoe polish, lipstick and a generous supply of tape... clothes on backwards...greased volley ball...mass calisthenics....” (Memorable Events, 1955, p. 26). The message conveyed was clear: In this all-male school, active men participated in sports and other masculine activities. This countered any stereotype of nursing schools as feminine spaces.

In 1942, the first group of secular students graduated. Because this was during World War II, most planned to enter the military. The Valedictory Address serves as an example of how male nurses used gender distinctions to gain acceptance for their work. An analysis of the text reveals that the graduate was arguing for men to be accepted as nurses into the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. At that time, gender dictated who could serve as nurses in the armed forces; nursing was women’s work, and combat was men’s work. Men who were registered nurses could enlist or be drafted, but they could not be assigned as nurses. The country’s involvement in World War II, however, provided an opportunity for male nurses to press their claims to professional equality with women in the military.

Noting the uncertainty of the future, the valedictorian elaborated on how professional male nurses should secure medical placements in their wartime military service. “In view of the need for competent nurses by the government,” he stated, “must I disregard all that I have learned in training, in order to take up a gun? As a registered man nurse, would I be of no value as such to my country?” (Kaveny, 1942, p. 4). Revealing the insecurities some male nurses had over the perceived status of female nurses compared with them, the graduate distinguished male nurses as being not only different from but also better than female nurses in some areas. Although he did not elaborate specifics, he justified men’s acceptance as nurses in the military by arguing that their qualifications differed from those of women. “Whether or not the ‘ladies of the cloth’ will admit it,” he stated, “the fact still remains that the man nurse is more competent than they in many situations which arise in medical services—that he can step in where the angels fear to tread... Certain aspects of contemporary hospital service have only too obviously proven it” (Kaveny, 1942, p. 4). Religion also affected the meaning this graduate gave to his work, and he closed his address by stating that, “Nursing, when properly motivated, is one of the finest ways to show that Christ-like love for our fellow men” (Kaveny, 1942, p. 5). Gender stereotypes adversely affected men in the Army Nurse Corps. Federal law and a preference for female nurses prevented men from receiving reserve commissions until 1955, and they did not obtain full military commissions until 1966 during the Vietnam War (Sarnecky, 1999).

Another valedictory address in 1955 also showed how language and communication are shaped by gender. In celebrating the role of men in nursing, the graduate elaborated on the characteristics of a “good nurse”: generosity of spirit, patience, cheerfulness, self-sacrifice, and effacement, which are more feminine qualities. However, he also listed the masculine

characteristics of executive ability, courage, and willingness to submit to strict discipline and hard work (Ferguson, 1955, p. 21). Clearly, for these men, their training school experiences with the Alexian Brothers increased their consciousness of a special religious and professional identity for themselves as nurses. As they underscored their skills, they also framed their work as a way of serving God. In addition, they embraced qualities usually portrayed as feminine, but they gave the clear message that men and women could personify them. However, in their attempt to broaden social ideas about masculinity, they identified other qualities in themselves, those more commonly associated with men—such as bravery, executive skills, and discipline.

After the Brothers built a new nursing school building in 1955, they were able to admit larger classes and faculties, and the school obtained full National League for Nursing accreditation. In 1962, 13 full-time faculty members and eight lecturers educated a graduating class of 42 students, the largest in the school's history and one of the largest classes in any men's nursing school in the country (Davidson, 1990). Many likely were attracted by the school's publications that stressed that male nurses were more apt to advance to specialized fields such as anesthesia, education, and supervisory work.

By the mid-1960s, men were entering the Alexian nursing program with certain career paths in mind. Williams (1989, 1993, 1995) argued that male nurses today are often shunted to administrative paths and highly technical roles by their instructors, and students' experiences in the Alexian Brothers' school serve as a historical parallel. Several men planned to use nursing as a stepping stone to the medical profession, a view that was more representative of a masculine perspective of acquiring education and power. Gender was a structuring force for other positions the secular graduates assumed. A 1966 survey showed that most of the graduates were working in prestigious and high-paying positions: 42% in anesthesia and 24% in administration. Others were doing typical men's work, with 22% serving in the military and 12% working in industrial and psychiatric nursing. Floor nursing, which required more intimate hands-on work, had only 18%. Here, the men worked as head nurses and staff nurses; 6% were clinical instructors (Welker, 1969).

After 5 years of discussion with experts in the field, the Alexian Brothers decided to close the school in 1969. At that time, through affiliations with other hospitals, they were offering students specialized maternity and pediatrics courses (Diaconian, 1948, 1954, 1969). The last yearbook noted that, "four-year university and college programs are better equipped to produce the highly-specialized nurse that is needed today, and this is especially true of the man in nursing" (Diaconian, 1969, p. 59). This last phrase is telling. In the eyes of the Alexian instructors, higher education credentials separated male nurses from female nurses, allowing the men to maintain their masculine identities as they worked in a female-dominated job. Thus, in a variety of publications, the Alexian Brothers and their students sometimes attempted to debunk gender stereotypes, whereas at other times, they maintained gender differences by adhering to the idea that men held certain advantages over female nurses.

At the school's closing, Brother Maurice Wilson, the director of the program, noted that the goal of the school had not been "to make the nursing profession masculine." Rather, throughout its 71 years of existence, it had aimed to gain society's acceptance of men in nursing. "When society questioned the reason why a man went into nursing," he continued, "when the armed forces refused to recognize this man, and even when the professional organization was quiet in its acceptance of men into its ranks, the Alexian Brothers were quietly but persistently promoting and encouraging men to move into this hospital field" (Diaconian, 1969, p. 59). To this end, the Brothers provided opportunities for 779 men to graduate in nursing. Of this number, 621 were secular. In the final yearbook, the men represented their masculine identities to the public in photos of graduates serving in the military, working in highly technical areas

of acute care and anesthesia, becoming physicians, and posing with their families (Diaconian, 1969).

Conclusion

In closing, the story of the Alexian Brothers and the men they educated is a testament to the power of gender and religion in nursing history. These men carved out a system of caring that recognized it as a responsibility not only of women but also of men. As they asserted that their paid work was a Christian calling, they renegotiated prevailing ideas about masculinity (Solari, 2006). In doing so, male nurses navigated among an array of representations, from nurse, to school administrator, to military soldier, to religious person, to professional practitioner of scientific medicine. It was the Alexian Brothers' religious institutions that set the conditions for the way gender and religious identities were woven together. In some ways, however, the fears of the traditionalists came true after seculars entered the nursing program. As secular students outnumbered religious students in the school, publications displayed images that had as much to do with masculine as religious roles. These self-representations in the masculine spaces of the hospital and nursing school were designed to debunk stereotypes of feminine men, and they challenged traditional spatial boundaries.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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FIGURE 1.
Operating Room, Alexian Brothers Hospital, circa 1918. Courtesy of the Alexian Brothers Archives, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

FIGURE 2. Brother Ludolph in the Alexian Brothers Hospital pharmacy, circa 1945. Courtesy of the Alexian Brothers Archives, Arlington Heights, Illinois.