

Abstract Title: Becoming and being a male dietitian in a female dominated dietetics profession

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Introduction: Despite serving a sex diverse population, the number of males in Canadian dietetic education programs remains low as do the studies examining this phenomenon. Few studies have explored the male experience of becoming and being a dietitian within this feminized profession.

Objectives: The qualitative research aims to provide a description of the experience and meanings of becoming and being a male dietitian. The research seeks to illuminate male experiences in the education and professional settings, and to shed light on how males come to understand those experiences.

Method: Six male dietitians were purposively recruited to participate in individual, semi-structured, two stage interviews which were transcribed and thematically analyzed following an interpretive phenomenological approach.

Results: Four superordinate themes that were persistent throughout both their didactic and career experiences emerged: 1) feelings of being different, 2) adapting, 3) finding a professional identity, and 4) passion as the driver of success. Sense-making of experiences was individual, however all participants struggled as they attempted to professionally acculturate in response to real and perceived challenges they encountered because of their minority.

Conclusion: Being male in dietetics requires effort to adapt to both education and career environments. The research provides insight into how males experience and make sense of becoming and being dietitians. While males adapt, a question emerges, is this adaptation positive or are males transforming their male identities to fit existing cultural norms, thus constraining their unique professional identities and their potential contributions to the field? Any advantages associated with balancing the profession's sex composition may not be experienced if male practitioners conform to the feminized standards of the profession.